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IRELAND

**Rosa
Luxemburg
and the
German
Revolution**



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NOTES of the month

THE SLUMP

How deep can it go?

SIX MONTHS ago most western politicians and economic commentators were celebrating the collapse in oil prices and predicting a major boom.

By August they were debating whether the world economy was about to fall into its third and possibly worst slump of the last 13 years. As we go to press, estimates of growth in the United States this year were being revised downwards yet again. Industrial production has been stagnant or declining in all the major economies.

Since the early 1970s capitalism has returned to the classic boom-slump pattern which in Marx's day used to last about ten years (from the bottom of one slump to the bottom of the next), and now seems to be running for about six to seven years.

But underlying the cycle we can also see a long-run decline in profitability, accompanied by low levels of investment, chronic stagnation in key industries such as steel

and shipbuilding, and the protracted agony of debt-ridden companies, farmers, and whole national economies.

As Trotsky observed in 1921, 'cyclical oscillations...accompany capitalist society in its youth, in its maturity and its decay, just as the beatings of a heart accompany man even on his deathbed'. But in an 'epoch of decay' or a long period of crisis the system's breathing becomes more laboured, and its heartbeat more erratic.

How deep will the current slump go? Much will depend upon whether the world financial markets and banking system can cope with the strain.

In the last few years those markets have seen staggering growth. Huge sums of money are being channelled back and forth across the world in search of the highest return or the quickest speculative gain.

One recent survey showed that \$90 billion a day gets traded on the London foreign exchange market alone. That's roughly ten times as much as is necessary to finance the trade, tourism and investment which such markets are supposed to be servicing. In other words nine tenths of the money is being moved from one currency into another solely as a matter of dealing and speculation.

It's not just that the financial markets have become bloated. The swings have also been getting wilder. In the last few months the dealers, the financial whizz-kids and even the newspaper columnists have been acting like a bunch of manic-depressives on amphetamines. None of them want to be left out of the market when it's on the up.

All of them are haunted by folk

memories of the Wall Street crash of 1929, when almost overnight the value of shares on the stock market collapsed, investments were wiped out, and the American economy—and with it the world—was plunged into the deepest slump in the history of capitalism.

Could that happen again? There are several respects in which the situation today does parallel that in the late 1920s, and at least one very important difference.

Firstly, there is the fall in the price of commodities. The prices of raw materials such as oil, copper, tin, wheat and sugar are now on average at their lowest level since the 1930s, after allowing for inflation (two exceptions are coffee, because of a drought in Brazil, and gold, because of fears over South Africa and the continuing fall in the dollar).

Not only have prices fallen. The battle for world markets is getting dirtier. Both the United States and the Common Market have increased protection against cheap food imports from each other and the rest of the world (so that the price of sugar in Britain is roughly four times as high as its price in the world market, for example).

The American government is now subsidising wheat exports (including sales to Russia) to such a degree that it threatens to wipe out the competition in Argentina and Australia, infuriating the governments of both countries.

So it went in the 1920s. The price of raw materials and foodstuffs began falling in 1925, accelerating downwards in 1929. Exporting economies were forced to cut back on their purchases from the industrial economies, helping to drive the world into the slump. The spread of import controls added to the problems. Coffee was burnt in Brazil, the Australian economy collapsed, and thousands of farmers in the United States were wiped out, unable to pay their debts.

The debt situation offers another parallel with the late 1920s. Regardless, it seems, of the state of the productive economy, heedless of the warning signals provided by the collapse of Continental Illinois in 1984, and a succession of minor banking disasters, the banks have just gone on lending.

That, of course, is how banks make

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profits. Indeed, banks have to go on lending to try to compensate for the dodgy loans they handed out in the past. If they dare not lend to Nigeria or Dome Petroleum any more, they'll lend instead to speculators on the stock market, or to finance the mega-billion takeovers of the last three years. In Britain the banks have been feeding money into the mortgage market, sending house prices soaring.

The American magazine *Business Week* recently ran an article headlined 'Debt is in the Danger Zone'. It wasn't referring to Mexico or the Philippines but to the six and a half trillion (a million million) dollar debt mountain inside the United States itself.

The danger signs are certainly there. The proportion of corporate debt rated as dodgy has risen from 11 percent in 1982 to 24 percent in 1985. The second largest steel company, LTV, went into bankruptcy in July. Seventy-five banks have gone bust this year, including the second biggest failing in US history—First Oklahoma Bank, up to its neck in loans to oil equipment suppliers, farmers and property speculators.

Another similarity with the late 1920s is that much of the bank lending has not been used for productive investment in new factories or machinery, but has been channelled instead into the financial markets. Despite the rise in profits which took place with the recovery after 1982, few industrial companies have been prepared to risk expanding their capacity to produce, given the state of world markets.

Yet ultimately the paper profits to be made on the stock exchange always depend upon the surplus value generated by workers at the point of production. The rise in the value of shares represents an increasing quantity of claims on the profits to be made in the future. But if the surplus value fails to rise sufficiently it becomes impossible to meet all those claims—the shareholders won't get their dividends, the money lenders won't get their interest.

In 1929 the speculative fever carried on even after the expansion of the industrial core of the economy had slowed. Investors on Wall Street kept borrowing in the belief that the market would keep rising. In the end it took only a small rise in interest rates to bring the whole edifice tumbling down.

The parallels between 1986 and 1929 are certainly close enough to worry the man they call the 'godfather' of the world economy, Paul Volcker, (he's chairman of the Federal Reserve, the US Central Bank, responsible for the supply of dollars to America and the world). Time and again he has warned, as in July, that: 'The rate of growth of debt has remained at disturbingly high levels. Today the imbalances and strains are clearly showing.'

Yet Volcker's importance in this situation is itself a sign of the major difference between now and the time of the 'great depression' which set in in 1929. Then no single state tried, or could hope to try, to 'manage' the crisis.

Today, as for the last decade, the American state machine, still representing by far the largest and most powerful bloc of capital in the world, is trying to manage the global economy. They have not solved the fundamental contradictions of the system. But their success, on behalf of the western banks as a whole, in managing the debt crisis and staving off a major financial collapse should not be underestimated.

Can they go on doing it? Two changes in the role of the American state since 1929 stand out as significant.

One is the sheer size of state spending. In 1929 central government spending in the USA (excluding local state spending) absorbed a mere 2½ percent of national resources (GNP). Today it takes 23½ percent. Reagan's arms budget continues to prop up not just the American economy but the rest of the world. The USA has provided a market in the last four years for the surplus goods of the rest of the world.

Secondly, Volcker's Federal Reserve bank has not only acted to orchestrate negotiations between the banks and the debtor countries like Mexico (whether directly or through its subordinate, the International Monetary Fund). It has also responded to signs of crisis by cutting the interest rate at which it lends to the private banks.

On 20 August Volcker cut that rate by half a point, for the second time in a month. As the *Financial Times* coolly observed, this 'may also indicate some concern about the stability of the US financial system, plagued by the credit problems of the energy banks, agricultural banks, and heavy losses at Bank of America, the nation's second largest banking group'.

The American state, in other words, is willing to pump dollars into the American banking system, and through it to the rest of the world, to stave off a crash.

Will it be enough? Can it go on like that? The strains are mounting. The US government's debts, and the trade deficit, continue to rise. The dollar is still heading downwards (in a race with the pound). The Americans are alternately begging and threatening (with import controls) the Germans and Japanese to help them out. The German and Japanese ruling classes are looking after themselves.

It's not difficult to write out a scenario for disaster in this situation. Some people

are making money out of doing just that.

But as Trotsky also wrote, 'Every historical prognosis is conditional, and the more concrete it is the more conditional it is.'

Of one thing, however, we can be certain. As is happening at the moment in Brazil and Belgium, the United States and Australia, regardless of whether the government calls itself Conservative or Radical, Liberal or Labour, the ruling classes of every country will try to make workers pay for the crisis.

In the final analysis the critical question is not how long can capitalism survive, but how long will the workers of the world put up with it? ■

THE TUC

Kinnock's law

ONE THING can be certain. The people who run British industry would have little to fear from the return of a Labour government. Much of the Shadow Cabinet's time in recent months has been occupied in proving to the City of London that its policies will help big business, and that the unions will prove more acquiescent under Labour.

Kinnock and Hattersley have been remarkably successful in selling this view of Labour, both through directly wooing big business over City lunches, and through stamping out any internal opposition to their policies.

This year's TUC should be an important indication of how successful Kinnock has been. Every sign is that he will encounter little serious opposition at the Congress.

In fact, the overwhelming aim of this year's TUC will be to smooth the way for the election of a Labour government. Two key documents, produced after months of discussion by the TUC Labour Party Liaison Committee, should go through the Congress.

The documents are concerned with the two issues which have come to dominate the official trade union machine in recent weeks: trade union rights and low pay. The two are interconnected in that Kinnock needs to get official union agreement to police wage rises under a future Labour government and if possible to make some sort of incomes policy stick.

This is the aim of what is termed the New Partnership. It means that the first document's starting point is a reversal of all previous labour and trade union movement policy. So the document says: 'There is no possibility of excluding the law from indus-

trial relations. But it can be given a positive role.' Such a view is a complete departure from the TUC's previous position. As short a time ago as 1982 it called a special Congress at Wembley, committed to absolute defiance of the Tory anti-union laws.

Now all this is abandoned. Instead we are offered 'a positive framework of law ... to establish the freedom to organise, to negotiate and to withdraw labour.'

Under the guise of 'positive rights', Kinnock and the TUC are attempting to retain much of the Tory anti-union laws. In practice they are taking disputes away from settlement by collective bargaining and putting them into the hands of the judges and the courts. They seem bent on consolidating the Tories' work of the last six years.

Their statements in fact appear to go further than anything Thatcher has dared to introduce. For example, the document proposes that where there is disagreement over the validity of industrial action, that a special body or even a special court should deal with the matter. The Tories haven't dared attempt this since the demise of the infamous National Industrial Relations Court in 1974.

Perhaps the best known aspect of the document, however, are the provisions on secret ballots. Kinnock wants such provisions included in union rule books, so that there would have to be ballots on decisions relating to strikes and for the election of union executives.

All in all, the proposals amount to a degree of policing of the trade union movement by itself and its supposed partner in government, the Labour Party. But the purpose of the proposals is not simply to strengthen the hands of the courts, although this may be the immediate result.

The document sets out to achieve something more complicated than Thatcher's union laws. It aims to create a legal framework which protects the union hierarchy against the courts while strengthening the ability of the TUC and the courts to control unofficial strikes and unofficial trade union organisations. Thus union executives do not want to be held accountable for unofficial walk outs, but they do want to be able to enforce a ballot to get unofficial stoppages under control as rapidly as possible.

But the purpose of all this is not just to control unofficial action, nor is it just to ensure that the 'trade union issue' doesn't cost Labour too many votes before the general election. The second document—on pay—makes it clear that the purpose of the assault on trade union rights is to prepare the way for some form of incomes policy.

The phrase itself isn't used. Instead the document claims it is concerned with low pay. The main thrust is to argue for 'a national minimum wage with statutory backing.' Companies which pay less than the fixed amount will be prosecuted by a strengthened wages' inspectorate.

The figure the TUC and the Labour Party have fixed on is ludicrously low—they are talking about an £80

minimum on today's figures. On the TUC's own figures, some three million workers receive under £80 a week, or its equivalent for part timers, but another three million receive under £100 a week. All targets for a 'living wage' which keeps a family just above the poverty line work out at around £110 a week. The Low Pay Unit, the DHSS, the Council of Europe and even the TUC all have a figure between £110 and £115.

In practice a low pay national minimum can become a point which many workers in the worst organised sectors are dragged down to. Far from pushing wages up, the result could be the opposite.

But the ludicrously low sum of £80 is not the real argument at all. The point is that the statutory national minimum wage allows the introduction of an incomes policy, dressed up in concern for the low paid. There will be 'a programme of legislation' over pay and the 'national economic assessment which ensures that the elimination of poverty pay receives due attention in the allocation of national resources.'

The point in all this is reached well into the document when it says: 'It is impossible to eradicate low pay without destructive inflationary consequences, unless there is a redistribution of income in which high earners...receive smaller increases than the low paid.' Later the document explains that: 'unions will be expected to undertake not to quote in claims for higher paid workers that element of general percentage increases in earnings specifically related to the general move to attain the national minimum wage.'

Such an incomes policy would operate at two levels. Statutory control over some pay settlements and voluntary restraint by the trade unions.

For socialists there is an immediate problem. The union proposals are dis-

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guised in the language of democracy and fairness, the pay proposals in the language of helping the low paid. The real purpose—a renewed attack on workers' living standards in the interests of British capitalism, a repeat of the Social Contract—is dressed up in a language which many of the left will go along with.

Some of the left have already collapsed. Among the members of the TUC/Labour Party Liaison Committee which agreed these documents without dissent are Ron Todd of the TGWU, Ray Buckton of ASLEF, Rodney Bickerstaffe of NUPE, David Blunkett, Tony Benn and Eric Heffer.

Socialists have to take up the real arguments against all forms of incomes policy and against any legal interference in the trade unions. It will be a long and difficult argument—much of the ground has already been abandoned. But it will be central to fighting back against the assault on the working class at the centre of Kinnock's real strategy. ■

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NOTES of the month

LABOUR PARTY

How conference works

MANY on the left will agree with criticisms of the Labour Party. But they argue that the Labour Party is the place to be, that it can be changed by being involved in its 'democratic processes'.

With the Labour Party conference only a month away it's useful to look at how it operates.

WHO GOES?

Last year 593 constituency organisations sent 628 delegates. Forty-two trade unions sent 579 delegates (only half their entitlement). The Constituency Labour Parties had 614,000 votes compared to the 5,871,000 votes of the unions.

The 207 MPs, 28 MEPs, 50 prospective MPs, some 30 Lords, and over 50 full time agents all attend *ex officio*.

HOW ARE DECISIONS TAKEN?

The constituency activist is in the minority, though theoretically can win a vote on a show of hands, as many attending do not have a vote.

However, in reality the union block vote is crucial all the way through conference. Occasionally a harmless resolution will get through on a show of hands, but anything controversial will be forced to a card vote. Thus last year the resolution calling for black sections was defeated by 5,358,000 to 1,159,000.

It would not be unreasonable to assume that anyone wishing to move the conference to the left would need to win a majority on the Conference Arrangements Committee. Yet every year the committee is dominated by the nominees of right-wing trade union bureaucrats.

The committee used to be five, always belonging to five major unions. The rank and file became so angry at this that a concession of one extra member elected by the constituencies was given to them. This didn't change anything, and last year the constituency candidate was returned unopposed.

Meanwhile, the GMWU, AUEW, NUR, NUM and the TGWU continued to control the committee.

HOW THE LEADERSHIP IS ELECTED

The National Executive is elected annually at conference. Twelve are elected by the unions directly. Five women are elected by the whole conference. That means once again the unions dominate.

The constituencies are allowed to elect seven members of the NEC on their own. The LPYS has one member. The Treasurer is elected by the whole conference. Last year Albert Booth was the favourite of the constituencies but Sam McCluskie of the seamen's union won on the block vote.

ELECTION OF LEADER AND DEPUTY LEADER

Once again the unions dominate, with 40 percent of the vote while the MPs get 30 percent and the constituency activists get 30 percent. Of the 29 that attend the NEC 20 owe their place to the unions.

The procedure of electing the leader and deputy leader is put on ice when Labour is in government. The only way there could be an election is if a majority card vote called for one.

RESOLUTIONS AND POLICY

Every affiliated organisation, whether trade union or constituency, is allowed one resolution only. Following the publication of the resolutions they are all allowed one amendment. So the maximum number of issues any organisation can raise is two.

This year, of 532 resolutions 184 of them are in opposition to the nuclear power and reprocessing industry. Another 28 oppose nuclear weapons. There are only six against the witch hunt.

Most unions do not bother to send in resolutions. At first sight, it appears that in the field of resolutions the activists should get a fair crack of the whip. But the 532 resolutions will be forced into 50 composites. Only four resolutions were called last year.

POLICY

The bulk of policy will be supplied by the NEC. Policy documents and statements will be seen for the first time at conference.

It is here that the unions determine the outcome of policy. For anything to become policy it needs a two thirds majority, and the unions will give the NEC the majority it needs again and again. However, anything the NEC opposes will nearly always be defeated.

Sometimes there are differences, through very rarely. Last year the unions split on the issue of the miners' amnesty; though it was passed it is not policy. Even if it had been passed Kinnock was going to ignore it anyway.

During the debates the NEC will dominate up to half the discussion. Trade union delegates will make up another 15 to 20 percent. The bulk of the policy passed by conference will have been presented by the NEC. Resolutions and composites passed by the rank and file will be printed in the annual report and forgotten.

MANIFESTO

There is no guarantee that policy passed will ever appear in the manifesto. The constitution gives responsibility for this to the NEC and the Parliamentary Committee—in reality that means the party leader. In 1979 James Callaghan didn't agree with the NEC's draft, turned up with his own draft at the last minute, and bulldozed it through. All the left-wing policies, even though passed by two thirds, were chucked out or watered down.

UNION DELEGATIONS AND THE BLOCK VOTE

Every union varies in how it chooses its delegation, but there is one common factor. Every delegation is dominated by fulltime bureaucrats. Even the TGWU, which elects nearly half its 40-strong delegation, also includes the general secretary, chairman etc. The NUM includes its full executive, plus election by area.

Even when the left get on to delegations it is very hard to get control of the way the block vote is cast. The vote the unions cast on affiliated membership, in some cases over one million, cannot be split. It is either fully for or against. Usually the general secretary or president casts the vote.

CONCLUSION

Any attempt to democratise the Labour Party cannot ignore the role of the union bureaucrats. They protect the parliamentary right, and block all change.

The right wing invented the block vote for use at the TUC in 1894. They brought it into the Labour Party from its beginning. It was not until 1937 that they conceded the right of the constituencies to elect seven members to the NEC. That was a token concession to stop the activists drifting away. ■

Additional notes from Pete Clark, Pete Green and Andy Strouthous.



NIGEL HARRIS

Mexican stand off

ONCE was bad enough. Twice is unforgivable. A year ago, the party that dominates Mexico, the Party of Institutionalized Revolution (PRI), was caught fiddling the elections in the northern states of the Mexican federation.

Last month the same thing happened. Some 140 foreign journalists were on hand to see, when the doors of the election offices were opened, the ballot boxes already stuffed with fictitious votes. Rumour has it that ten billion pesos were used to fix the results.

One of the worst cases occurred in the election for governor of the large state on the United States border, Chihuahua. The leading opposition party, PAN, claimed to have been most damaged in last year's elections.

On that occasion, the PAN militants rioted, and a police chief was burned to death in one township. This time PAN seized the bridge to the United States and wrecked the transborder traffic for a few days. Three PAN leaders went on hunger strike.

PRI stoutly denied any interference with the poll. The president, De la Madrid—the supposed Mr Clean of Mexican politics—openly praised what one journalist called 'the mammoths of the old political bureaucracy'. PRI accused PAN of being agents of Reagan and the US Republican Party, and of wilfully trying to involve the church in politics, contrary to the constitution.

The priests did urge churchgoers to vote PAN, and, after the election, Archbishop Almeida of Chihuahua tried to close all churches for one Sunday to protest at PRI fraud. But PRI also tried to get the church on its side, and after the election, organised a demonstration of PRI catholic women against the archbishop. Almost certainly the Mexican ambassador to Italy approached the Pope who duly forbade the closure of the churches on the grounds that mass could not be denied catholics on political grounds.

The picture is more complicated. Earlier polls suggest PRI would have won anyway. Ballot fraud is an old tradition, but the current scale suggests the political exhaustion of PRI, its demoralization under the impact of crisis. PRI cannot indefinitely treat Mexico as if it were a small corrupt banana republic, and Mexicans, as if they were a mass of credulous fools.

Mexico's gross domestic product is now eleventh in size in the world, and the share of product generated in industry (40 percent), is larger than in Britain (36 percent), France (34 percent), or the United States (32 percent). By the year

2000 a new giant manufacturing power will have emerged on the world stage.

But despite all the noise, PAN has been unable to stir the mass of the population. The crisis is severe. Even the PRI trade union federation grumbles, claiming real wages have fallen 40 percent in the last decade. Among the half the labour force that is officially employed, unemployment is running at over 15 percent, and inflation is over 100 percent.

Yet there have been no real riots, no sacking of supermarkets or general strikes as in Brazil. What political opposition there is remains small and relatively isolated, unable to focus mass demands and resentment. And most of it has gone to PAN, a conservative catholic and nationalist party.

Thus, in the Chihuahua governor elections, the poll was only 50 percent. The PRI claimed 61 percent of the votes and gave PAN 32 percent. The five parties of the left—the PSUM (the heart of which is the old Mexican Communist Party), the PMT (nationalist, leftist intellectuals), PRT (Fourth International), and two PRI outriders, PST and PPS—gathered just 3.4 percent of the vote between them (or 1.7 percent of the electorate).

Admittedly, the crisis is not all of a piece, especially in the north. The lower the peso sinks (it was 26 to the dollar in February 1982; it is now about 660 to the dollar), the more severe the crisis in the centre of the country, but the more the border zone next to the United States booms. North Americans flock across the border to exploit very low Mexican prices, to utilize the free trade shopping malls.

The American-owned factories in

Mexico boom because the dollar value of wages is so low—employment in manufacturing in foreign owned plants on the border increased from 150,000 in 1982 to over 250,000 now.

Most of the border cities boast of increasing factory jobs this year. Ciudad Juarez, one of the largest, has 60,000 women employed in factories; it claims the longest bar in the world, in a tavern capable of taking 15,000 (and restricted to women between 5 and 9.00pm when the day shift ends).

But the failure of the opposition parties further south to escape from the politics of sects is equally apparent. There is no shortage of issues—from city employment and wages to continued rural warfare between the landless and the landowners. Yet what rebellion there was came not from workers and peasants, but from the middle classes, private business and the church.

The role of private businessmen is curious. In general, capital prefers stability even if the government is not ideal (and may even be rhetorically hostile to business). Yet in two recent cases, the Philippines and South Africa, rebellion is backed by an important segment of capital. In Mexico, business has done well out of the years of PRI rule, but now part of it has swung hard against the government to the point of publicly championing the demands of PAN.

What is lacking in Mexico so far is a crisis of the ruling order, the disintegration of its right to rule. This complex phenomenon is not simply a function of the existence of a mass revolutionary party that is able to force such a disintegration—the mass party is also partly a function of the incapacity of the



May 1985: riot police attack Labour Day march

ruling order to sustain its political, social and moral integrity in the face of massive material challenges.

Most Mexicans—including the militants of PRI—are cynical, with very low expectations of political change. But that helps PRI; it can easily meet the most modest bribes required to sustain the loyalty of the cadre, watering the deep roots it has in Mexican society (the PRI has no parallel in the rest of the Americas, and its existence has ensured there is no cycle of military power in Mexico).

The PRI mixture of leftish rhetoric (and endless talk of revolution), mild state capitalism when required, and virulent anti-Americanism has regularly disarmed a left that has little else on its banners.

Consider the absurdity of the left demonstration in support of the last president when he nationalized the banks—in order simply to guarantee their debts to overseas lenders—they should have been demonstrating—or, better still, organizing—for the workers to seize the banks, not just accept state appropriation.

Now the left spends its time baying after the IMF and the government's decision to join GATT, the issues of middle class nationalists that hardly connect at all with the material problems facing the mass of the population.

The earthquake a year ago was one of those bolts from the blue that could turn cynicism to fury, and it nearly did. The fact that so many buildings fell when they need not have done so, that many of the 9,000 or so who died could have been saved were clear from the beginning.

In the midst of it all, amid the blood, tears and brickdust, De la Madrid appeared on television—just as everyone needed a passionate rallying call—with his usual tired ranting. The alienation of the president from the feelings of the mass of people symbolised the alienation of the PRI, its exhaustion. The five months incompetence and corruption that followed in the relief operations only increased the agony, bringing the government's reputation to its lowest ebb.

But then a new minister started moving fast, shifting a lot of World Bank money—44,000 dwellings to be built in ten months in inner Mexico City—and what political opposition there had been, dissolved.

The left missed the opportunities. The bad old traditions of politics afflict all parties, the bad old conditioned reflexes of nationalism and state capitalism. This is not an argument for embracing an even worse abstract internationalism, but rather for focussing on the material questions that confront the mass of Mexicans in order not to demonstrate, to seek influence or pressure or make moral gestures, but to build an organised party.

While the socialists cannot do this, the PRI leaders do not need to stuff ballot boxes. Their right to rule Mexico is self-evident to the majority. ■

PASOK'S lost pledges

LOCAL ELECTIONS in Greece next month are widely expected to show a swing to the left.

After a year of bitter struggles against the 'socialist' PASOK government's austerity package, the two Communist Parties (the pro-Moscow KKE and the eurocommunist KKE-Interior) look set to increase their electoral strength.

But the leaders of the CPs are already looking for a compromise with PASOK. It will be up to rank and file militants and revolutionaries to continue the fightback as the crisis deepens.

The crisis in Greece is very severe. Greek industry managed to avoid the worst of the crisis in the seventies because of its connections with the Middle East. Exports expanded as petro-dollars were 'recycled' and the expectations of Greek capitalists soared.

With Greece joining the Common Market there was talk of the country becoming a springboard for penetration into the then fast-expanding markets of the Arab world.

Firms borrowed heavily to finance these projects. And state debt expanded rapidly to pay for a vast military build-up.

In a region so tense with competition as the Eastern Mediterranean, to become a 'powerful country' demands military strength to back up your claims. An expensive arms race was started with Turkey—the main rival of Greek capitalism.

In the eighties nothing has remained of all these high hopes—except the debt. The Middle East markets were contracting even before the price of oil plummeted. Membership of the Common Market did not bring in any new investment; instead it slowed up in the inability of Greek industry to compete, even in its own market.

The balance of payments deteriorated and its traditional props—tourism, shipping and Greek workers' savings from Germany—have all been hit by the crisis. The burden of military expenditure became heavier as the dollar and interest rates soared. Foreign debt has reached \$20 billion—an enormous amount for a country the size of Greece.

When PASOK won the election in 1981, it did so on a programme that matched the then high hopes of Greek capitalists combined with a few concessions for the working class.

Papandreou used to argue that Greece need not become a low wage economy—'A Taiwan of the Middle East'.

Rather like Lee Kwan Yew of Singapore, Papandreou had visions of Arab money and European high-tech rushing to Greece to invest in a dynamic, open economy.

For many, under these circumstances, to

give concessions to workers was considered an advantage.

Accordingly, PASOK granted wage indexation and promised to organise a National Health Service in Greece.

It wasn't long, though, before it was realised that these plans were out of touch with the problems of Greek capitalism in the eighties.

But two years after the election workers in Greece were repaid with an imposed wage freeze.

The government's first U-turn was carried out with the support of the trade union bureaucracy.

PASOK skilfully used a carrot and stick policy, mixing a legal ban on free collective bargaining with a system of institutionalised consultation with the unions called 'socialisation'.

Top union officials were given posts in decorative 'boards of governors' which were supposed to supervise public sector industries.

Another trick used to con the unions into co-operation was PASOK's offer of top trade union posts to KKE trade unionists.

Since the civil war the Greek equivalent of the TUC (the General Confederation of Workers—GSEE) had been in the hands of bureaucrats loyal to the government of the day.

Left wing unions were excluded and conferences rigged so that any of their delegates that did participate were defeated.

PASOK inherited a corrupt union bureaucracy and promised to 'democratise' it. The extent of the 'democratisation' was tightly controlled by the ministry of Labour so as to make sure that trade unionists loyal to PASOK retained control of the GSEE.

When an absolute majority was ensured in the general council of the GSEE, PASOK then offered the post of General Secretary to KKE.

For the first time in nearly 40 years a CP trade unionist was back in office—but at a price—collaboration with a 'socialist' government already breaking its promises.

This compromise lasted until last year. Despite the co-operation of the trade union bureaucracy, the sacrifices imposed on the working class were not enough to pull Greek capitalism out of its crisis.

Last year, after winning a second election on promises to resist the 'monetarist' policies advocated by the bosses and right-wing opposition, PASOK took the initiative by breaking the truce with the unions.

Under the pressure of a deteriorating balance of payments leading to a massive flight of capital away from Greece, the 'socialist' government swung violently to the right.

Wage indexation was 'reformed' to ensure continuous wage cuts by granting 'automatic wage rises' well below inflation. Savage cuts in public spending were announced. State-subsidised industries were in for a shake-up with closures and mass redundancies.

These economic measures were combined with an attack on the left in PASOK and in the unions. People who had helped PASOK to victory in 1985 suddenly found themselves expelled.

Papandreou now attacked left-wingers as 'daydreamers'. Even top trade union officials and the Finance Minister who implemented the 1983 wage freeze were expelled, in an attempt to show that the government would not waver in implementing its tough new policy. Restoring business confidence was given priority over any loyalty to pre-election promises.

But if Papandreou had reckoned on this attack to scare workers into passive acceptance he was in for a shock. The response to 24-hour strikes called by KKE and ex-PASOK-controlled unions was magnificent. Workplaces that hadn't seen strikes for years came out solid. Scabs were met by mass pickets. Mass rallies and demonstrations were held all over the country. There have been four such 24-hour strikes in the past ten months.

The left-wing trade union leadership failed to build on this militancy. All the strikes were tightly controlled from the top. No group of workers was allowed to move beyond protest action. In the few cases where strikes could go further, they were sold out. Trolley bus drivers in Athens had beaten back a scab and police attack on their picket lines when the KKE-led union called off the strike to 'avoid violence'. The result? Six leading militants victimised for 'using violence' and many strikers fined. None of the demands was satisfied.

The big battalions of the trade union movement were kept back. Telecoms workers had their strike called off after six days when their union leadership (ex-PASOK members) agreed to go to arbitration. Airline pilots, whose union is controlled by the right wing New Democracy Party, were left to fight alone when they decided to ignore a government decree imposing military discipline on them. They had to return to work after a vicious campaign against 'those greedy privileged agents of reactionary destabilisation plans'. Not one of the unions lifted a finger to support them.

Both the KKE and KKE Interior have given top priority to the demand for a change in the electoral system to bring in proportional representation. They argue they have to force PASOK to realise that it cannot govern without the support of the left. Strike action is therefore regarded as token action—real action is through the ballot box, where a vote for the left means PASOK will lose its overall majority and will be forced to join a coalition with the CPs on a progressive programme.

How progressive this programme will be remains dubious. It argues for more state



Athens demonstration against wage freeze

intervention, but also argues that 'honest' private enterprise should be encouraged. It accepts the need for 'rationalisation' in the public sector (cuts) and advocates import controls. The programme falls short of even the modest target of returning to PASOK's policies before last year's U-turn.

The KKE has suggested to ex-PASOK members and eurocommunists that they run common candidates. This has only materialised in Salonika. In Athens there will be two left candidates. The eurocommunists argue that common candidates would lead to a head-on clash with PASOK and make it harder for the left to win votes.

With leadership like this, the militancy shown by Greek workers can turn to disillusionment. PASOK and the right

wing are certainly counting on this. Unfortunately such a perspective cannot be ruled out. It is up to revolutionaries to argue that a different strategy is needed for a successful fightback.

Most of the far left in Greece had moved away from working class politics in search of the movements. They have been unable to build out of the wave of anger which has swept the working class in the last year. But the opportunities for building a revolutionary Marxist organisation are there and our group, OSE (Socialist Revolution Group), has been trying to push in that direction.

We are optimistic that a small but important revolutionary pole of attraction will emerge from the present crisis in Greece. ■

Panos Garganan

Polish impressions

Graham Veitch and May Freeman have recently returned from a visit to Poland, where they had numerous discussions with members of Solidarity.

POLAND is a little reminiscent of wartime Britain. Meat supplies are controlled by ration-cards. There are weird shortages of everyday commodities—during our stay, toilet paper was almost unavailable.

There is very little variety of choice in the food stores. Clothing is utilitarian, and expensive. On the other hand, people in the street look healthy—the diet, if restricted, is adequate. One morning in Warsaw, all the milk in the shops was sour—the distribution system cannot cope with warm weather. Imported foods—including such 'luxuries' as oranges and bananas—are available at massively inflated prices only to those with access to foreign currency.

The black market flourishes. In tourist spots, currency touts side up. They will pay up to four times the official exchange rate for western currencies; private citizens with a few savings will pay nearer five times. The 'dream goods' are only available in the hard currency shops, the 'Pewex'. The western tourist feels like a millionaire.

There is an extensive second economy of moonlighting workers, making up their wages doing private construction and decorating work for those with the means to pay. The average wage for manual workers is 20,000 zloty a month, and 60 percent of this goes on food. Many white collar workers, with less opportunities to work overtime or moonlight, live on far less.

A university maths teacher with six years in post took home just 14,000. As his rent for one room (nine square metres) in someone else's apartment cost 15,000, his wife's income was a total necessity: they *dare not* consider having a baby.

Housing is in desperately short supply. Young people have to live with their parents, as independent places to live—outside the factory hostels—are impossible to get. In Warsaw, some housing cooperatives have closed their

waiting lists. The queues are already ten to 15 years long.

In the wake of Jaruzelski's 'state of war', the regime is isolated from its subjects. The dwindled number of party members know they are unpopular, and have no hope now of influencing those around them. To belong to the PUWP (Polish Communist Party) now is no longer a matter of careerism: it requires active political loyalty, and that is the commodity in shortest supply.

The repression of Solidarnosc activists continues, but it is arbitrary and uncertain. Sackings are used as well as imprisonment, the former being regarded by some activists as worse. One activist told us, 'The regime has used up its terror. We're no longer afraid to be arrested. I used to hide a single leaflet in my knickers, now I carry them around in a bulging rucksack.'

There's a very extensive underground publishing activity: everyone we visited had numbers of 'forbidden books'. These appear in relatively large runs, with quite decent printing. The main opposition news sheet *Tygodnik Mazowsze*, appears every week with a print run of 20,000.

The regime is nervous. On the sixth anniversary of the shipyard strike, the Gdansk police rounded up local teenagers in the street and searched them—in case something was brewing (it wasn't).

Individual policemen turn a blind eye sometimes: the radiator in an activist's flat burst last winter, flooding the apartments below. He was away, and the janitor and a local constable forced his door to stop the leak. His flat was festooned with illegal posters and badges, his shelves bulged with forbidden books. Nothing happened to him—the policeman didn't want to be unpopular in the community, it was 'not his department'.

The proportion of workers still paying dues to Solidarnosc varies between workplaces and even departments in factories. In many, dues collection has collapsed, in others 5 or 10 percent still pay. In a small minority of workplaces, 20 percent and more is achieved.

Within the underground, there's a long-running debate about the attitude to take to the factory works councils. In one or two very well organised factories, these are totally boycotted, but in others the boycott tactic led to the collapse of all shopfloor organisation. In the majority of the *large* factories, the works councils are used as a weapon of the workers. The councils still operate under the 1981 legislation, with free and secret ballots among the workers. Solidarnosc candidates, identified 'on the grapevine', can be sure of winning.

By law, works councils can communicate with each other. Last autumn, the Elana textile works at Torun tried to organise a national 'horizontal' conference of the big factories up and down Poland. It was banned, but the appeal court judgement was ambiguous. Union activists expect the works council legislation will soon be amended.

Mostly, the workers don't feel strong enough to strike. National strike calls by the underground have not been very effective. But there are various forms of resistance in the factories. One method of negotiation is 'withdrawal of enthusiasm'.

Another effective bargaining ploy, one worker told us, is to spread 'strike rumours' to frighten local management. Recently Warsaw taxi drivers refused to sign for their pay, to force management to make concessions on conditions.

Every manager is scared of 'trouble'. In one workplace, the manager hung out red flags for May Day, and the workers kept nicking them. Eventually he approached one of the known Solidarnosc workers to say, 'Please, what do you want? I have to get my books straight with these flags...'

The *majority* of workers, at this time, are not involved in any direct way in Solidarnosc activities. They have retreated back into the everyday worries of private life. Organisation is weakest in the smaller enterprises, and in the small provincial towns. One activist described the Polish working class as 'watching and waiting'.

There is a continuing, and effective, underground information network between factories. News travels very fast. Within hours of Adam Michnik of KOR's release from prison, people were telling each other the news all over town.

Much of the underground's activity at present consists of collecting money, maintaining propaganda, and 'stunts'. A Solidarnosc slogan is painted in huge letters on the end wall of a block of flats; a union flag appeared at the top of a high-tension pylon on the Czech border—the international grid had to be turned off to get it down.

During elections in 1984, a pig was released in the central street in Gdansk, its sides painted with the slogan 'Vote For Us'. The cops chased it up and down the city centre, to the vast amusement of the crowds.

But the level of activity is overall quite low. During August, Solidarnosc cooperated with the Church (reportedly a slightly unwilling partner) in an anti-alcoholism campaign. In most cities there

FESTIVAL OF THE OPPRESSED

Solidarity, reform and revolution in Poland 1980-81

by Colin Barker

The trade union *Solidarnosc* was the most impressive working-class movement for more than 50 years. This book not only recaptures its magnificent achievements, but brings new insights into the reasons for its failure and the problems faced by workers whose rulers have stolen the very language of socialism and liberation. 192 pages. £4.25

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were pickets outside shops selling vodka and whisky. Last year, in a similar campaign, the pickets were all arrested; this year they were mostly left alone.

In the aftermath of a crushing defeat like the coup of 13 December 1981, this low level of struggle is hardly surprising. Yet it is clear that Solidarnosc still lives on in the activity of tens of thousands, and in the hearts of millions. With few exceptions, activists can rely on their neighbours not to sell them out to the cops, to hide literature if a raid on their apartment is expected, to turn a blind eye and often a quiet wink.

The influence of the Church—the only legal ‘opposition’—has grown. We watched a massive youth pilgrimage set out from Warsaw to the Jasna Gora monastery in the south of Poland. Tens of thousands of students and young workers, organised by young priests in colourful hats, marched with guitars and a mixture of hymns and freedom songs past large applauding crowds. The whole event was clearly a soft political demonstration, very ambiguous in its meaning.

In the early period after the coup, the priests were more radical than they are now. Father Jerzy Popieluszko—murdered by secret police in 1984—symbolised the difference. He worked with the underground, organised specifically *workers’* pilgrimages, and gave sermons whose texts were directly based on the underground leaders’ statements. His church in north Warsaw is still a Solidarnosc shrine, the area round his grave bedecked with union banners.

But the presence of the shrine, and the banners, is a subject of continuous debate. Solidarnosc activists (especially workers from the Warsaw steel works) had to fight the episcopate, with a threat of strike and blockade, to keep the grave in the city, and to maintain the permanent guard on the banners.

There are no more Father Jerzys. The ‘Solidarnosc priest’ in Gdansk has a chauffeur-driven Mercedes and the smartest white business suit to be seen in Poland. We attended an oppositional Mass in a village church near Kutno—a monthly event for numbers of Warsaw Solidarnosc activists—where the sermon attacked the regime, but from a purely nationalist standpoint.

Mostly the church seeks to contain Solidarnosc, to turn politics into religion, organisation into prayer. There are numbers of new churches being built, with the regime’s passive acquiescence.

At the same time, the churches are not now as full as they were in the period of Jaruzelski’s ‘state of war’.

Within the underground, a variety of political tendencies appear to be developing. There are bulletins from the liberal ‘Independence’ party, and the nationalist KPN. A couple of rather nasty semi-fascist, anti-semitic groupings have surfaced, although their influence is very small.

The main voice of Solidarnosc, *Tygodnik Mazowsze*, prints the statements of the underground Temporary Coordinating Commission. If its politics are definable,

they are social-democratic. The KOR grouping (with Adam Michnik an especially influential thinker) plays a major theoretical role in this predominant wing of Solidarnosc.

In the 16 months of Solidarnosc’s legal existence, up to December 1981, the movement’s internal life was shaped by a perpetual struggle between radicalising impulses coming from below, from the pressures of the workers in the factories, and moderate tendencies in the leadership. To a degree, this corresponded to a submerged struggle between the workers and the intelligentsia.

Polish intellectual circles played a role within Solidarnosc that was unparalleled in other workers’ movements in the world: beside the elected workers’ leaders, the union’s co-opted ‘experts’ and ‘advisers’ formed a parallel leadership, which wrapped itself around Lech Walesa in particular like a swaddling band.

The Polish intelligentsia is centred, physically and psychically, on Warsaw, a city which, as one worker put it, ‘has too many bloody institutes’. It is the least working class city in Poland.

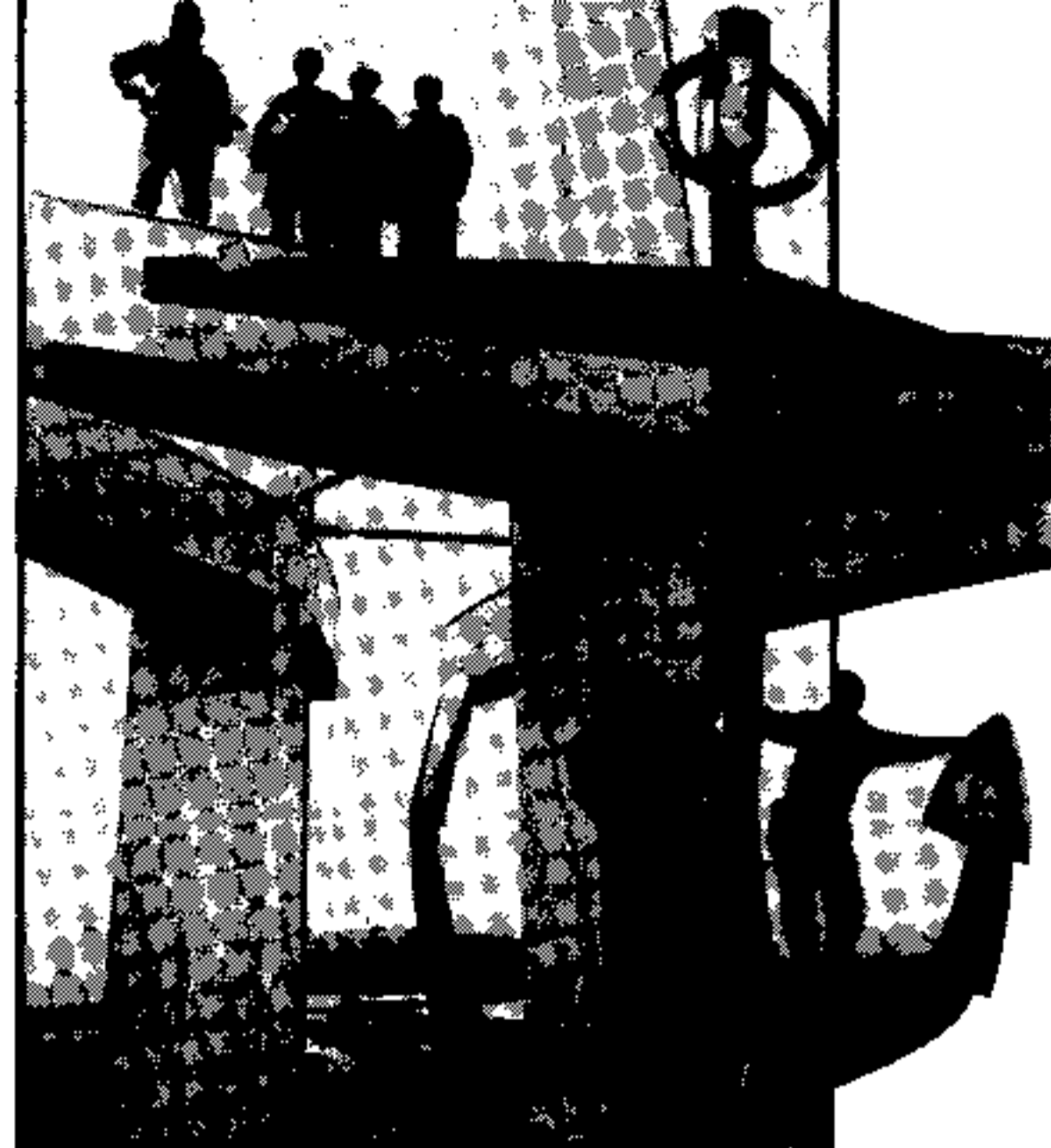
The coup of December 1981 has, for the time, broken the back of the workers’ movement. Few impulses from the factories now flow into the underground. In these circumstances, the centre has shifted to Warsaw, and to the intelligentsia. Their formulae are now much more predominant. They pull to the right, instinctively.

It is this stratum which translates workers’ demands and frustrations into programmatic terms. It is the common experience of Polish workers—especially the skilled—that the Polish economy is immensely wasteful and frustrating: work is wrecked and spoiled through bureaucratic interference.

From this experience followed the demand for workers’ control that emerged during 1980 and 1981. But now the opposition’s most commonly voiced economic demand is a fantasy about a free market Poland where ‘money will be money’ and ‘qualifications will be rewarded’. Almost unconsciously, like the priests, the intelligentsia are translating the history of Solidarnosc from that of a workers’ movement into a *national* movement. They stress the value of alliances with the church, and play down the conservative consequences.

The actual politics of the underground are soft and swampy at the core. There is enormous personal bravery, but little theoretical clarity. What does *not* exist is any organised challenge from the left. We talked to a number of activists who had individually developed quite radical, even brilliant, critiques of Solidarnosc’s past and present activity and organisation.

Many felt the movement was being pulled to the right by the pressure of the Church; they worried about the tendency to bureaucratisation in the union, and sought solutions in the development of rank-and-file activity. They were clearly groping for answers to the problems they



faced. Some pointed to possible forms of low-level activity, in the workplaces and housing co-operatives, where small gains can be made and worker networks rebuilt.

The *potential* for a more radical grouping clearly exists within the extensive underground, but no effective nucleus appears to be forming.

Numbers of these more radical people told us how isolated they felt, how they could not articulate their criticisms—of the rich priests, of Solidarnosc’s drift to the right, of the movement’s perspectives. ‘If only we knew what to do!’ one told us. In the West, there have been reports of Trotskyist groupings, but none of the people we spoke to had ever heard of them: if they exist, they are tiny and buried deeply.

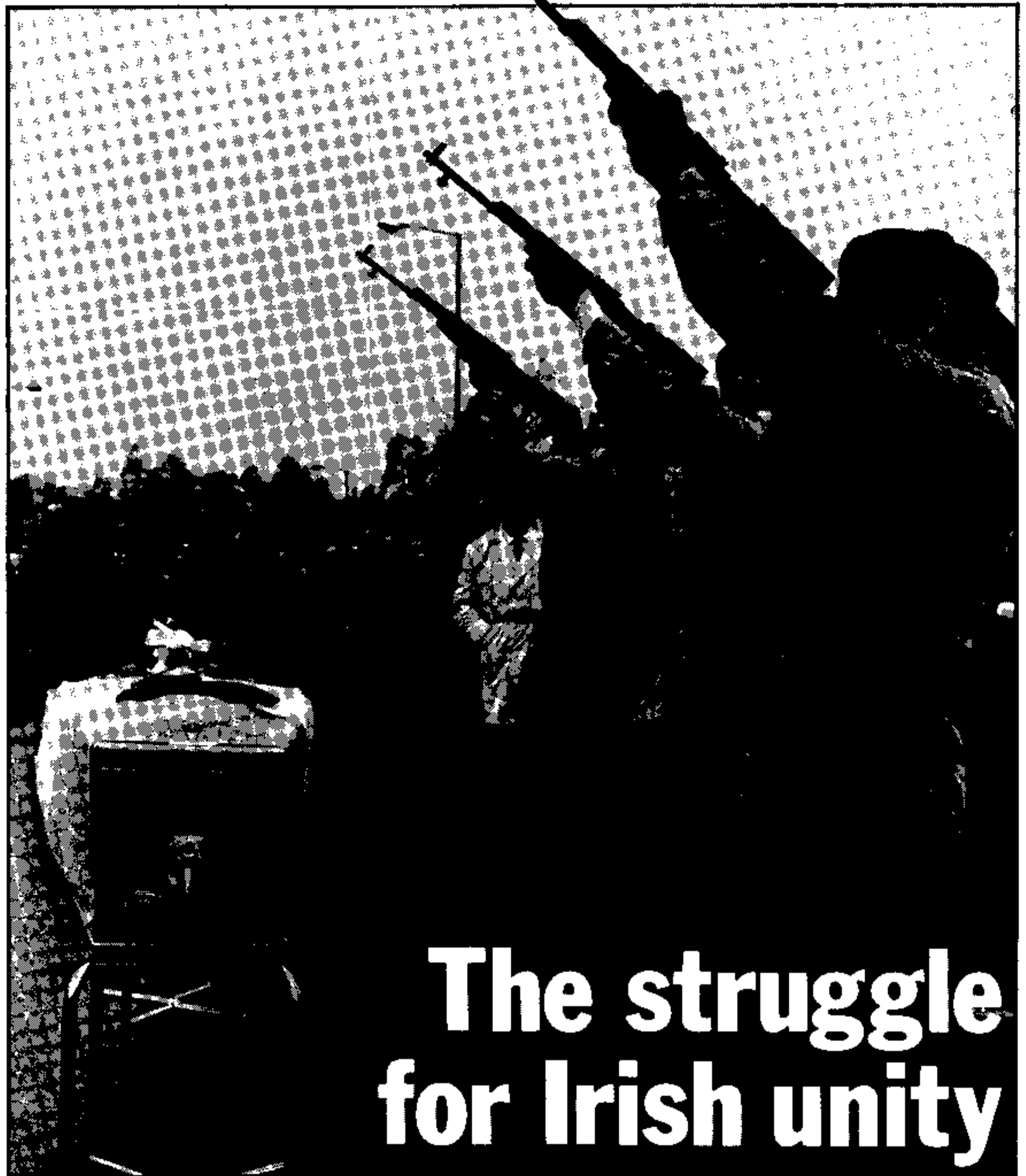
In the end, the most tragic aspect of Poland today is the situation of these radical activists. They hardly know about each other’s existence. They feel constrained to keep quiet about their views for the sake of ‘unity’—actually from fear of being cut off from their friends, who are more influenced by either the Church or the KOR. They are scared that their criticisms will be taken as ammunition for the regime.

Yet none can envisage the possibility of forming a left fraction within Solidarnosc, in which they might collectively develop alternative perspectives.

In part, they are politically disarmed by the limits of Polish nationalism. Most of the Solidarnosc radicals limit themselves to concerns with purely Polish issues, yet they know there can be no purely national solution to their problems.

Myths of ‘national character’ are widespread: Russian workers are and always will be docile, the Czech workers will never forgive the Poles for having joined in the crushing of their movement in 1968, etc. The result is a certain paralysis of thought. The system is agreed to be unreformable, but no possible way out is envisaged.

Until some small group of these radicals overcomes these internal obstacles, the period of the Polish downturn—when the seeds of a new and more militant workers’ leadership can be sown—is liable to be a lost time. The possibilities are modestly considerable, but remain to be realised. ■



The struggle for Irish unity

Chris Bambery looks at the current situation in Ireland, and the Republican response.

FOR NEARLY 15 years the situation in Northern Ireland has been deadlocked. Now, however, events around the Anglo-Irish agreement seem to be provoking a change in the situation. When it was signed we were told it was part of a 'healing process'. But the Loyalist reaction to it has created a situation where once again people are talking of all-out civil war.

The aim of the agreement was very modest—to dent the Provos' support and increase their isolation.

Dublin and London ruled out any real changes in the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the Ulster Defence Regiment, which will remain nearly 100 percent Protestant. The non-jury courts and special laws will stay, as will British troops.

But a series of more or less cosmetic reforms were to be granted to help rebuild support for the Catholic middle class party the SDLP, which acts as a key prop of the set-up in the North.

Initially the SDLP held up official col-

laboration between Dublin and London as a major step to Irish unity.

In a series of by-elections caused by the resignation of Unionist MPs in protest at the agreement, the SDLP increased its electoral support over Sinn Fein by 10 percent.

THE PROVISIONALS' initial response to the agreement was highly confused. It combined correct warnings that it would bring no real change with claims that if any reforms were achieved it would be due to the IRA's campaign.

It compounded this by then asking for an electoral pact with the SDLP.

Since then Loyalist opposition to the agreement has spiralled, with a one day strike in March, a series of clashes with the security forces over the re-routing of an Orange march in Portadown and, more seriously, a wave of sectarian attacks on Catholics.

The Provisionals seem to toy with the idea that

the Loyalist response weakens Britain's position in Ireland and can only strengthen the Provos' position.

But increased sectarian violence in the early 1970s helped create an atmosphere of fear and tension in Catholic ghettos.

Above all, sectarian conflict does not challenge Britain's presence. It merely reinforces the established sectarian ideas which maintain the set-up in Northern Ireland.

The other side to the Anglo-Irish agreement is the increased security campaign aimed at the Provos. Republicans can now be deported from the Republic northwards. The Irish police and army have stepped up their presence on the border.

Some £200 million is to be spent building new army forts and strengthening police stations in the North. The result in areas like South Armagh is a string of new observation points.

The Provos' response has been to attack these positions and to threaten contractors employed on them. In August they went further and threatened groups of workers engaged in work for the security forces. The statement detailed British Telecom and STC workers, civil servants, shipping and bus workers, cleaners, caterers and workers delivering bread and milk.

The media was quick to present this as simply on a par with a statement from the Ulster Freedom Fighters (a front for the still legal Ulster Defence Association) threatening to kill any Catholic working in Protestant areas.

That equation was also drawn by the Workers Party (the old Official republicans), supporters of *Militant*, and trade union officials North and South.

Militant simply lumped the IRA and UFF together as 'bigots and thugs'. A resolution published on *Militant's* front page from London Telecom workers denounced the Provos without mentioning Loyalist firebombings or the daily intimidation of Catholic workers by the British army.

For socialists, the Provos cannot be equated with the UFF. The Provos are fighting the sectarian set-up in the North. The Loyalists want to keep every piece of bigotry intact.

Unlike those such as *Militant* who are prepared to blame the Provos for sectarian violence, we clearly blame Britain's policy of divide and rule.

BUT THE PROVOS' threat confused many workers in the Catholic community and the Republic, and does show the limitations of the much-heralded 'left turn' of recent years. In fact, such threats can only serve to exacerbate the sectarianism that already exists. They move workers away from any class unity, and reinforce existing divisions.

Yet workers can be won to supporting the struggle.

In 1920 railway workers and dockers in the South operated a highly effective blacking campaign against munitions for British forces. Rail drivers refused to transport armed members of the security forces. That was achieved despite

opposition from union officials. The campaign was initiated in the docks by workers influenced by the socialist ideas of James Connolly, who organised it at a rank and file level.

Workers in the Republic and in the Catholic areas of the North were won to taking industrial action in support of the H Block hunger strikers in 1981. Those stoppages faced hostility from union officials. Again they were organised not by the Republican movement but by shop stewards and socialist activists.

Now many of those same workers are confused and worried by a command issued by the IRA with little or no explanation.

A similar approach is seen over the Provos' response to the wave of sectarian attacks in Lisburn and North Belfast coupled with intimidation in Shorts and other workplaces.

The Provos are in no position to directly defend individual workers on the shopfloor or living in Protestant areas. Far more effective in isolating the Loyalist thugs was the action of civil servants in social security offices in striking against UFF threats to Catholic staff.

Naturally, the majority of the workers involved, being Protestant, would see the Provos as being little or no better. But their action represents a significant break from sectarian ideas. It was highly effective. The opportunity for socialists to argue their case was made easier.

THE NORTHERN state is based on sectarianism. Anything which strikes at that challenges the existence of the set-up there. Socialists welcome such instances of workers' unity and seek to deepen them into opposition to the sectarian state and Britain's presence.

The Provos did not respond to this strike. They did not lift the threat to individual workers which could have isolated the Loyalist murder gangs still further. Similarly, the Provos have not clearly spelt out their opposition to Catholic gangs responding with sectarian threats of their own.

In the current situation all this can only help increase the political isolation of the Provos.

It also throws into doubt the political perspective of the Republican movement. For some they are still engaged in a 'long war' in which Britain will only be ground down over decades by the cost of policing Northern Ireland and its political effects at home. That perspective places more emphasis on military matters.

Other sections see some possibility of a bourgeois coalition uniting unionist employers, the Southern ruling class and the Catholic middle class in the North—an alliance to dismantle partition. This perspective centres on building Sinn Fein along the lines of a classic European socialist party.

The old Republican right is effectively marginal—with strong speculation that Sinn Fein will agree to take seats in the Dublin parliament.

In addition there is a vague left in the Republican movement which can be drawn to revolutionary ideas. The tragedy is that these



people are trapped within the 'unity' of the Republican movement.

A row is likely to break out over the thorny question of abortion. Last year Sinn Fein accepted the position of a woman's right to choose after being simply opposed to the right to abortion. This new position was written around with all sorts of contradictory clauses but it was a step forward.

Whether the policy will remain is uncertain. But even supporters of abortion spell out the limitations of change within Sinn Fein.

In an interview Daisy Mules from Derry, who moved the successful right-to-choose amendment last year stated:

'If we go too fast too quickly we'll end up splitting the movement. We could forge ahead with the correct line and lose half our members. That doesn't help Ireland and it wouldn't be totally fair to those people who have been holding the movement together.'

The 'left turn' was based on a turn towards working class issues, in recognition of where the Provos' base lay. It was seen in electoral terms. In the South the Workers Party's success was seen as a model.

The hunger strike has radicalised a new generation of Catholic workers in the North, this is reflected within the Provos.

The Provos are committed to 'a democratic socialist republic' but despite the new socialist language, socialism is only on offer *after* the border has been removed and Ireland united within a capitalist framework.

DESPITE THE spectacular electoral gains of Sinn Fein in the North the new strategy has not broken the impasse the struggle is bogged down in. Firstly, the Provos have been forced to give up on hopes of overtaking the SDLP's electoral support. Hopes of that went when Danny Morrison was beaten by SDLP leader John Hume in the 1984 European elections.

Secondly, electoral success has not translated itself into an active movement against British repression among Catholic workers.

In contrast to 1981 there is a mood among Catholic workers that nothing can change in the short-term. Talk of a 'long war' only reinforces that.

Sinn Fein is not intent on building such a movement. Instead it wants the votes of Catholic

workers and their passive support for IRA operations.

In Belfast and Derry Sinn Fein councillors are bogged down in housing and social security matters. This is undoubtedly good work but it does not represent a challenge to British rule.

Sinn Fein itself is tightly controlled, with an increasingly hierarchical structure. The emphasis is not on mobilising workers or carrying out agitation and propaganda. The result is that there is no concerted effort to develop political consciousness among Catholic workers.

Individuals within the Provos can have excellent records in their unions on women's liberation or whatever, but they remain individuals with no organisation campaigning on these issues.

Thirdly, the Provos have not won the support they hoped in the South.

The key to breaking the impasse lies here. The Southern working class has the strength to bring down both ruling class states which exist in Ireland.

But the majority of Southern workers still vote for the green Tories of Fianna Fail. The Irish Labour Party is in its death throes but the benefactors have been the Workers Party, particularly among well organised workers.

Sinn Fein hoped to repeat their Northern electoral success by good constituency work around housing, the anti-heroin campaign and issues like street trading rights. The aim has not been to explain the links between the struggle in the North and the issues facing Southern workers in an attempt to build a unity between the two.

SO THE STRUGGLE in the North has remained trapped within the confines of the Catholic ghettos. The Anglo-Irish agreement will not end the resistance there. That is fuelled by sectarianism, repression and poverty. But it does aim at isolating the struggle still further.

It comes at a time when Ireland as a whole is in deep crisis. In both states unemployment tops 20 percent and is rising. Last year 35,000 workers emigrated from the Republic. It is fourth in the world in terms of the amount of foreign debt per head of population—above the likes of Brazil. A new round of recession will add to the crisis.

Capitalism cannot solve the problems facing Irish society as a whole. That has to be our starting point when it comes to the Northern crisis. But Ireland—North and South—is a capitalist state with a majority of the population which is working class. They have the power to solve the crisis.

The resistance of Catholic workers in the North is the sharp end of the struggle against the system which means dole queues and repression in both Irish states.

Socialists start by identifying with the victims of the Anglo-Irish agreement and of sectarianism—the Catholic workers.

But more than ever at this time we have to argue that socialism is the only solution. The struggle for Irish unity or against sectarianism cannot be separated from it.

The German Revolution



In 1918-19 workers were on the verge of taking power in Germany. The lessons of their defeat have immense importance for us today. Newly published is a book documenting in detail the debates taking place among revolutionaries and socialists at the time. Also just out is a film on the life of Germany's leading revolutionary, Rosa Luxemburg, murdered in 1919.

Chris Harman reviews the book, and Clare Fermont and Pete Green interview Margarethe von Trotta, the director of the film.

'THE international revolution has come so close in one week that it has to be reckoned with as an event of the next few days... We must have by the spring an army of three millions to help the international workers' revolution.'

So wrote Lenin to the Bolshevik commissar for war, Trotsky, and the secretary of the Bolshevik Party, Sverdlov, at the beginning of October 1918. He had just heard the first news of the massive political crisis in Germany brought on by the prospect of military defeat.

Lenin's optimism was only partly justified. A month later the German emperor was forced to flee after workers and soldiers revolted in every major town. For a brief period political power was in the

hands of workers and soldiers' councils.

But the revolutionary upheaval did not culminate in the formation of a workers' state. On the second day of the revolution the Berlin councils were easily persuaded to hand power over to a government of Social Democrats who had no intention of smashing capitalism.

Five weeks later a national congress of council delegates voted to call elections for a new parliament and to abdicate powers to it. The elections gave a majority to the bourgeois parties, with whom the right wing Social Democrats then formed a series of coalition governments.

Meanwhile, the Social Democrats worked hand in glove with the old generals to destroy the soldiers councils, to form a

mercenary army, the Freikorps, and to smash the revolutionary opposition. The best known revolutionary leaders, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, were murdered.

Yet Lenin's hopes of socialist revolution were not completely misplaced. There were 17 months of sporadic civil war between the overthrow of the emperor and the return to anything like bourgeois normality.

The experiences of this period are of immense interest to revolutionary socialists today. It was the closest we have yet come to working class revolution in an advanced industrial country.

Yet until recently it was difficult for English speaking socialists to learn the real

story of the German revolution. Even the best biography of Rosa Luxemburg, by Paul Frolich (just republished), does not give more than an outline of the crucial events.

I tried myself to fill in some of the gaps with my book, *The Lost Revolution*. But although I think I gave an adequate account of the events and the main arguments that took place, that was not the same as being able to provide readers with direct access to sources where these arguments might be found.

This new book does just that.

It contains the texts of many newspaper articles, leaflets and speeches from the first three months of the revolution. Most are by revolutionaries, but a few are by the right Social Democrats and by the 'centrists' who tried to create a middle ground between reform and revolution. These are very useful in enabling the reader to understand the context in which revolutionaries were operating.

Of the pieces by revolutionaries, the most interesting are articles which Rosa Luxemburg wrote in her daily paper, *Rote Fahne*, the hitherto unobtainable debates of the founding congress of the German Communist Party, and the account Karl Radek later gave of his impressions on arriving in Germany fresh from Bolshevik Russia.

The Rosa Luxemburg articles show a great revolutionary at her most perceptive, as she analyses the course of the revolution and argues what needs to be done. They are also useful in dispelling the myth that she was a soggy sentimentalist, standing half way between the right Social Democrats and the Bolsheviks. The articles show her as a granite hard revolutionary, pouring derision on those who do not understand the need for the workers' councils to take all power, and insistent on carrying the revolution through to the end.

The programme she wrote for the new Communist Party argued: 'The proletarian revolution needs no terror to achieve its goals. It hates and abhors killing...'

But she straight away went on to insist: 'It is an insane illusion to imagine that the capitalists will submit good naturedly to a decision by a socialist parliament or national assembly and calmly agree to give up their property, profit, privileges, and their right to exploit...'

'The imperialist bourgeoisie, the last of the exploiting classes, exceeds all of its predecessors in brutality, unabashed cynicism, and depravity...It would rather turn the country into a smoking heap of rubble than voluntarily give up the system of wage slavery.'

'All this resistance must be broken, step by step, with an iron hand and relentless forces. The violence of the bourgeois counter-revolution must be met by the revolutionary violence of the proletariat...'

The debate at the founding congress of the Communist Party showed the real problem that faced Rosa and her comrades. The party was very small and with



Rosa Luxemburg

hardly any members in the major workplaces. The speed at which the revolution had developed meant that the great majority of workers still had illusions in the right wing Social Democrats, and that those who were disillusioned with them put their faith in the vacillators of the 'centre' organised in the Independent Social Democratic Party (USPD).

What was worse, however, was that the small minority that had already been won over to revolution had little understanding of strategy or tactics, and no tradition of working together in a disciplined way.

These weaknesses were revealed in the discussion over whether to participate in the elections.

The party programme, written by Rosa Luxemburg, argued very strongly that the new Communist Party could not take power without the support of the majority of the working class. In this its approach was very similar to that of Lenin when, in April 1917, he called for 'all power to the soviets', but then went on to insist that for the time being, the Bolsheviks could not impose this, but had to 'patiently explain' the need to the rest of the class.

The programme 'was not controversial', according to Radek's account. But two thirds of the delegates were incapable of seeing what its approach meant in practice. Rosa Luxemburg, rightly, argued in a newspaper article on the eve of the congress that the majority of workers were still in favour of the the national assembly elections, and that therefore the revolutionaries had to use the election campaign as an opportunity.

'Ebert and company have devised the national assembly as a dam built to contain the revolutionary flood. Thus we must direct this flood in and through the national assembly to sweep away the dam.'

One of her leading supporters, Paul Levi, put her case at the congress itself:

'The national assembly is the banner of the counter-revolution... We know exactly the road the proletariat must travel to victory. It will be over the dead body of the national assembly... Comrades, we propose to you nevertheless that we do not stand aloof from the national assembly elections...'

'The national assembly is going to meet. It will dominate the political scene

in Germany for months to come, and there is no way you can prevent that. It will be the centre of politics in Germany. There is no way you can stop all eyes being focussed on it... Our duty is to break into that building.'

But nearly three quarters of the delegates simply did not understand the need for tactics that related to the consciousness of the mass of workers. They heckled Levi with cries of 'Never!', 'No!' and 'A waste of energy!'

The attitude of the majority, Radek later told, was, 'We will break up the assembly with machine guns.'

This approach played right into the hands of the right wing Social Democrats. They were able to give the impression that the revolutionaries wanted to impose a dictatorship of 'oppressive terrorism' on the working class. The headline of their paper was, 'Spartakus aims to break up national assembly', and their writer claimed, 'Bolsheviks agitate for world war'.

The discussion on the trade unions was even more confused. In any great revolutionary movement of workers, while the more advanced sections of the class begin to build workers councils, less advanced sections get involved, for the first time, in economic struggles and join trade unions. Yet almost all the participants in the discussion wrote off the existing unions and counterposed workers' councils to them.

For instance, Paul Frolich argued, 'The only slogan for us is, "Get out of the unions".' Even Rosa Luxemburg did not squarely stand up to such nonsense. Instead, she suggested that 'we replace the unions with another system that has a new foundation'.

The most experienced revolutionaries at the congress were horrified by the political immaturity of the delegates. Rosa Luxemburg wrote, in a letter to Clara Zetkin, this was 'a somewhat childish, half baked radicalism. It was, however, she insisted, inevitable in a 'new generation, free from the mind-numbing traditions of the "old party".'

Radek talks of 'the immaturity and inexperience of the German party... I did not feel I had a real party here before me.'

This inexperience showed itself with tragic results in the second week in January. The right wing Social Democrats sacked the popular left Social Democrat who had run the Berlin police since the revolution. Many workers who had been prepared to tolerate the government only weeks before now turned bitterly against it. There took place what was described as 'the biggest demonstration Berlin had ever known'.

Very influential in the Berlin workers movement were a group of shop floor activists known as the 'revolutionary shop stewards'. These wavered between the left Social Democrats and the revolutionaries. Now, under the pressure of events, they called for the overthrow of the government.

Rosa Luxemburg and the leadership of the newly-born Communist Party were op-

posed to any such course of action. A leaflet from them a few days earlier had argued:

'If the Berlin workers were today to disperse the national assembly and throw the Ebert Scheidemann people into prison, while the workers of the Ruhr and Upper Silesia and the rural workers of Germany east of the Elbe remained inactive, the capitalists would be able tomorrow to subdue Berlin through hunger.'

A meeting of the party's central committee on 4 January agreed unanimously 'it would be senseless to strive for our government... A government based on the proletariat would last two weeks and no longer.'

Yet two days later the party's representatives at a meeting of the revolutionary shop stewards, Karl Liebknecht

how difficult it is, after so many sacrifices, to stand up before the masses and sound the retreat. I know this will lead to a decline in morale. But such depression is nothing compared to what the masses will say to themselves after a bloodletting...'

There is little doubt that Radek was right. Revolutionaries do, on occasion, have to restrain workers from mad adventures, however much temporary unpopularity it gains us.

Yet Rosa Luxemburg felt she could not follow such advice. The Communist Party was so small that she feared it would lose its chance of winning the most militant workers if it told them to hold back from armed struggle. They would think it was no different to the left Social Democrats who one minute called for advance, the next for retreat. And so her articles in *Rote Fahne*

to the German working class. It was compelled not only to fight for power but to create its organisation and train future leaders in the very course of this struggle... Absent was a centralised revolutionary party with a combat leadership whose authority is universally accepted by the working masses...'

Lenin made the same point two and a half years later:

'When the crisis broke out, the German workers lacked a genuine revolutionary party, owing to the fact that the split (with the left and right Social Democrats) took place too late, and owing to the burden of the accursed tradition of 'unity' with capital's corrupt and spineless gang of lackeys. The heart of every honest and class conscious worker was filled with incredibly bitter hatred for the opportunism of the old German Social Democracy, and this hatred blinded people and prevented them keeping their heads and working out a correct strategy... This hatred pushed them into premature insurrections.'

The tragedy was that among the victims of the premature insurrections were leaders like Rosa Luxemburg and Leo Jogiches who had the grasp of revolutionary politics required to prevent further terrible mistakes.

One great merit of this book is that it enables you to read the debates that took place yourself, and, in the process, to learn the lessons that too many German revolutionaries did not understand in January 1919.

But there is even more to it than that. The latter half is devoted to the discussions that gave rise to the founding congress of the Communist International in March 1919. Here, too, the reader will find much material not readily accessible before.

I only found one minor fault with the collection. The editor's politics means he elevates quite a minor question, that of the German peasantry, into a major issue, devoting a whole section to the discussion on the issue at the founding congress of the German Communist Party under the title 'towards a worker-peasant alliance'.

But Germany in 1919 was already an overwhelmingly urbanised country, with less than a third of the population in the countryside. And of these, the only ones who could be attracted to revolutionary slogans (as opposed to learning to live with an established workers' government) were the agricultural labourers of Prussia. They were not small landowners, mainly interested in owning their own land, but rural workers who flooded into trade unions in 1919, showing how similar their interests were to those of industrial workers.

But this is a minor blemish on an invaluable book that should be on the shelf of every serious revolutionary socialist. ■

Chris Harman

The German Revolution and the Debate on Soviet Power: Documents 1918-19
Edited John Riddell
Pathfinder, £8.95



Brothers don't shoot: soldiers support workers at Berlin barracks, November 1918

and Wilhelm Pieck, took it upon themselves to support the call to overthrow the government.

Rosa Luxemburg was disgusted when she finally learnt what they had done. But there seemed little she and the rest of the leadership could do about it. Radek advised them to oppose the movement openly and to urge workers to stay within peaceful limits:

'The most advanced Berlin workers have been misled by the shop stewards, who lack any political experience and are not in a position to see the relationship of forces in the country as a whole. The shop stewards have impetuously turned the protest movement into a fight for power. That allowed Ebert and Scheidemann [the Right Social Democrat leaders] to deal the Berlin movement a blow that can set it back months.'

'The only restraining force that can prevent this misfortune is...the Communist Party... Of course, I am aware of

urged the workers into action and denounced the left Social Democrats for not carrying through to the end actions they had initiated.

Trotsky, in an article written in April 1919, pointed out why the German revolutionaries had not been able to give real leadership to the mass struggle as the Bolsheviks had in Russia in 1917:

'At the moment of its transition to open revolutionary struggle for power, the German working class proved to be extremely defenceless organisationally.'

'The Russian working class which accomplished its October revolution received a priceless legacy from the previous epoch: a centralised revolutionary party... Fifty years of bitter struggles against Czarism 'prepared a large staff of revolutionary leaders, tempered in struggle and bound together by the unity of the revolutionary socialist programme.'

'History bequeathed nothing like this

'She was for the mass struggle'

A new film on the life of Rosa Luxemburg has just opened in Britain. Clare Fermont and Pete Green interviewed its director, Margarethe von Trotta, for SWR.

SWR: What inspired you to make a film about Rosa Luxemburg?

MvT: My life, my experience. The first time I met her was as a portrait being carried around in the streets at the time of the so-called student rebellion. And there were portraits of Marx, Lenin, Ho Chi Minh, Che Guevara, and a portrait of Rosa. She was the only woman among all these men, and that was like a shock. Just this face.

SWR: What especially attracted you to Rosa?

MvT: Her democratic, human socialism. It is still a utopia—it was never realised. Nowhere. Even if the Germans hadn't killed her, Stalin would have killed her later on.

SWR: But if she hadn't been killed there might have been a successful German revolution, in which case you might not have got Stalinism.

MvT: No, I don't think so, because at the moment when she was killed the possibility of a real revolution was already over.

She knew a successful revolution was not possible. It was premature. Also during the war Leibknecht and Rosa were forced into silence because both were in prison. They had so little time—just these two months after coming out of prison to speak to people. The organisation of Spartakus was not already there. They were very weak.

SWR: You have said you were concerned to stress her anti-war feeling, but our biggest criticism of the film is the description of her at the beginning as 'an ardent pacifist'.

MvT: In Germany we have this strong anti-militaristic peace movement and I wanted to bring this up.

But you are right to bring up the thing about pacifism. That was not my text. In the German film that doesn't exist—it just opens with the first image. That was only added by the French and the English.

The film shows she is not a pacifist. In the film it shows she leads, before the First World War, the anti-militaristic struggle. And that she hopes that the internationalist social democratic movement will struggle against the war. That for her was the moment of her worst despair—when she saw that this international struggle would not happen.

SWR: Was she against terrorism?

MvT: In the beginning when she comes to

Warsaw, Leo Jogiches reads a text about how to make agitation rather than terroristic acts. In reality it is a text of Rosa's. She wrote it at this time—at the time of the first Russian revolution. She was very much against individual acts of terrorism. She was for the mass struggle and for mass agitation.

SWR: Obviously this is an important question for the left in Germany with the legacy of Baader Meinhof.

MvT: Yes. When I did *German Sisters* I dealt with German history after fascism. Now for me, this film is going more into the past. They didn't work the past out in Germany. They tried to forget it rather than analyse it, to see their guilt. In this film I tried to go to the real roots of our history—and it is the failure of this revolution in 1918.

SWR: What were the problems you faced making the film?

MvT: I did all the documentation myself over one and a half years. When I started there were practically no books in the bookshops, so I had to order them or go to the libraries or to the Institute of Marx and Lenin in East Berlin. Even at this time there were still two volumes of her letters not yet released. Also the letters of Paul Levi were not found. They came out a year later—only then could you see she had a relationship with Paul Levi too. That was all new.

I also met two people who knew Rosa. It was a problem because they were very young then, and they had such a long life after. One was an old anarchist—Souchy. The other was the wife of Paul Frolich. They always wanted to tell me about their lives, and I wanted to know about Rosa. So they would say one sentence about Rosa, then they jumped to their long life history!

But Rosi Frolich gave me an old photograph of Rosa when she was in the costume of a geisha. I was surprised, but she told me about the fancy dress balls they used to have. And then this old lady of 92 said: 'The geisha dress suits Rosa very well because you can't see her short legs!' So this gave me the idea for the ball in 1900.

SWR: Do you think an audience which does not know the historical background, who do not know Bernstein was an arch reformist, will have trouble understanding scenes like the ballroom one?

MvT: In Germany the people who liked the film most were all the historians who really know her, and the people who don't know her at all. But people who are just in between, like the students from '68, they were saying 'what's this and that?'—they all knew better than I did. But I know her

better because nobody, apart from a few historians, did all the work I did.

SWR: Were you involved in the student days of '68?

MvT: I was not very politically minded in my youth. But from '65 onwards I started to become more political.

When the student rebellion came in '68 I was already well informed. I must say that for me there was a lot of hope at this time. I did not realise that it would not go on. I did a lot of work, and afterwards I visited political prisoners, and tried to help where I could. I also visited some of these so-called terrorists, which led me afterwards to the *German Sisters*.

SWR: Was there any particular political current that you identified with?

MvT: I was never in a political party. I am not a party member. But at that time I was very left wing—social democratic left wing, and then afterwards I went outside this, I would not say communist, but very left wing socialist.

SWR: Not a communist because you didn't want to identify with East Germany?

MvT: Yes. Nor with Russia, nor with all these so-called socialist societies.

SWR: What about Trotsky?

MvT: Yes, Trotsky is the most close to Rosa in his theory, but she didn't like him at all.

SWR: The impact of the Russian revolution was obviously very important during that period and that is missing from the film.

MvT: There is a big lack in the film—the whole discussion with Lenin that she had, and her writings about the Russian revolution, and so on. But I felt that was a scene for a whole film. So I just left it all out.

But I think cinema is not just a vehicle for political ideas. If you make films you must feel it in the way a person exists also. And I think that when you look at Rosa and the way she behaves you can imagine what her idea of revolution was too.

SWR: Did you intend to suggest a separation between individual fulfilment and political fulfilment?

MvT: They are connected because she wanted them not to be disconnected. Finally it was because with the man she loved (Leo Jogiches) she couldn't have children because he didn't want her to have them.

For me that's a key scene. It's a very



Rosa Luxemburg with Liebknecht in the film

short one—when she says I want to have a child, and he says, 'No, because a child makes you scared, and your children are your ideas.' Then she throws something at him.

Then you read in her letters how fond she was of children. She was born into a family with seven children, so she wanted so much to experience that side of the possibility of life. She had to sacrifice this for her political work.

SWR: Was this one of the reasons you included the scene with Bebel telling Rosa to stick to women's work?

MvT: Yes. Even though he wrote the famous book *Women and Socialism*, he always said to Rosa; you must carry more for the women's section. She wrote so many articles for *Gleichheit*, the woman's party paper which Clara Zetkin edited, but she never agreed that she should not be equal to all those men.

SWR: You have said that Rosa thought she was not a feminist, but that you think she was.

MvT: She didn't write specially for women and refused to just care only for the woman's question, so she was a real Marxist, thinking that only through a whole revolution can women be liberated. But that's not true. Just look at Kollantai. In the very early days of the revolution women were liberated, but after that if you look to Russia you can say that women were not liberated.

SWR: Was it important for you that Rosa was a woman?

MvT: I think women are more courageous. When they get involved in politics and when they have reached a certain intellectual level, and they are involved, then they stand without thinking of their

own safety. They want to go straight forward with their ideas, and to speak them out loudly.

I think that this is because to get involved in politics they have to have such a strength. And especially at that time—women didn't yet have the vote, they had so few rights.

SWR: Your portraits of Kautsky and Bebel were very effective. Do you think she always stood for the self-emancipation of the working class, whereas the others stood for winning votes?

MvT: Yes. They were more interested in winning the elections and in getting more and more members.

But Rosa only fully realised this the moment she came back from Russia in 1906. That was the period I wanted to show because she comes back from Russia and thinks everyone must be absolutely enthusiastic about the possibility and to go further, and to learn from revolution. Then she realised that the Germans were not at all willing to follow this way and so her fight against these cowards became her main fight till the end.

Then she was also killed by the Social Democratic Party. Because Ebert and Scheidemann knew about the plot of the officers and they did nothing against it.

SWR: You said you hope your film will make people go out and read Rosa Luxemburg.

MvT: In Germany it has. Now you can go into a bookshop and you'll find all her letters and political writings and biographies which I couldn't find when I started.

The idea still exists in Germany of violent Rosa, bloody Rosa. But to look at this person and see the really deep humanity, and that kind of socialism—that

I think you can learn from the film.

SWR: You have said that you feel pessimistic about the future. Yet you also said that the last image of the film, of the water running on, was to show that the ideas and history carried on.

MvT: I am still fond of the idea of human, democratic socialism, but I know that it is utopia. When I see the power games of the big nations and the possibilities they have to destroy the world, I feel I would be very illusionist to think that we might still have a chance.

SWR: What about Rosa's idea of barbarism or socialism?

MvT: But when she wrote that she had not yet seen a socialist country as we have now. If we look at all these countries, we don't find her ideas realised.

SWR: Wouldn't Rosa have said that the revolution in Russia eventually failed, and Stalinism had nothing to do with socialism? And that from those defeats, lessons can be learnt?

MvT: Sure, she would say that. But I don't know if she would have such a strong belief. She would fight always for the same things. But I don't know if she would have had the same strength of hope in history—because of the strength of capitalism.

SWR: So is there any point in carrying on Rosa's struggle?

MvT: Yes. I fight nevertheless. I can fight also when I am pessimistic. I have to fight—that's my character. That's my opinion of how to live in this world. But I can't have the same confidence in history that she had. ■

Patterns of a witch hunt

Socialists have fought back against expulsions before. Donny Gluckstein looks at revolutionaries in the Labour Party in the 1920s.

WITCH hunts are not new to the Labour Party. They stretch through its entire history, from the hounding of MP Victor Grayson in 1907, when the Party was officially just two years old, to the present day.

Labour's biggest operation was against the Communists in the 1920s. The questions we need to ask are: Why and when does the Labour Party have witch hunts? What are the mechanics of witch hunts? How did the Communist Party (which initially had no illusions that the Labour Party could be transformed) fight back? And finally what attitude did the 'soft left' of the time adopt?

While the Labour right has consistently attacked militant socialist policies, they have only resorted to witch hunts in specific circumstances. If we look closely at this history, it becomes clear that the leadership do *not* indulge in such tactics because they feel about to lose control of the labour movement to the left.

At times when the working class is on the offensive, Labour Party leaders are compelled to put on left clothing themselves. In the period just after the Russian Revolution of 1917, arch right wingers like Sidney Webb and Arthur Henderson 'discovered' their socialist faith and wrote Clause 4 into the Labour Party constitution. And in the early seventies, when the miners had smashed Ted Heath's government, Dennis Healey spoke about 'squeezing the rich till the pips squeaked'.

Witch hunts occur when the Labour Party leadership feels it is losing votes because of socialists in its ranks, and the workers' movement generally lacks the confidence to defend advanced political thought.

Perhaps the most surprising feature of the anti-Communist campaign in the 1920s was that it took so *long*. Although a witch hunting resolution was passed as early as 1922, the Communists were only driven out in 1929.

Yet the Labour Party leadership never disguised its loathing of everything the Communists stood for. In 1918, for example, Arthur Henderson, the current leader, told parliament that:

'We ought not to do anything in this country that would in the slightest degree encourage an emulation of this deplorable spirit that has characterised the life of Russia...'

The Labour Party was the force that could hold back the Bolshevik hordes from Britain:

'I wish to claim that if one thing more than another has kept down the revolutionary spirit in recent years in this country it is the fact that Labour has had the power to express its grievances upon the floor of this House. I believe that the coming of a Labour Party into this House...has done that one thing.'

At that time James Ramsay MacDonald was

equally opposed to revolutions, saying: 'I prefer to read about them rather than to repeat them.'

Dislike for the Communists was not confined to the Labour right. The story is often told of how in 1922 the 'Red Clydesiders'—Maxton, Wheatley, Shinwell, Kirkwood and Co—were given a tremendous send off to London after their election. But one Clydeside MP was consciously excluded—J T Walton Newbold, the Communist who won Motherwell under Labour auspices.

At first it was the Communists who were on the offensive. At their founding congress they had decided, on Lenin's advice, to affiliate as an open revolutionary organisation to the Labour Party. They believed that Labour's federal structure would allow them complete freedom of action. But if it happened that affiliation was refused or the Communist Party expelled, Lenin reckoned: 'That will have an excellent effect upon the mass of the British workers.' It would underline the difference between revolutionaries and reformists, and help the building of an independent communist organisation.

WHEN affiliation was first moved at the 1921 Labour conference it lost by 4,115,000 votes to 224,000. The same happened a year later. However, the 1922 Edinburgh Labour conference passed the first witch hunting resolution. By two to one the conference decided that 'no person shall be eligible as a delegate who [supports] candidates other than such as have been endorsed by the Labour Party'. This was directed at the Communists who, as revolutionaries, always reserved the right to stand separately, and if need be, in opposition to reformists.

Yet the resolution proved completely inoperable. Communists not only remained delegates; they were selected to run for parliament by Labour Parties without hiding their principles or the fact that they belonged to a separate organisation. Walton Newbold was a case in point. He wrote that when asked to stand as Labour candidate:

'I begged them to realise what they were doing and to understand that I would only fight as a Bolshevik, and if they did not want a Bolshevik they should choose someone else... They chose me with their eyes open—prised wide open.'

In 1923 Labour's NEC admitted the failure of the witch hunt and conference formally dropped it at the NEC's request. This first attack failed for two reasons—one political, the other technical. The spirit that had brought Britain to the brink of revolution in 1919 was still not dead. True, it had been dampened down by the union leaders' treachery on 'Black Friday' 1921. Nevertheless, activists were not prepared to sacrifice the Communists and the fighting policies they stood



Ramsay MacDonald with four of his ministers in the 1929 Labour government

for to please the right wing.

The second problem flowed from the structure of Labour itself. The party was made up of a number of affiliated bodies, chiefly the trade unions, as well as individual membership. At conference the bloc vote of a few trade union bureaucrats was worth millions of votes, while the rest could muster only a few hundred thousand. Since union officials and Labour Party leaders shared an interest in keeping workers' struggle within bounds, Labour conferences voted the way MacDonald wanted.

So the structure of the Labour Party made it easy for HQ to get witch hunt motions through conference. But at local level it worked the opposite way. The rank and file of the trade unions, trades councils, elected delegates to local Labour Parties independently of party HQ and conference. And so Communists could resist central decisions. This local situation might encourage a belief that the Labour Party leadership could be won by the left. But this was, and is, an illusion which should disappear as soon as the Party's *national* structure is considered.

THINGS changed dramatically with the first Labour government of 1924. From now on the stakes were far higher. Labour leaders might tolerate an active left when power was not in prospect, but when control of the state was to hand, nothing would be allowed to interfere. In 1924 Lenin's chief argument for affiliating—complete freedom to criticise reformism inside the Labour Party—was disappearing.

The Labour government lasted nine months. In that short time it shattered many hopes. Prime Minister MacDonald could use the excuse that his was a minority government and so could not pass socialist legislation. But that was no excuse for at least three times threatening to use states of emergency—police, troops and scabs—to break strikes.

Pressure for a witch hunt developed even before the government crumbled. In May, Kelvingrove Labour Party ran a Communist candidate in a by-election. He lost by 1,000 votes.

That was the excuse wanted for launching an inquiry into Communist activities. The Labour Party executive put up with MacDonald breaking all election pledges, but losing seats was unforgivable.

On 27 August the inquiry reported that the chief obstacle was Communist strength in the unions. As Marxists, the CP did not see socialism coming through parliament, but by the activity of the working class itself. So it concentrated its efforts on industry where it established its credibility as a fighting organisation. As the inquiry complained: 'It is doubtful whether the unions are prepared to enforce a ruling that individual Communists shall not be eligible to serve as delegates to local Labour Parties.'

WHEN the government fell in 1924 the right wing wanted scapegoats, and who better than the Communists? After all, it was the bungled prosecution of a Communist newspaper editor that had forced the election. And the forged 'Zinoviev letter', purporting to show the Communists organising armed insurrection, swung decisive votes to the Tories.

The 1924 Labour conference, held just before the election, was keen to show voters that Labour was anti-Communist. The vote for CP affiliation was the lowest yet. Communists could not be candidates for local or national government. Finally, individual membership was proscribed.

Now the leadership's tone was even more vicious. MacDonald said: 'We have as much to do with Bolshevism as the man in the moon—except that we regard it as an enemy... We have not a thousandth-millionth part of sympathy with the Bolshevik point of view.' After electoral defeat he made this simple calculation: 'I firmly believe the attitude of the Labour Party in turning down the Communist proposals...will bring the party hundreds of thousands of votes.'

J R Clynes was equally candid. Labour would not win power 'until the public mind is purged of the mistaken impression that the party entertains

a measure of approval with Communist objects and policy'. But if the Communists were ditched, 'we may fairly hope to change the one third of the 16 million who have just voted into the two thirds or more required'.

Although the situation inside the Labour Party was clearly ripe for a witch hunt, the mood of the movement outside was not. Not until the defeat of the 1926 General Strike were active workers prepared to sacrifice socialist fighters for electoral gain.

In January 1925 the NEC had to admit that the exclusion of Communists was impossible. Although the 1925 Liverpool conference tightened up its anti-Communist policy, the NEC still had to tread carefully. It asked unions to be 'consistent' and 'appeal' for branches to 'refrain' from choosing Communist delegates. Once more the power of the block vote gave these proposals a crushing 2,870,000 to 321,000 majority. But still the localities resisted.

Regular reports reached the NEC of Labour Parties openly committed to defying the Liverpool conference decisions. But until May 1926 only three local Labour Parties had been disaffiliated. The General Strike, from 3 to 12 May 1926, changed all that.

THE sell-out of the General Strike demoralised and disorganised the rank and file. It meant the Labour leadership could attack the Communists with impunity. The first NEC meeting after the General Strike disaffiliated Springburn Labour Party. The next kicked out fully five more. By the end of 1926 13 parties were disaffiliated.

An indication of the NEC's double standard was the case of George Spencer MP. He organised the scab Nottinghamshire union that so weakened the 1926 miners' strike. The NEC refused to discipline him, saying: 'This is primarily a matter for the Miners Federation.' Yet it had no qualms about interfering in union affairs to root out Communists.

By this time the Communist Party line had changed too. Under Stalin's pressure Communists were encouraged to think they could capture the Labour Party. A newspaper, the *Sunday Worker*, was issued in 1925, and a 'National Left Wing Movement' organised inside the Labour Party. The tactic was mistaken from the first since it promised the impossible—the transforming of the leadership of the Labour Party'.

At the same time, the left wing was not timid. Because the Communists formed an independent political organisation, the Left Wing Movement possessed a base from which to fight. The movement's response to the witch hunt was that we 'will fight it without mercy'.

First came a bitter fight in Manchester. The Borough Labour Party announced it would reject Communist delegates. The reaction was immediate. The Trades Council deliberately picked two Communist delegates. The NUR instructed its Communist delegate 'to sit tight and refuse to leave the meeting'. The engineering union withdrew its non-Communist delegate in

order to send a Communist instead.

Similar tactics were repeated all over the country. Expelled Communists were re-elected to responsible positions, dozens of Labour Parties stood in open defiance and were disaffiliated. The official record mentions a total of 27 Labour Parties disaffiliated but this covers only borough and divisional parties dealt with by HQ. Countless individuals, wards and affiliated organisations were involved.

In October 1926 came the Margate Labour conference. Discussion was stitched up by excluding local Labour Parties with awkward resolutions. Eleven Communist delegates were either banned from attending or 'discovered' and chucked out. Only two Communist union delegates remained.

BY 1927 the fighting reached a new intensity. Impressive union forces were marshalled behind the anti-witch hunt campaign. For example, a North East Coast Left Wing conference drew together 127 delegates from 19 Northumberland and Durham miners' lodges, 25 union branches, 32 Labour Parties, and so on.

Birmingham witnessed a bitter fight. In December 1927 after two years struggle the Birmingham Labour Party voted to expel the Left Wing. But still the fight went on at ward level, with prominent Left Wingers elected again and again as Ward secretaries and so on. In May 1928 four Birmingham Divisional Parties still stood firm and in June came disaffiliation.

In April 1927 the Left Wing took ten out of ten places on the South East St Pancras LP individual section. In September the Left Wing were expelled en bloc even though not one was a Communist. Labour HQ wrote that 'associating with an organisation actively opposed to the Labour Party' was sufficient reason.

Resistance did not end with disaffiliation, for despite its weaknesses the Left Wing Movement never put the Labour Party above the struggle for socialist policies. J J Vaughan, chairman of the National Left Wing Movement, put it this way:

'We have been asked by several people why we do not propagate our ideas inside the Labour Party without organising a Left Wing Movement on a national scale which carries on a constant struggle... The Left Wing would easily be crushed and with it the spread of working class ideas in the Labour movement if the Left Wing did not organise and prepare to fight for its point of view.'

Disaffiliated groups were to fight for socialism to the point of running against the right wing 'official candidates' installed in their place. And the Left Wing were not without success. In the 1928 municipal elections Left Wingers in Bethnal Green won twice as many votes as official Labour and one third of the total Labour vote across London as a whole. In South Wales Left Wingers took 64 percent of the Labour vote. But the disaffiliated parties could not remain in this transition stage for long. Eventually Labour HQ decided to break opposition by expelling every-

one and all organisations connected with 'unofficial bodies'.

The 1928 Labour conference was an extraordinary affair. All resolutions and amendments from branches were ignored. Only the executive could present items for discussion. No emergency resolutions were allowed unless brought by the executive.

A 'Loyalty Clause' was passed barring association with Communists, and excluding them from attending meetings or appearing on the same platform as Labour Party members.

The witch hunt was effectively at an end, with 24 of the 27 expulsions accomplished. At the third annual Left Wing conference the chairman estimated that 'from 10 percent to 15 percent of the entire movement...has been sacrificed' in the process.

AROUND this time the Communist Party, under Stalinist pressure, adopted its crazy 'Third Period' line which meant creating breakaway 'Red' trade unions and treating the Labour Party as no different from the Tories or Liberals.

The Left Wing Movement was officially dissolved in March 1929, but it had long been in ruins. Even before the 'Third Period' line was installed, the disaffiliated Labour Parties had to face the fact they could only briefly put off the simple choice of returning to the official fold or joining the Communists.

So the Left Wing Movement had been beaten before the swing to the ultra-left. Though they had fought as hard as possible in conditions following the General Strike, the witch hunt was unstoppable. Socialists would *not* be allowed to operate openly in the Labour Party. In fact, the stupid 'Third Period' line was probably accepted more easily because of a reaction to the dashed hope that the Labour Party could be changed.

ONE element has been missing from this account—the left Labourites who opposed the right wing but refused to fight the witch hunt as the Communists had done.

The most prominent figure was George Lansbury. He was once the fiery editor of the *Daily Herald*, the hero of Poplarism, and the man for whom electricians threatened to black out Kensington if he was not allowed to speak in the Albert Hall. He began by stoutly denouncing the anti-Communist moves.

However, the weakness in Lansbury's position was that, unlike the Communists, he was tied to the Labour Party come what may. He put this *before* his commitment to defending socialist policies. As he put it: 'Once any of us accept membership in the Labour Party we are bound in honour to accept its decisions.' When the witch hunt began to bite he found he could no longer have it both ways—either he backed the Party or he backed socialist politics. His choice was quickly made.

In December 1925 he wrote:

'One or two Labour Parties have defied the resolutions and have been faced with the con-

sequences. The official Headquarters did its duty in carrying out the official policy. The result is: the dissidents find their local party faced with disaffiliation and expulsion... If they fight on, they know they must face splitting the Party, *they and their instigators are the wreckers of the movement*. It is hard saying, but true.'

When it came to the crunch he sounded as vindictive as the worst right winger!

He hoped, perhaps, by keeping his head down, to fight for socialist policies another day. Nothing could have been more wrong. The smashing of the Communists meant the gagging of everyone else who now lived in fear of expulsion and disaffiliation. The ridiculous position Lansbury had been reduced to by 1927 was revealed by the comedy of the 'Ginger Club'.

The Ginger Club was to be Lansbury's constitutional opposition to the right wing. However the lengths to which Lansbury had to go to keep on the right side of Labour's regulations are shown by his statement launching the Club: 'It is not a new minority movement, is not even vaguely a disruptionist movement. We shall never meet except when everybody else is present. We shall not formulate either new or old policies... We are out to secure...100 percent attendance at all meetings.' A group dedicated to getting people out to meetings—who could object to that? The refusal to fight for socialist policies had ended in a pathetic farce.

THE witch hunt of today contains many ingredients similar to that of the 1920s. The loss of the 1983 election has angered the Labour leadership and they will do everything to ensure a 'safe' Labour image will be projected next time. The defeat of the 1984/5 miners' strike has demoralised many trade unionists, so that left wing ideas are less easy to defend.

The dangers that stalked socialists in the 1920s are also present. The illusion that it is possible to transform the Labour Party may give way to despair—either in the shape of an ultra-left reaction which wrongly lumps reformists and open reactionaries in the same camp, or, more likely, leads to dropping out from politics altogether.

Equally, for those that remain in the Labour Party the risk is that socialist politics will simply collapse into blind support for the official policies. In the late 1920s that meant uncritically supporting Ramsay MacDonald. In 1931 he engineered a 'National Government', which led to a fall in the number of Labour MPs from 288 in 1929 to 46. He not only wiped Labour off the map for 15 years, but left the labour movement unable to resist the horrors of the 1930s.

The Communists had serious political weaknesses. But they did not see the Labour machine as the fount of all progress. They mounted a serious challenge to the right because they had an independent political organisation which looked to the needs of the working class movement as a whole. It was because of that they were able to fight for socialist principles.

Capital's deadly crop

DRUG USE and 'abuse' is on the rise. The world is lousy, recession is making it lousier and drugs that make you feel high and euphoric, drugs that make you feel calm and reflective, or hallucinogenic drugs can provide temporary personal relief.

Supplying that relief is a fabulously profitable business, whether it is legal—alcohol, tranquillisers—or part of the underbelly of commerce.

The use of drugs, tonics, painkillers, is as old as 'society', and there is nothing inherent in cannabis, opium or coca leaves that turns them into social dangers.

It is capitalism, in creating the misery that leads to mass demand and the means of production to satisfy it, which creates the 'epidemics'.

The 'scares' and law and order drives are shot through with hypocrisy. Cutting through the deliberate distortion and myth is important. But to simply make the point that one drug is vilified while another is advertised and leave it at that is crass.

For users, there *are* significant differences.

Coffee is a commodity worth millions to our rulers. The caffeine it contains has, in its pure form, a kick like amphetamine. Ten grammes—about 100 cups—will kill you.

But, as a rule, users do not inject or inhale it, nor do they drink it in lethal quantities.

Eight pounds of Liberty Cap, one of a variety of 'magic' mushrooms, constitutes a lethal dose. It is also a legal dose. The fungus is common and the police are powerless to stop its use.

In contrast, while a doctor might prescribe 200 milligrammes of barbiturates for sleep, just ten times that amount—two grammes of Tuinal, Seconal or Mandrax—is enough to kill!

Barbiturates were part of the first mass street drug alternative to alcohol, at least in Britain, when they were combined with amphetamine to make Drinamyl—'Purple Hearts'.

They were responsible for half of all fatal poisonings—suicides and overdoses—through the 1960s and 70s.

But the demon drug of popular myth is heroin, a stupefying painkilling powder manufactured from morphine and acetic anhydride, processed with hydrochloric acid and strychnine.

Thirty to forty times more powerful than the opium it is derived from, it is nonetheless not true that it produces instant junkies.

It can take some weeks of perseverance to become dependant. But in the beginning users are often ignorant of what they are taking and of what it can do.

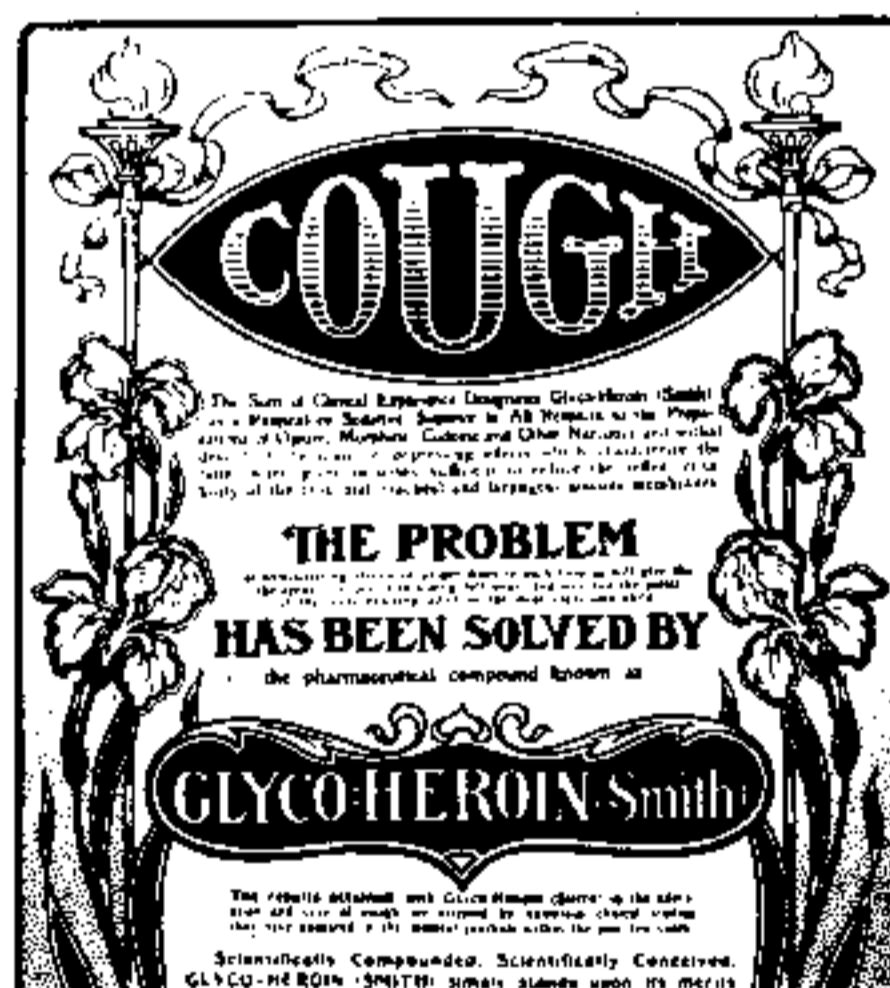
Anyone who believes only injecting is addictive is a fool. In the 1850s, morphine abusers welcomed the manufacture of the hypodermic syringe, convincing themselves that it was smoking the damn stuff that was habit forming.

Nowadays, too many seem to believe the reverse of heroin. It is equally stupid.

Fashionable junkie writer, William Burroughs, was right to call heroin 'the ideal product, the ultimate merchandise', but Marx preceded him with his description of the Opium Wars of the mid-nineteenth century.

When Imperial China insisted on payment for tea in gold and silver, merchants of the British East India Company turned to opium as the key to trade on their terms. They vastly expanded poppy cultivation in recently-seized Bengal and shipped enormous quantities under force of arms.

For the Chinese ruling class the trade was 'a public calamity'. When opium prohibition threatened profits, Britain went to war. Victory ensured that by 1860 there were an estimated 15 million Chinese opium addicts!



Respectable ad—but these drugs are still on prescription

Economic growth transformed south-east Asia, producing great cities—Hong Kong, Singapore, Rangoon, Djakarta, Bangkok, Saigon, Shanghai—based on the exploitation of Chinese labour on sugar, cotton, coffee and rubber plantations.

And every nation and colony from north Borneo to Burma ran a state opium monopoly and government 'smoking' dens.

British rulers in India—the Raj—drew a sixth of its total income supplying the drugs to meet this demand. It was the very foundation stone of empire.

An extract of opium, morphine had been manufactured from the 1800s as a painkiller and anaesthetic. It was freely given to soldiers in battle to encourage them to fight, oblivious of wounds. Addiction was



commonly called 'soldiers' sickness'.

Attempts to find a non-addictive painkiller produced diacetylmorphine—ten times more powerful and addictive.

In 1898 the German pharmaceutical company Bayer began commercial production, launching an aggressive advertising campaign in 12 languages. Its brand name was heroin.

By the time it was outlawed in the US in 1924—four years after drink prohibition—there were 200,000 addicts among the poor whites of the Southern states and in the city slums of the North.

This market was met by organised crime and financed by big business, with the unofficial backing of umpteen governments. It is an arrangement that still holds.

Post-war, the victory of the Chinese People's Liberation Army saw the ploughing up of the world's principal poppy fields. It made no difference. Opium production expanded through south-east Asia under the prompting of the French intelligence service, the SDECE.

To help finance its war against the Viet Minh, the service had by 1951 taken effective control of the Indochinese opium traffic—the produce of the Golden Triangle. Its co-operation with the Binh Xuyen river pirates in distributing and selling the drug in Saigon bought France a vicious ally in fighting Viet Minh advance.

Heroin refineries mushroomed, in Hong Kong, serving the Asian market, and in Marseilles—the 'French Connection' to the black ghettos of America.

The Marseilles end was controlled by Corsican gangsters—a reward from French and US intelligence for their role in smashing the strike wave at the close of World War Two.

Heroin could not, however, halt the French empire's collapse. Despite official US protestations of horror, the South Vietnamese government took up the trafficking.

The CIA's own Air America flew opium from poppy field to refinery. A CIA agent in Vietnam later described his job 'to buy up the entire local crop of opium'.

In Laos, the CIA recruited the Meo hill

tribes as mercenaries for its 'secret war' against left wing Pathet Lao guerillas. The agency encouraged the turning over of all cultivatable land to opium, promising plentiful food supplies and manufactured goods in return.

A village elder in the Long Pot district recalled in 1971, 'Last year I sent 60 (young men) out of this village (to fight). The Americans said I must send all the rest. But I refused. So they stopped dropping rice to us.'

Members of the American forces were caught in a storm of heroin. As many as 15 percent of GIs were classified as addicts.

Only 1 percent continued their 'addiction' on returning home, but it was enough for heroin to move out of its acceptable confinement in the ghetto.

Nixon cynically hyped the 'heroin menace' in the run-up to the 1972 presidential election. Declaring the drug traffic 'public enemy number one', he kept secret a government report which stated that, 'compared to the problems of alcoholism, drug abuse is relatively small'.

Narcotics agents ditched inquiries into big time traffickers to concentrate on picking up users and street dealers. The tally of arrests soared, massaging the president's crime figures.

In sanctioning the bust-up of the Marseilles refineries, Nixon possibly went too far, but the crackdown served to smash the Corsican-run refineries and created a near monopoly for the US-Italian mafia families.

Since then there have been two developments of crucial importance.

Firstly, refining has increasingly been carried out within the opium-growing regions. This closer integration of poppy production and heroin manufacture is one reason for the rising supply.

Secondly, the major source has shifted from South East to South West Asia—initially Iran, subsequently Turkey and, by 1982, primarily Pakistan.

Through the seventies, the Shah and his secret police SAVAK expanded Iran's traditional opium growing area to pay for increased repression. With their fall wealthy Iranians fled to London and Los Angeles, moving their capital in the most profitable and easily transportable form—as a white powder.

Until then, heroin-use in Britain—though rising—had remained pretty small-scale. It was largely shunned by users of other substances, still steeped in hippy drug 'lore'.

The year 1978 proved a watershed, as a deluge of the stuff coincided with savage economic recession.

Today around 80 percent of heroin entering Britain originates in the mountain borders of Pakistan and Afghanistan. With American backing it finances the Mujahadeen's war against Russia.

The rate of profit on heroin is substantially higher by weight than on any other illicit drug. But cocaine and cannabis offer investors a higher turnover because of greater demand.



The story is the same. Britain imports 600 tonnes of cannabis a year. A large slice comes from the Lebanon where it buys arms for the Christian Phalangists. Production jumped ten times on the outbreak of civil war.

The 12 million cocaine users in the US are supplied by an alliance of mobsters, military, Nazis and CIA. They in turn maintain the pro-American rulers of Columbus and Bolivia, where growing and refining coca is all that staves off bankruptcy.

Cannabis plays a similar role in Jamaica and in Belize. Jamaican prime minister Seaga openly argues, 'Ganga (marijuana) is better than communism'.

At the same time, the drug trade is a stick for the Reagan administration to beat the 'red' menace in its backyard. In 1984, secretary of state George Schultz claimed 'mounting evidence of the complicity of Communist governments in the drug trade'. He named Cuba and Nicaragua.

Embarrassing revelations about military aid to the Contras being used to finance drug traffic have been largely glossed over by the US Drugs Enforcement Administration (DEA).

So have the testimonies of those like a former CIA operative who claims the agency, 'cuts airstrips in jungle areas (in Nicaragua) and allows dope planes to land, refuel and take off'.

When profits are sufficiently high for national economies to be drug-dependent and so many are on the take, what purpose does a 'crackdown' serve?

Obviously politicians look to rally support through law and order binges. And there are limits to the level of stupefaction the bosses can tolerate before it interferes with business.

But there are more pressing factors than the simple, almost mystical catch-all of

'control'—as though drug-taking was of itself somehow 'subversive'.

The DEA monopolises the release of information on drug trafficking, tailoring it to fit the demands of US capital. The results can be laughable. In November 1984, for example, narcotics agents in Mexico seized 10,000 tonnes of marijuana in a single haul.

This was eight times what the DEA had reliably informed the media was the total, annual production in Mexico!

In contrast, in 1985 the Administration gave massive publicity to Brazil's part in the drugs business. In fact, the threat of economic sanctions unless action was taken against drugs formed part of a trade war directed at Brazilian exports, notably rolled steel.

So what should the attitude of socialists be towards 'narcotics'?

Clearly no drug is going to change the world. In the meantime, anyone who claims to want that change but spends half the time drunk or stoned is a fraud.

Using a drug for 'recreation' is one thing. What you use is another.

Exhaustive, often hostile research has failed to produce evidence either that cannabis is harmful, or that its use leads to 'harder' drugs.

The same cannot be said of heroin. Beneath the myths, the drug is dangerous both in the lift it can bring and in the fact that it is often adulterated with dangerous chemicals.

Regular use of hard drugs is about as glamorous as a street fight. At best, users are boring. Their self-absorption, the obsession with the ritual of feeding a habit that brings only stupor, is both sad and pathetic.

It is not a question of morals. You cannot be a revolutionary and use heroin. ■ Ian Taylor



'A collective will'

The Prison Notebooks
Antonio Gramsci
Lawrence and Wishart £6.95

IN November 1926 Antonio Gramsci, secretary of the Italian Communist Party, was arrested by the fascist government of Mussolini. At his trial in 1928 the prosecutor demanded that 'for twenty years we must stop this brain from functioning'.

Gramsci spent another nine tortured, disease-ridden years in prison, and died still under guard in a clinic in 1937. But his legacy to the movement, his 33 notebooks, were smuggled out at the last moment. His brain had never ceased to function.

Of all the books discussed in this series, the *Prison Notebooks* are the most difficult. The threat of the censors and confiscation of his materials meant that Gramsci could not write explicitly about events in Italy or the tasks of the party. Instead he took up a vast range of seemingly obscure or abstract questions of culture, history and philosophy.

The difficulties and ambiguities of Gramsci's writing have spawned an industry of interpretation, dominated by the most appalling reformist elements in and around the Italian Communist Party since the Second World War.

I cannot deal with most of the issues raised in the 'Gramsci debate'. Chris Harman has written an excellent pamphlet reclaiming the essentially revolutionary thrust of Gramsci's ideas before and after his imprisonment.

Instead the focus is on what I consider to be the most powerful and relevant ideas of Gramsci for revolutionaries today; those grouped especially under the heading of *The Modern Prince*.

Gramsci's strange terminology was a sort of code. Marxism became the 'Philosophy of Praxis'. Classes were referred to as 'dominant' and 'subaltern' groups. The revolutionary party was the Modern Prince.

In the early years of the sixteenth century the great political thinker Machiavelli wrote his classic work *The Prince*. It has an infamous reputation as a manual for cynical and treacherous political manoeuvring. In fact Machiavelli was simply expressing the needs of the Italian bourgeoisie for a leader capable of building a unified nation-state. The failure of such a state to emerge, crippled the once prosperous Italian economy for centuries.

The Italian state which was finally formed in the 19th century rested on an unstable combination of rapid industrial growth and the formation of a combative organised proletariat in the north, and a backward peasant-based economy in the south.



The occupation of the factories, 1920

The impact of the First World War, economic chaos, and the great working class offensive spearheaded by the factory occupations in Turin in 1920, once more threw Italy into a state of crisis. The Turin workers were isolated and betrayed by the reformist leadership of the Italian Socialist Party and the trade unions. As the movement ebbed the bourgeoisie and the landowners turned to Mussolini.

Mussolini paraded as a modern prince, as a man who could resolve all the contradictions of Italian society. In reality the fascist combination of repression and rampant nationalism offered nothing to the mass of Italian workers and peasants.

For Gramsci, by contrast,

'The modern prince, the myth-prince, cannot be a real person, a concrete individual. It can only be an organism, a complex element of society in which a collective will, which has already been recognised and has to some extent asserted itself in action, begins to take concrete form. History has already provided this organism, and it is the political party—the first cell in which there come together germs of a collective will tending to become universal and total.'

Gramsci was not content with simply proclaiming the historical necessity for a revolutionary party. Time and again in the *Notebooks*, from all points of his intellectual compass, he returns to the central

question—how can a party nurture, formulate and translate into practice the 'collective will' of the working class?

It is impossible to grasp the full force of what Gramsci argues in the *Notebooks* without understanding something of the history of the Italian CP between its formation in 1921 and its virtual elimination from the political scene inside Italy in 1926. In that brief period Gramsci was engaged in ferocious political debate on several fronts.

He had to fight against the right wing current inside the party which wanted to subordinate everything to the struggle against fascism and compromise with elements of the liberal bourgeoisie.

But more seriously at that time he had to fight the ideas of Bordiga whose faction dominated the party in its early years. Bordiga was one of the main targets of Lenin's polemic *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder*. Lenin savaged his rejection of all 'compromises', his opposition to united front tactics with reformist organisations, and his attitude that the party should refuse to dirty its hands in the mundane struggles of the class.

Later Bordiga sided with Trotsky against Stalin in the international debate over 'socialism in one country' (a stance which seems to have influenced Gramsci mistakenly to side with Stalin on that issue).

But inside Italy Bordiga's failure, for example, to clearly distinguish between reformism and fascism as agents of bourgeois rule, had disastrous consequences.

Gramsci argued that Bordiga's errors were rooted in a mechanistic version of Marxism—there were iron laws of historical evolution which would inevitably drive the working class towards socialism.

The leader of German social democracy, Kautsky, had drawn reformist conclusions from such a perspective (socialism was inevitable so a revolutionary break was unnecessary). Bordiga's position was fatalistically sectarian. The party should avoid all contamination with the reformism or syndicalism (relying on trade union struggle alone) of the mass of workers, and simply maintain militaristic organisation, pure and intact for the day of revolution.

Gramsci's attack on that sort of rigidly deterministic Marxism has parallels with the work of Lukacs in *History and Class Consciousness*. Both wrote critically, for example, of Bukharin's highly mechanistic textbook on historical materialism. Both stressed the necessity of the working class consciously creating socialism.

But whereas Lukacs' account rarely reaches down from the summits of philosophical debate, Gramsci continually stresses that ideas are shaped and transmitted by social organisations—political parties, the church, unions, the education system etc.

He emphasises the contradictions within the everyday experience and 'common sense' of workers. As individuals they can hold simultaneously both ideas which challenge the system, and ideas 'borrowed' from the ruling class.

In moments of struggle it is the former which come to the fore, and are developed further. But at times when workers are passive and submissive they will relapse back into fatalistic acceptance of the status quo, and can even be prone to all the sick prejudices of the fascist.

Gramsci's own experiences led him to reflect deeply on the relationship between the 'spontaneous' movements of the class and the necessity of conscious leadership.

The critical question was the degree of consciousness, the politics of any leadership. The syndicalists were incapable of breaking the influence of reactionary ideas on the class because they refused to openly challenge them. But Bordiga and his faction were equally incapable of raising the level of consciousness because they failed to relate, except in the most sectarian dismissive manner, to the immediate struggle.

As Gramsci wrote in defence of his position in Turin:

'...the leadership was not abstract; it neither consisted in mechanically repeating scientific or theoretical formulae, nor did it confuse politics, real action, with theoretical disquisition. It applied itself to real men, formed in specific historical relations,

with specific feelings, outlooks, fragmentary conceptions of the world etc... This element of spontaneity was not neglected and even less despised. It was *educated*, directed, purged of extraneous determinations; the aim was to bring it in line with modern theory (ie Marxism)—but in a living and historically effective manner.'

Two final points are worth drawing out of Gramsci's writing for their relevance today.

One concerns the role of intellectuals. Gramsci argued that the working class needed the services of elements of what he termed the 'traditional intellectuals', theoreticians like Marx, or indeed himself, who had been trained in academic skills but were willing to break unequivocally with the ruling class.

But Gramsci also insisted that every class needs its 'organic' intellectuals. In the case of the bourgeoisie that meant the managers, civil servants, journalists and politicians who served to organise its rule and transmit its ideas on a day-to-day basis.

The working class similarly needs its own 'organic intellectuals' if it is to seriously challenge the power of the ruling class.

The key task for a revolutionary party is to weld together and develop such a layer of 'organic intellectuals' *inside* the working class. Which brings me to a point of particular concern to the SWP in the current period.

EDUCATION for Socialists

THE weeklong event of socialist debate, Marxism 77, was organised ten years ago. It was held in the Kentish Town precinct of North London Poly, and attracted 500 people, mainly students.

Only six courses were held during the week—on women's liberation, literature, the Marxist method, capitalism in crisis, 20th century revolutions and labour history.

Marxism became an annual and very successful event, which grew in size and diversity over the years.

The latest, Marxism 86, was a testimony to the continued thirst for socialist ideas. Over 4,000 people attended the week of discussion and debate held at the University of London Union and the Institute of Education in July.

The numbers were at times staggering. A thousand people packed into a Tony Cliff meeting on Lenin. A similar number heard a debate on the Spanish Civil War between the SWP's Duncan Hallas and the Communist Party's Monty Johnstone. Hundreds attended meetings concerning women's liberation, art and the Russian revolution, problems of Marxist theory—and even Bob Dylan!

One of the issues in Gramsci's fight with Bordiga was that under the leadership of the latter, 'centralisation, unity of approach and conception had turned into intellectual stagnation'.

To counter this Gramsci stressed the need 'for the party in an organised fashion to educate its members and raise their ideological level'. 'In order for the party to live and be in contact with the masses it is necessary for every member of the party to be an active political element, a leader.' (The quotes are from Gramsci's *Introduction to the First Course of the Party School*, written in 1925.)

For the Italian Communist Party at that time such education was all the more vital because the fascists were already in power, and the party was operating in conditions of semi-legality. It was necessary, if the 'leading committees were unable to function', that:

'...all members of the party, and everyone in its ambit, have been rendered capable of orienting themselves and knowing how to derive from reality the elements with which to establish a line, so that the working class will not be cast down but will feel that it is being led and can still fight.'

We are not, of course, in anything like those conditions today. Fascism is just a tiny black cloud on the horizon. But we are in a period of working class retreat in which Gramsci's revolutionary ideas are still relevant. ■

Pete Green

Marxism has now become an established event on the left wing calendar. It is also helping to contribute to a wide ranging debate on some of the problems facing the left today.

Equally important, it is a rebuttal of all those on the left who are pessimistic about the chances of the left growing. Marxism 86 showed that there are thousands of socialists open to ideas which challenge the growing dominance of Kinnockism.

It also showed the importance of revolutionary organisation in carrying the tradition of those ideas.

The number of people attending, the quantity of socialist literature sold (over £20,000 worth), and the sheer breadth of ideas discussed made it by far the largest and most successful event of its kind on the left—one that will hopefully be repeated again next year. ■

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White revolt

The Rand Revolt of 1922 is known to history as both the high point of white working class militancy in South Africa and possibly the most notoriously reactionary strike ever. Six decades later the lessons of the strike are of central importance to the struggle for socialism in South Africa and have an echo in many of the issues faced by the left in Britain today. Neil Faulkner takes a look.

IN 1921 two thirds of South Africa's gold mines, the backbone of the economy, were operating at a loss. So the employers' federation, the Chamber of Mines, attempted to cut costs by driving wages down.

But the wages of African miners were already at subsistence level—significant cuts could not be made without rendering them physically incapable of doing the back-breaking work. In any case the Chamber's 180,000 African miners accounted for only £6.5 million of the £16.5 million annual wage bill.

But a significant cut certainly was possible in the £10 million paid to the 20,000 white miners. So the Chamber announced their intention to sack 2,000 white miners, at a saving of £1 million a year.

But this would proportionately increase the number of black miners in an open violation of the 1918 Status Quo Agreement between the Chamber and the white miners' union.

The response was a solid ten week strike by all 20,000 white miners on the Rand, which at times reached insurrectionary proportions.

'Commandos' of armed strikers were formed and a call was made for a general strike. But by the time Prime Minister Smuts sent in the army to smash the revolt in the second week of March the struggle was already ebbing.

Smuts' forces were ruthless. Two hundred died fighting, 5,000 were arrested and four of the strike leaders later hanged. The traditional militancy of the white working class had peaked in momentary civil war.

However, the bulk of the South African working class, black workers, had been mere spectators. Solidarity was neither requested nor offered. And not surprisingly.

White miners had struck in defence of the colour bar, which ensured their monopoly over highly paid, skilled supervisory jobs and condemned African workers to unskilled, sweated labour.

While African miners drilled and shovelled, the white 'ganger' ensured that the pace of work never slackened. Part of his wage was determined by the output of his gang. A white miners' union official explained that his members were paid by 'the efficiency per boy per fathom per day'.

For this they earned at least ten times as much as the African miner.

In contrast to prejudices arising from the marginal privileges of certain workers in, say, Britain, which could be overcome through joint struggle, the benefits to the white South African miner were so great as to bind him in allegiance to the mine owner. He had a direct interest in the exploitation of black workers and no interest in their emancipation.

There had been a tradition of defending these privileges. For example, the skilled union, the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, opposed 'the growing practice of placing kaffirs...in charge of boilers, winches, engines and other machinery'.

When African miners struck at the Jagersfontein diamond mine in 1913 in protest over a white overseer kicking to death one of their employees, the employers armed the white miners to break up the strike.

'Commandos of armed strikers were formed, and a call was made for a general strike.'

So it was nothing new for one of the Rand strikers' leaflets to read, 'The European worker who accepts equality with the Negro tends to become...a Negro ceasing to live up to the standards, traditions and aspirations of the great white race, which can be the heritage of them alone.'

In a strike motivated by such racism, victory could only have reinforced white workers' confidence in their racism.

But, equally, the defeat of the strike merely spurred them to change tactics—towards racist electoralism. The 1924 Pact government, an alliance of Afrikaner nationalist and white Labour parties safeguarded the white worker's position by statute and police power.

The job of socialists in these circumstances is to clearly oppose such a struggle concerned with promoting the interests of a minority of the working class against those of the working class as a whole.

Why then was the Rand Revolt supported, and partly led, by the newly formed South African Communist Party? They argued, wrongly, in 1922 that the Rand Revolt was a proletarian struggle against mining capital.

They were not racists; most were sincere, dedicated revolutionaries. But overwhelmingly they were white workers with almost no social contact with blacks. They mistook the militancy of their workmates for evidence of revolutionary potential.

And in order to relate to what one communist theoretician called the 'Red Guards of the Rand', enormous political concessions had to be made.

The strikers' racist slogan, 'Workers of the world unite for a white South Africa', was interpreted as a call to defend the living standards of white workers. And since these could only be guaranteed under socialism, the slogan was in effect a convoluted call to revolution!

Their isolation from black workers was compounded by a deep hostility to black nationalism, which they denounced as threatening 'inter-racial class unity' (in conscious defiance of Comintern instructions).

Supporting black nationalist demands meant recognising and resisting racial oppression. Of course, as a whole the white working class was unwinnable to such demands, but those who supported such demands could be won to proletarian class struggle and socialist politics.

More importantly, socialists' respect and support for black nationalist demands were preconditions to breaking into the black working class. Even in 1922 black workers, not white workers, were the gravediggers of South African capitalism.

The first big movement of black workers had already started after the First World War. In 1918 black miners, armed with pick-axes and rocks, fought it out with the police. The following year 2,000 coloured dockers struck in Cape Town, and out of their struggle emerged the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union. In 1920, 70,000 black miners struck on the Rand in a struggle that culminated in a pitched battle at Village Deep mine.

But to these great struggles the revolutionary socialist activists who formed the Communist Party in 1921 had little to say.

Their tactics not only left white workers firmly in the camp of reaction, but also left the Communist Party isolated from the mass of South African workers.

Finally, the Rand Revolt showed that white workers in South Africa at the peak of militancy were still determined to defend privileges. It confirms that the white workers' position sets them apart from black workers to such an extent that the mass of them will always be inveterate opponents of socialist revolution.

And the role of the Communist Party in the revolt shows that revolutionaries who ignore these factors and, in all sincerity, place a primary focus on an appeal to white workers, will be given no choice but to fudge and duck their anti-racism. ■



The trials of Danton

ANDRZEJ WAJDA'S film *Danton* was almost universally praised when it came out three or four years ago. The RSC production of Pam Gems' play, the *Danton Affair*, at the Barbican theatre in London has been almost universally hammered by the critics.

The different response to the film and the play is not just because the film was better acted. It is true that there is a fair amount of ham over-acting in the RSC performance and the sort of over-elaborate stage scenery you expect in Shakespeare-for-tourists.

The real difference is that the Gems play challenges what might be called the 'Danton myth'.

The myth was first presented in *Danton's Death*, written by the German playwright Buchner 150 years ago. Although Buchner was himself a revolutionary of sorts he wrote an anti-revolutionary play.

It showed Danton, who had been prepared to use terror to defend the French revolution against foreign invasion and royalist intrigue in 1792 and 1793, falling prey to those like Robespierre and Saint Just who want the terror to continue without limit.

Danton is haunted by his own past actions, awaking in horror when he dreams someone shouts out 'September'—a reference to the September massacres when royalist conspirators were dragged from the prisons and slaughtered.

He sees his own fate as something inevitable to the revolutionary process: 'The revolution is like Saturn: it eats its own children.'

The message is that people like Danton, who enjoys life to the full and suffers from all-too-human weaknesses, lose out in revolutions to people like Robespierre—portrayed as an inhuman, puritanical hypocrite.

Wajda's film continues with this myth. It heightens the drama by developing the contrast between Danton and Robespierre. But in doing so it eliminates facts that Buchner did refer to—such as the way in which the Parisian poor backed the terror and Danton's support for the guillotining of the most revolutionary of the Jacobins, the Herbertistes.

Pam Gems turns the whole myth round by moving in the opposite direction to Wajda and expanding the amount of historical material she uses. Danton, the 'lover of life' becomes a debaucher who buys himself a child wife and rapes her. His 'moderation' becomes rejoicing at the fate of the Herbertistes and a willingness to consider a pact with the enemies of the revolution.

By contrast, it is Robespierre who is torn between fear of relying on terror and the need to take measures to stop Danton conspiring with the counter-revolution.

The centre of the play then becomes not the contrast in personality types or allegedly inevitable outcome of any revolutionary process, but the arguments for and against particular courses of action. It is an intense, intellectually challenging play, which forces the audience to listen and think. No doubt this is why it was hammered by critics who could do neither.

But there is one real fault in it. It abstracts from one very important fact about the French revolution—that it was a bourgeois revolution. Such a revolution is always caught between the need to smash its enemies and the fact that the bourgeoisie is a money grabbing class whose members are individually prepared to sell themselves to any one who will offer them enough.

It is this which explains why the French Revolution could only succeed through interventions by the Parisian poor against the backsliding of important sections of the bourgeoisie.

In Gems' play Robespierre debates the question of how to make a pure revolution from impure people. This was indeed the central issue of the bourgeois revolution. But the 'impure people' were not people in general but the bourgeoisie.

Robespierre tried to impose 'purity' on them in their own historical interests by executing Danton. He was bound to fail.

Three months later the individual, avaricious members of the bourgeoisie turned on Robespierre himself. In Thermidor (the name the French revolution gave to one of the summer months) 1794 they guillotined him.

The pattern has necessarily been repeated with subsequent bourgeois revolutions, including some of the bureaucratic revolutions in the Third World.

But it is not a pattern for all revolutions. The Russian Revolution did not, in the vital years of 1917-20, involve terror against the left as well as the right, against workers as well as the bourgeoisie. It did not 'devour its own children'. There was to be a 16 year gap before the Moscow trials and the great purge—part not of the revolution but of a bureaucratic counter-revolution.

For that reason, you cannot fit the Trotsky-Stalin struggle into the Danton myth. There is no way in which you can equate the incorruptible Trotsky with Danton or that cynical manoeuvrer Stalin with Robespierre.

The *Danton Affair* is well worth seeing. And it has one great advantage over most plays shown at the big London theatres—the bad reviews it's had means there are usually plenty of seats available. ■
Chris Harman

Obituary: Vincente Minnelli

VINCENTE MINNELLI, the film director, died at the end of July. His film-making career began in 1943 when he began directing musical films for MGM in Hollywood. He is best known for his brilliant use of colour and fluid camera movements which often found their best expression in 'unrealistic' films like musicals.

Minnelli was never a figure of the political left. Paul Robeson refused to appear in his first film, the all-black musical *Cabin in the Sky*, because he felt it demeaning. Minnelli played no noticeable role, either good or bad, in the struggle against the Hollywood witch hunts.

There are two reasons to note his passing. There can be little doubt that some of the films Minnelli directed were among the best Hollywood ever produced. There is more to movies than colour and lighting and camera movement but these elements are important parts of the ways in which films achieve their effect. There is no more stunning example of the ways these things can be combined than the 20 minute long ballet at the end of *An American in Paris*.

The other reason concerns the content of his films. As well as musicals Minnelli

directed a number of melodramas. These are often dramatisations of the tensions and strains in the US family of the boom years. Musicals are often concerned with the ways in which social restraints block human happiness.

Minnelli's characteristic twist to these two forms was to champion the cause of artistic imagination as different from and better than everyday life (he made a film about the life of the painter Van Gogh). So melodramas directed by Minnelli, like *The Cobweb* or *Some Came Running*, not only dissect in great detail the destructive effects of everyday life in capitalist society but they hold up an image of a better and richer, often literally more colourful world.

There is a case, then, for considering Minnelli's films as more interesting than those melodramas which just criticised society and those musicals which just celebrated the singing and dancing talents of their stars. His alternative is a 'utopian' one because it is an abstract and impossible world but it is nevertheless astonishingly vividly portrayed.

His films are some of the finest monuments to the power of Hollywood. ■
Colin Sparks

Bagging the peasants

The Long Affray—the poaching wars in Britain

Harry Hopkins
Papermac, £6.96

*'There's the fat men of Oakland and
Durham the same,
Lay claim to the moors, likewise the
game.
They sent word to the miners they would
have to ken
They would stop them from shooting the
bonny moor hen...*

*But miners sent them an answer they
would have to ken
They would fight till they died for their
bonny moor hen.*

Pennine miners' ballad, 1830

THE LANDED gentry have just celebrated 'the Glorious Twelfth', the opening of the grouse season. The game season has always been the privilege of landed wealth—anyone else was a poacher.

Hopkins' book shows that in the past poaching was extremely widespread among working people, and not only among the labourers in the countryside.

As the industrial cities grew, spilling into the countryside, incorporating the surrounding villages and putting factory gate and landlord's estate side by side, so industrial workers continued the tradition of their ancestors.

They faced a reactionary and vicious enemy in the landed aristocracy and gentry. To shoot game you had to be 'qualified'. The qualification was that you owned land.

And the penalty for poaching—shooting game if you weren't qualified—was death or transportation to the colonies.

For workless agricultural labourers or starving workers, 'it was like putting five pound notes down in the road and making it illegal to pick them up' as one contemporary put it.

But the poaching laws were more than that. They were a form of class administration.

Before the establishment of a regular police force in 1856 gamekeepers were the main law enforcers. The small county of Hertfordshire contained 200 in 1843.

As late as 1911 every village in Norfolk and Suffolk would have three or four gamekeepers, well outnumbering the police.

With the risk of execution or trans-

portation the poachers resisted arrest by shooting or clubbing the keepers. And since poaching parties were commonly ten, 20 and up to 100 strong, facing a similar number of keepers, 'poaching war' is not too strong a term.

If arrested the poachers faced the very landlords whose game they shot, dressed up as judges. They sat at the local assizes or, attired in their dressing gowns, dispensed the rule of law in the 'justice room' of their own mansions.

Sometimes this rural guerrilla war would feed into a more openly political movement, like the 'Captain Swing' rick burning demonstrations of 1830.

The insurgents harked back to the English Revolution or the more recent French Revolution, both of which had ended the game laws and pulled down the walls that surrounded the landed estates.

Indeed Thomas Carlyle believed that the French Revolution 'was made by the poachers of France'.

Harry Hopkins has written a fascinating and detailed book, but it often places more importance on the poaching wars than they really merit.



The hare of the dog

The whole political context is referred to more than it is spelt out. This gives the book the feel of an enthusiast's obsession, where a balanced view is necessary.

But the book's real value is probably more general.

Today the image of the countryside is a potent weapon in the ruling class's ideological armoury.

It is a vision of a harmonious community which is set against the strife-torn city. A picture of pastoral peace against the conflict of the workplace. The country is portrayed as a place where order and hierarchy go unchallenged.

That picture is and was a lie. For most of human history land ownership has been the ownership of the sole means to life. The people who owned the land were the ruling class.

The struggle against them touched every corner of rural life. It was a bloody and damaging conflict even when it didn't become overtly political. In demonstrating all this Harry Hopkins has written a valuable book for socialists today. ■

John Rees

Brilliant but flawed

Nikolai Bukharin and the transition from capitalism to socialism

Michael Haynes
Croom Helm, £14.95 hb

THERE IS a glaring contradiction facing any socialist making an assessment of the great Bolshevik theoretician Nikolai Bukharin.

On the one hand he was, in Lenin's words, the 'party's leading theoretician', a brilliant revolutionary intellectual and the party's most insistent exponent of the view that socialism means workers' power, not state power in the hands of bureaucrats.

On the other hand, in 1924 he ended up as Trotsky's most bitter enemy, and his alliance with Stalin from then on secured the rise to power of precisely such a bureaucracy and the creation of state capitalism in Russia.

The contradiction becomes even more glaring when you consider the fact that so many of his achievements were precisely in those areas which should have made him immune from such deviations.

On the theory of the state it was Bukharin who prefigured Lenin's great work, *The State and Revolution*, in seeing the need to decisively smash up the existing state apparatus and replace it with an entirely new structure which would be the direct creation of the workers themselves.

And his theory of imperialism stressed not so much the need of the imperialist powers for colonies as the need of each to organise themselves at home into integrated national economies so as to defeat competitors by all possible means—commercially, strategically and, when crisis bites most deeply, by military means too. In doing so Bukharin was able to show how world war was endemic in ageing twentieth century capitalism.

This led him straight on to the theory of state capitalism. The increasing internationalism of the world economy went hand in hand with the rise of the state to organise the various national chunks of the world economy for strategic and military competition. State capitalism, therefore, was an inherent and necessary tendency that accompanied capitalism's ageing process and its tendencies towards imperialism.

Furthermore, it was a process that the world economy enforced on its individual components from *without*. It did not depend on the historical accidents that differentiated one society from another.

Nor could it be kept at bay by such devices as the state monopoly of foreign trade.

Finally, this internationalisation of the world economy implied the absolute impossibility of 'socialism in one country'. A revolution that begins in one country has to be exported immediately.

How then could someone who was so brilliantly in the forefront of some of the most important advances of twentieth century Marxism end up so abjectly? How could he have supported Stalin against Trotsky?

Part of the answer is to be found in faults and gaps in his economic theories themselves. Brilliant though his analysis of ageing capitalism is, he never grounds it properly on Marx's own insight that the underlying cause of capitalist crisis is the tendency of the rate of profit to fall.

This meant that he was able to switch from extreme optimism that capitalist recovery was impossible (and socialist revolution was therefore immediately on the cards throughout the advanced world) in 1917-20, to its exact opposite—the view that recovery made revolution *impossible* in the years of the early 1920s.

Another part of the answer is that, while he was a brilliant economist, he was a rotten philosopher. Unlike Lenin, who made a complete break with the whole tradition of the Kautskyite mechanical Marxism in the years 1914-16, Bukharin made no such shift. Indeed, his major post-revolutionary work in this area, *Historical Materialism*, owes much more to Kautsky and Plekhanov than it does to Marx and Lenin.

And this mechanical Marxism led him into all sorts of errors. Above all it made him tend to draw political conclusions mechanically and directly from the economic situation without bothering to look at the historical or political dimension as well, and often without even referring to the class struggle itself.

So long as Lenin was around this didn't matter too much. Bukharin was well aware of his own limitations and always had half an eye over his shoulder to get the cue from Lenin, but when Lenin died in 1924 the problem became acute.

Even so, he was still capable of major political blunders before then. Over the right of oppressed nations to self-determination, over the peace treaty at Brest-Litovsk and over the trade union question in 1921, he made major mistakes from attempting to draw action-guiding conclusions from the economic situation alone.

But these were as nothing compared with his mistakes afterwards. He rightly defended the need for coercive measures during the Civil War period, arguing that the new state as the 'organised collective subject' had to take such measures or perish.

Here he was already identifying the working class with the Bolshevik Party, but that was distinctively ambiguous. It could

mean (and with Trotsky did mean) that the party, even in its current bureaucratised form, had to be protagonist of the revolution until workers' democracy and soviets could be re-created.

But this could not have been what Bukharin had in mind. For when he argued for the introduction of the New Economic Policy he made no mention of any way in which workers' power could be regenerated. At the same time too he began to argue that 'socialism in one country' was possible too, even though it would be a slow process—Russia would have to crawl at a snail's pace—but it would be possible nonetheless.

With the revolutionary tide ebbing in Europe after 1919, Bukharin drew the conclusion that the national road to socialism would have to be tried instead.

This ran against the overwhelming thrust of nearly all his earlier theoretical writings, however. And for all the individual errors and philosophical wrong-headedness we are still left with something more to explain. The fact was that he didn't have the personal courage and integrity that raises the great revolutionary leader above any purely academic intellectual.

When it came to the test of practice he didn't have the courage to voice his criticisms of the Stalin clique. And once he had made that personal compromise his theory began to degenerate accordingly.

For us today, however, it is crucial to re-appropriate the many brilliant insights of Bukharin. And this is where the real virtue of Mike Haynes' book lies. Anyone reading his excellent book will come across many examples of ideas that we have subsequently incorporated into the theory of the SWP today.

Indeed the fullest development of Bukharin's ideas, their clearest exposition and their application to the world today are to be found within our own tradition. What



Nikolai Bukharin

a shame, then, that Mike makes no reference to this anywhere in the book. His analysis would have been the clearer if these connections had at least been mentioned. ■

Pete Binns

The good voyeur

The Spanish Cockpit

Franz Borkenau

Pluto Press £4.95

WITH THE 50th anniversary of the Spanish Civil War, the political souvenir industry has predictably gone into over-drive. No less than 30 books have been either newly published or reprinted to cash in on the anniversary. Most are political waste matter, but this book is an exception.

It was originally published in 1937, and it immediately acquired a reputation as a classic.

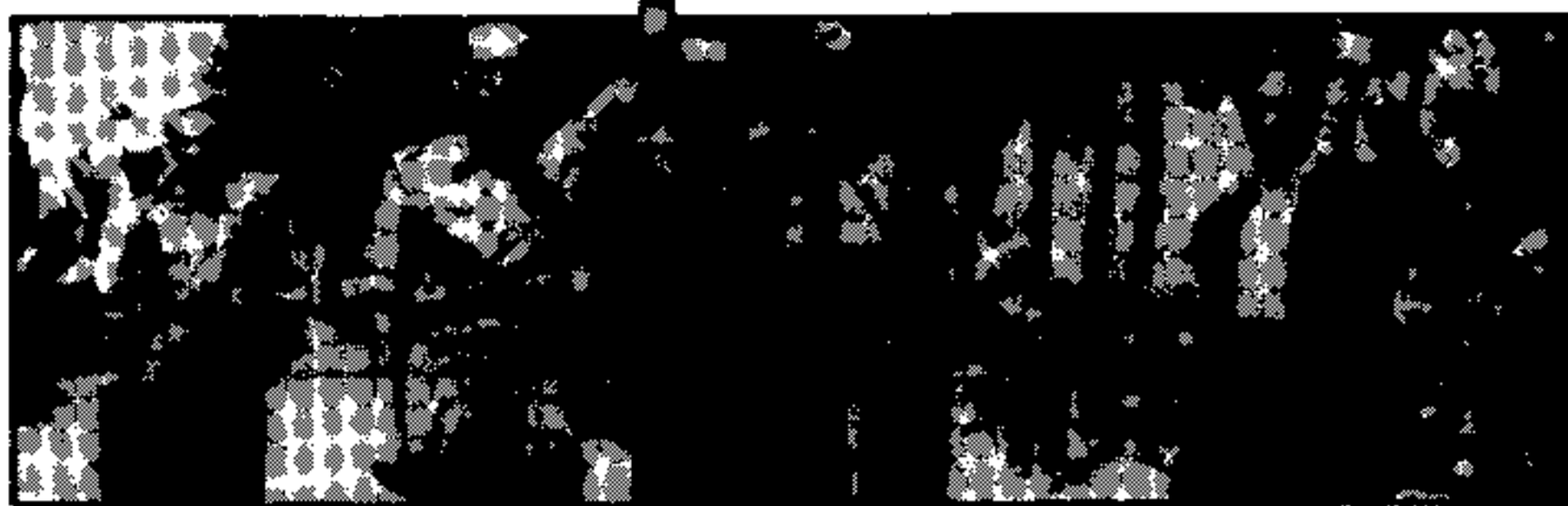
Borkenau was an Austrian journalist who spent many years in the Communist Party. By the 1930s he was disillusioned, and he trod the usual escape route of burnt-out lefties into a university sociology department. But within days of the outbreak of the war Borkenau was travelling into revolutionary Barcelona with a first class ticket and a dining card. *Spanish Cockpit* is his eye-witness account of what he saw, heard and learnt during his two extended visits to Spain. Or to use his own words it's a 'descriptive field study of events'.

When Borkenau arrived, the working class effectively controlled whole areas of the Republic. This was his very first impression of Red Barcelona:

'As we turned the corner of the Ramblas—the chief artery of Barcelona—came a tremendous surprise; before our eyes in a flash unfolded itself the revolution. It was overwhelming. It was as if we had landed on a continent different from anything I had seen before.'

He went on to travel through the rest of the Republic, where he found the revolution nothing like as overwhelming, but his account adds up to a vivid—if slightly caustic—view of a society in the rapids of revolution.

Borkenau's return journey five months later was very different. Now 'Barcelona came as a shock as in August, but in the opposite way'. Now a political conspiracy of liberals and Communists was relentlessly suffocating the revolution that had so overwhelmed Borkenau. This is a much



Barcelona: the early days

more sobering account of a social revolution as it decomposes. The climax comes when Borkenau himself is arrested by a group of self-employed secret police and has to flee the country.

Borkenau's narrative ends in spring 1937, when the civil war still had two years to run and the pattern of the war was already set. But *Spanish Cockpit* captures the essential tragedy of Spain as the energy and hope of the workers' revolution is soured and destroyed by a Communist-inspired counter-revolution.

What made the book so powerful was this insight into the Republican counter-revolution and the role played by the Communists in it. In 1937 this seemed like political high treason. Anyone who dared to criticise the Republic was automatically labelled as 'pro-fascist'. Anyone who dared to question the role of the Communists was by definition condemned as an agent of Hitler.

It was Borkenau's achievement—like Orwell—to defy this dead orthodoxy and tell the truth. In particular Borkenau's pedigree in the Communist movement meant that he had a close knowledge of the Communist Party. At a time when Stalinism was bathing in the sentimental glory of Russian supply ships, La Pasionaria and the International Brigades, Borkenau realised that

'the Communists do not admit the notorious truth: namely that there is all the difference in the world between their policy in 1917 in Russia and their policy in 1937 in Spain; that they have ceased to be a revolutionary party and have become one of the mainstays of the anti-revolutionary forces'.

So two hearty cheers for the reprint of this book. It is a clear-headed and well-written view of the crucial months of the war. But there is a down side.

Put baldly, the central problem is that Borkenau approached Spain not as a political challenge but as a sociological 'field study'. He can understand the political in-fighting and intrigue. He can even dimly understand that:

'An old rule about revolutions was once more confirmed: a revolution must either be carried through to the end, or had better not start at all.'

But he will not draw any conclusions from this 'old rule'.

The revolution *had* started, and Borkenau had witnessed it first hand. So what was to be done? Leon Trotsky took

the same basic assumption and argued that the only way to win the war was, in Borkenau's phrase, 'to carry the revolution through to the end'.

Borkenau couldn't go that far. He was after all a liberal sociologist. So almost despite himself, Borkenau winds up justifying the counter-revolution; a counter-revolution, mind you, which had nearly cost him his life. He despised the political table manners of the Communists, but ultimately he saw them as the 'executors of inevitable necessity'. Or to use someone else's phrase: There Was No Alternative.

There's a more personal side to this political weediness. Whatever its shortcomings, the civil war in Spain was one of the great causes of this century. For the Spanish working class it was, literally, a matter of life or death. Orwell felt this instinctively; he went to Spain not to produce *Homage to Catalonia* but to fight. John Cornford, the young Cambridge writer who travelled with Borkenau, felt it too. He volunteered to fight—and to die.

But not Borkenau. He insists on 'my character as a neutral in the whole civil war as such'. For him the war is not a social revolution, not even an anti-fascist crusade, it is simply material for a book. Borkenau was a political voyeur, albeit a talented one, and I find that faintly sickening.

So: *Spanish Cockpit* is a liberal book, but at least it's a good liberal book. If, however, you want to understand the politics of the Spanish Civil War, or if you want to capture the passion of the revolution there, there are better books. ■

Bob Light

More honest than most

Afghanistan: Politics, Economy and Society
Bhabani Sen Gupta
Frances Pinter £9.95

THIS BOOK is probably the best introduction there is to recent Afghan politics. It

will be of interest to specialists, but not to most readers of *Socialist Worker Review*.

Most recent writing on Afghan politics is full of disinformation and is written from the point of view of the American ruling class. In Britain, for instance, the Afghan solidarity campaign is solidly anti-communist, gets a grant from the Foreign Office, and is actively patronised by Thatcher herself.

Gupta is a refreshing change. He writes from the point of view of the Indian ruling class for whom he works at the centre for policy research in Delhi. They are neutral on the Afghan conflict, but nervous of the Russians. This means Gupta can afford to be less biased than most academics. But the book is much better on the international ramifications of the Afghan revolution than on the internal class dynamics in Afghanistan. ■

Jonathan Neale

Beyond the boundary

Apartheid's Second Front

Joseph Hanlon

Penguin £2.95

JOSEPH HANLON is an honest and outraged liberal journalist. In clear and bitter prose his brief report from southern Africa examines how and why the Pretoria government maintains stifling economic and political dominance over the majority ruled states of the area.

The Frontline States clearly do pose a threat to the security of apartheid, but Hanlon shows that South Africa uses its ascendancy to fleece its neighbours of cash and resources, as well as to keep them in line. More subtly, the apartheid regime needs to check the development of any local competition so that it can show the world that the 'emerging states' of Zambia, Mozambique and so forth simply can't look after themselves.

To stay on top the Bothas use the tried and trusted combination of carrot and stick. They offer neighbouring states special credit terms for South African exports, but send in commandos to sabotage pipelines, roads or railways that might open up local trading links to bypass their country. They offer work in gold and diamond mines to unemployed labourers from Mozambique, Lesotho and Botswana, but bomb civilian targets in these countries if their governments make the feeblest gesture of defiance to apartheid.

Hanlon shows in detail just how effective this twin strategy of destabilisation and

dependence has been. The majority ruled states oppose apartheid *and* rely on it; they have an annual balance of payments deficit of £900 million with South Africa and have suffered an estimated £10,000 million damage at the hands of Pretoria-backed guerillas and military in the last six years.

It is essential that no one sees the struggle against apartheid as restricted to the boundaries of South Africa. But Hanlon's liberal slant on the situation is that South Africa is inhibiting the 'healthy' and independent development of the majority states. His conclusion is to support these countries' calls for Western sanctions against apartheid.

He writes as if there were no internal resistance to white rule. For while socialists do support sanctions, we also see South Africa's massive wealth and economic dominance in a different light. If South Africa is the economic key to the area, then the growing militancy of its working class is the key to genuine *socialist* liberation throughout southern Africa. ■

Chris Nineham

maybe I'm just being defensive as I bought a lipstick three hours before I started the book! ■

Tracy Martin

A slice of life

City Pit—Memoirs of a Speedwell Miner

Fred Moss

Bristol Broadside £2.50

LIFE FOR a coalface worker in the 1920s was horrific: uncomfortable, dangerous and badly paid. Moss worked in the Speedwell pit in Bristol from just after the First World War until the early thirties when he could stand it no longer (a couple of years before the pit was closed as unprofitable).

The narrative is straightforward, short and simply written, but it is a record of life

with no interpretation. Moss was a good union man, but no militant. Not surprisingly he does not see politics as particularly central. The General Strike receives about two pages of coverage, the next five being concerned with where he stayed while doing casual work during the strike.

His overriding concern is for the sense of community that the miners felt, which has been lost. He sees no alternative to the system and therefore has nothing bad to say of anyone, even the management, who had no choice but to try and be profitable.

He is particularly glowing with praise for his local union official, an opinion Marxists are not likely to share.

'On any delegate meeting with the employers...all his arguments fell on deaf ears. There was only one thing that Mr Gill could do. He would call a mass meeting and recommend a return to work... The men would vote to continue the strike, although they were right down on the 'breadline'... But Mr Gill would, in the end, win the men over...'

It is a book worth reading for anyone interested in working class life between the wars, how much conditions have changed, and how similar union officials are. ■

Ken Olende

Only skin deep

Cosmetics, Fashions and the Exploitation of Women

Joseph Hansen and Evelyn Reed

Pathfinder Press

AFTER A BITTER internal split in 1953, the SWP (US) jumped into another row in 1954. What has since become known as the *Bustelo Controversy*, started with an article about the cosmetics industry. And 30 years after the dust has settled they have published for posterity a collection of documents involved.

At first glance the row appears to revolve around the question of whether socialists should support the wearing of cosmetics by working class women, and arguments about what constitutes 'real beauty' ensue. However, it soon becomes clear that there are more deep-rooted problems than the question of mascara at work.

The bulk of the book is devoted to the question of whether Marxists accept the writings of Engels and Briffault, specifically over the existence of primitive communist societies, refuting the suggestions that patriarchal relations have always existed and are therefore 'natural'.

The book is a disappointment and a very uninteresting read. A solid analysis of both the roots of women's oppression and the problems facing working class women in post-war America is sadly missing. Or

Bookbrief

FEMINIST fiction is the most successful offshoot of the women's movement—witness the size of the *Virago* range. They have now published *The New Feminist Criticism*, edited by Elaine Showalter. Our reviewer did not think much of the essays—which treat 'women's writing as a safe sanctuary from the oppression of the world'.

On the same subject is Dale Spender's *Mothers of the Novel*, (*Pandora*), looking at novels by women that pre-date Jane Austen and arguing that society has deliberately ignored them because they were by women. *Pandora* have reissued a series of early women writers (*Self Control* by Mary Brunton, *Belinda* by Maria Edgeworth and *The Female Quixote* by Charlotte Lennox).

More modern feminist fiction includes *She Came Too Late* by Mary Wings and *What Comes Naturally* by Gerd Brantenberg (both *Women's Press*). Both have similar plots about lesbians finding havens from the oppressive world.

Still with feminism but now from sociology comes *Housing and Homelessness: A feminist perspective* by Sophie Watson with Helen Austerberry (*Routledge & Kegan Paul*). This reviews the position of women and their housing needs, ending with a glib conclusion—'the sexual division of labour reinforces the hidden nature of women's homelessness, which in turn means that the issue is not a central one'.

Naivety knows no bounds also with

Reinventing Technology: Policies for Democratic Values by Michael Golhaber (*RKP*), which outlines alternative ways of using high technology. The author seems to have overlooked profit or class struggle as a factor in the development of society.

Still in the realm of naive politics is *After Full Employment* by John Keane and John Owens (*Hutchinson*) which argues that full employment is no longer possible. In the same area of concern *Pluto* have published *About Turn: The alternative use of defence workers' skills*—text by Bill Evans and photomontage by Peter Kennard. A short essay has been padded out with unamusing pictures.

A book whose writer has pretensions as big as his subject is *Powers and Liberties: The causes and consequences of the rise of the West* by John A Hall (*Pelican*). It is amusing and at least has witty chapter headings but the politics are a mish-mash.

Two books that are worth looking out for at your library are *Good Morning Blues* by Count Basie (*Heinemann* £14.95) and *A Life in Jazz* by Danny Barker (*Macmillan* £15). They both give a flavour of the US black ghettos in the 20s and 30s. Barker is the better of the two in describing the racism of the period. Also from the world of jazz comes *Let's Join Hands and Contact the Living* by John Fordham (*Elm Tree Books* £6.95)—it's the story of Ronnie Scott (who owns and runs the jazz club of the same name). ■

Noel Halifax



Personal or political?

I MUST take issue with Noel Halifax's article (July *SWR*). I think that the whole question of the gay movement and of the politics of sexual preference has not been thought through by socialists. Indeed I believe that a Marxist tendency with an orientation to the working class like the SWP has to a limited extent adapted to its milieu.

Whereas women and ethnic minorities play a particular role in the labour force and are systematically discriminated against in labour markets, sexual preferences play no such role.

I would like to see those who define themselves as 'socialist gays' conducting a furious agitation against the disgraceful sexual exploitation of working class youths in the Piccadilly 'meat market'. (I see no such thing and therefore sometimes wonder about the quality of their socialism.)

For gays and lesbians to compare their predicament with both the daily humiliations and the economic degradation inflicted on blacks, as Halifax seems to do, strikes me as frankly insolent. It may be true that many gay people have difficulty in coming to terms with their sexual orientation, but then many heterosexuals also have problems.

The whole question of sexual politics is a difficult one. In some areas it is what I would consider to be a progressive but a non-class issue, such as the admission of women to the Stock Exchange. That is not something for which I would want to campaign, though I would certainly not be against it and mildly welcome the recent change. I think that I would see tolerance for gays in this light but also one which has a further, and more advanced, ideological dimension, in that it challenges

conventional religious views that are still powerful in countries such as Ireland.

To go further than this, as some Labour councils have done, by seeming to adopt a policy towards job opportunities that is one of positive discrimination for gays, seems to me to be fraught with problems.

I see the whole question of the exaggerated importance of gay and lesbian liberation as an aspect of lifestyle politics which appears to have hijacked many Labour councils. Since they fail to build any more council houses etc, that will be their contribution to the class struggle and the epitaph of the lifestyles.

How infinitely superior is the record of those, with all their faults, from the Trotskyist tradition, such as Militant. ■
Ted Crawford
Ealing, London

Clydeside clangers

IN YOUR last issue Ray Challinor's article on the Labour Party's 'senile socialism' referred to the Clydeside group of Labour MPs elected in 1922. Jimmy Maxton, we are told, was John Maclean's 'right-hand man', and John Wheatley was the 'great tactician of the Clyde Workers' Committee'.

These statements must be questioned. Maclean is remembered because he alone in Britain took a revolutionary stand against the First World War. Maxton was a reformist. He never went beyond the ILP's pacifist position. Maclean was made Bolshevik consul for Britain and understood the difference between his politics and those he described as 'the fossil types inside the ILP'.

John Wheatley was *not* the Clyde Workers' Committee tactician. Quite the contrary. He, along with Davie Kirkwood,

sabotaged the Clyde Workers' Committee campaign on dilution. In his memoirs Kirkwood tells of how Maclean attacked his pro-war position, but how he and Wheatley managed to stifle the influence of the militants.

The Clyde Workers' Committee hoped to challenge the government plan to introduce unskilled labour into the workshops (dilution). All the factories were to refuse to talk to government officials, thus forcing open negotiations with the workers' representatives. In their concern to keep the munitions factories running, Kirkwood and Wheatley presented the government officials with a plan for dilution. It skilfully avoided raising political issues and defused a potentially revolutionary crisis.

The result of this 'great' tactician's work was the fatal weakening of the Clyde shop stewards' organisation, which was smashed soon after.

It does no justice to revolutionaries to confuse them with reformists, nor does it aid our understanding of the Labour Party and its history. ■
Donny Gluckstein
Edinburgh

Mad dog days

On Saturday 16 August, the fiftieth anniversary of the first of the three big Moscow Trials of the old Bolsheviks, the *Guardian* carried a full page commemorative article by Geoffrey Robertson entitled 'The Day of the Mad Dogs'.

It was a curious article in a number of ways but most notably in that it was largely devoted to Nikolai Bukharin. Now Bukharin was not on trial in 1936. Indeed he was still editor of *Pravda* at the time. What he privately thought about the trial can only be guessed. What *Pravda* said is a matter of record. It daily denounced the 'mad dogs' in the dock, Zinoviev and Kamenev being the best known, along with their alleged leader the exiled Trotsky, as fascists, traitors, agents of Hitler, scum, human vermin etc.

True, Bukharin's own turn duly came (at the third trial in 1938) but why, on the anniversary of the first monstrous frame-up in 1936, scarcely a paragraph about Zinoviev, President of the Communist International in Lenin's day, Kamenev, Politbureau member with Lenin and his literary executor and,

above all, Trotsky the real principal defendant in all three trials?

The political motivation is clear enough. Bukharin, we are told, 'occupies an honoured place in the eyes of Communist reformers in countries outside the Soviet Union [read Eurocommunist DH], his political and economic principles are increasingly in tune with those espoused by Gorbachev.'

In a particularly disgraceful paragraph Robertson writes: 'It was incredible that Bukharin would have joined forces with his old enemies the Trotskyites, and conspired with [the] fascist powers...'—implying that Trotsky (and presumably Zinoviev and the others) did or might have done!

It is not my purpose here to discuss the actual role and political ideas of Bukharin. That has been attempted in various articles in *International Socialism* by Peter Sedgwick, myself and (most recently) Mike Haynes.

I wish instead to stress two related points. First, the 'evidence' against *all* the accused in all three trials was equally and utterly worthless; a mass of baseless fabrications supported only by confessions obtained by torture (as Khrushchev, in effect, admitted).

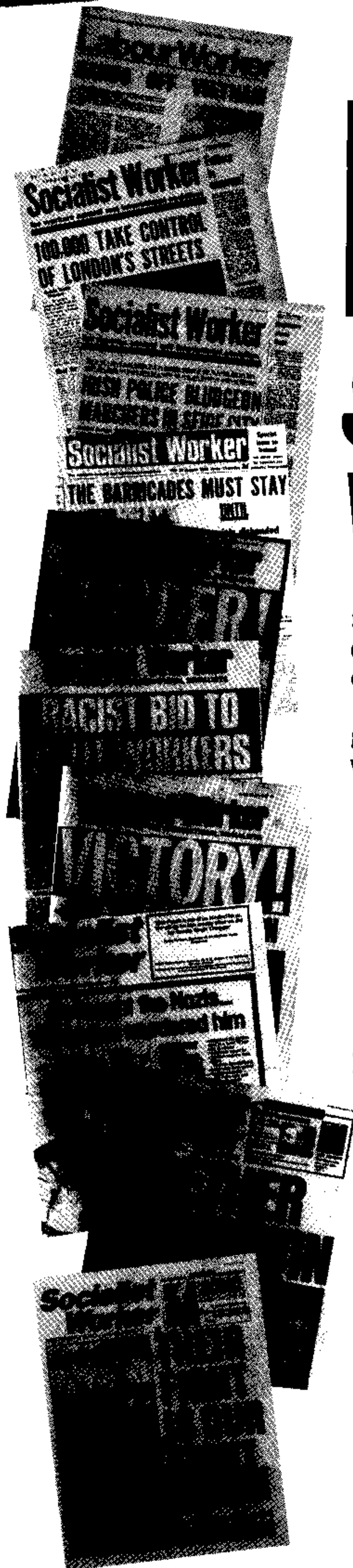
Second, an important function of the trials was to demonstrate to the Western powers that Stalin's regime represented a decisive break with the revolutionary politics of Lenin and his associates (the earlier Bukharin included) and was a reliable coalition partner of the British and French empires against Hitler.

This was the era of the Popular Front, of the abandonment by the Stalinised Communist parties of revolutionary class politics in favour of collaboration with 'their own' ruling classes, of the strangling of the Spanish revolution in the name of 'democracy'.

The trials, the terror in the USSR and the Popular Front were integral parts of the same phenomena—the consolidation of Stalin's conservative regime in the USSR and its emergence as a 'great power' pursuing the ends of its own ruling class. ■

Duncan Hallas
North London

We welcome letters and contributions on all issues raised in *Socialist Worker Review*. Please keep your contributions as short as possible, typed, double spaced if you can, and one side of paper only. Send to: *SWR*, PO Box 82, London E3 3LH.



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The hooray Hitlers

THE IDEA that the Second World War was a time when all of Britain united against the evils of fascism is a common one.

Of course most of the ruling class did back the war, but certainly *not* because the ideas of fascism were alien to them.

In the early thirties some quite prominent ruling class individuals began to identify themselves with fascism. A director of Associated Newspapers, Ward Price, wrote in 1936 in the *Daily Mail* that if Hitler did not exist 'all Europe might soon be clamouring for such a champion'.

For world capitalism had plummeted into the depths of an economic crisis. In its lowest point, 1932-33, 23 percent of the insured population of Britain were unemployed, and industrial production in Britain stood at a third of its 1929 figure. The ruling class the world over was frantically looking for a solution to the recession.

Although the 1929-31 slump had less impact in Britain—and especially on the middle classes—than in Germany, nevertheless, the sheer scale of the social crisis produced political polarisation.

The way out of the crisis for the ruling classes of Germany and Italy was fascism.

In 1932, the British Union of Fascists (BUF) was formed. The founder of this fascist grouping was Sir Oswald Mosley, an aristocrat and former Labour minister. It certainly attracted support from some ruling class individuals.

One of the more well-known supporters was Lord Rothermere, who owned the *Daily Mail* and *Evening News*. He used these papers to declare support for the Mosleyites: 'Hurrah for the Blackshirts' was the *Daily Mail* headline of 15 January 1934. (He also offered 500 free tickets for a BUF rally to *Evening News* readers in a competition entitled 'Why I like the Blackshirts').

Other early BUF backers included Lord Inchcape (shipping, banking and insurance), Courtauld's, and—almost certainly—Imperial Tobacco. Sir Alliot Verdon Roe, owner of A V Roe, the aircraft firm, was a BUF member, whilst Sir Henry Deterding KBE, chairman of Royal Dutch Shell, made substantial financial contributions.

The British establishment had developed close links with Nazi leaders from their first significant electoral successes in 1930. In 1931 Alfred Rosenberg, editor of the Nazi daily *Volkischer Beobachter* paid a visit to Britain organised by the British Air Intelligence chief, F W Winterbotham. He visited press barons Beaverbrook and Rothermere, as well as *Times* editor Geoffrey Dawson.

In 1937, almost five years after Hitler came to power, the Duke of Windsor, freshly abdicated and on a trip to Germany, spoke of what he had seen there as one of 'the great achievements of mankind...and is a miracle...behind it all is one man and one will, Adolf Hitler.'

Similar views prevailed towards the Italian and Spanish fascists. From the British embassy in Rome in 1933 came the view: 'Strikes and lockouts have been made illegal...(the Italian people) have, under a leadership that inspires their full trust, won through.' In 1927, Churchill had told his

were 'too decent' to sympathise with fascism is nonsense. Faced with the strength of the working classes or with fascism, the choice was fascism.

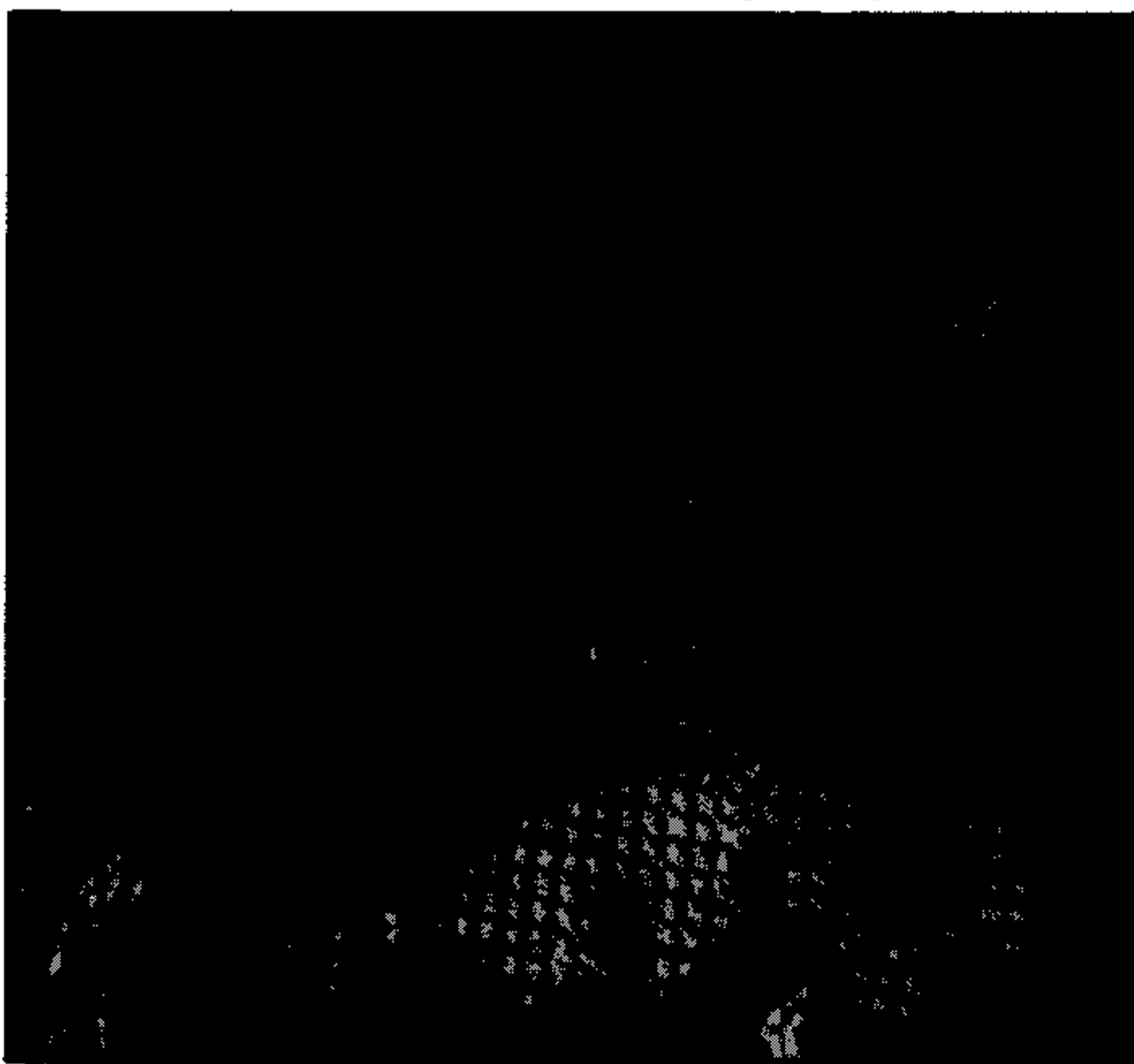
But in Britain itself there were other alternatives to fascism.

By 1936 the recession in Britain was beginning to ease slightly. The empire had enabled British capital to ride the worst of the storm and remain relatively intact.

The middle classes were never so impoverished as to become disenchanted with capitalism and look towards fascism.

The working classes were still reeling from the defeat of the 1926 general strike and remained controllable.

On top of this, Germany's militarisation was beginning to threaten the British empire and so the interests of the British ruling class. Confrontation with Germany was looking necessary if the bosses were to



Pitched battle in Hyde Park: demonstrations helped stem the fascist tide

Italian audience that 'If I were an Italian I would don the fascist blackshirt...I would have been wholeheartedly with you from start to finish in your triumphant struggle against the bestial appetites and passions of Leninism.'

In Spain 1936 the British preference was similar. According to the US ambassador in Madrid, everything his British counterpart did, 'was intended to cripple the government and serve the insurgents (the fascists)'. George Orwell's assessment can serve as a monument to Britain's attitude: 'In the most mean, cowardly, hypocritical way, the British ruling class did all they could to hand Spain over to Franco and the Nazis.'

So any idea that the British ruling class

keep their investments in the colonies.

Finally, an important factor in deciding the fate of fascism in Britain, were the anti-Nazi demonstrations themselves. Up until 1934 Oswald Mosley's BUF had been growing and building with some success. But the turning point for Mosley came at a rally at Olympia. The 15,000 who came to support the fascists were met by angry demonstrators. Savage and bitter fighting resulted. There is no doubt that this began to alienate some of Mosley's respectable supporters.

The anti-Nazi demonstrations culminated in the famous Battle of Cable Street in 1936. The fascists were driven off the streets. ■

Peter Bain