This issue of Socialist Review has as its central theme the relationship between socialism and women's liberation and was co-edited with Anna Paczuska. Considerations of space prevented us from publishing as much of the material on this subject as we had hoped. With any luck there will be room for the rest in coming issues.

A couple of apologies are due for our more glaring errors in recent issues. Robyn Dacey wrote the article on the German socialist women's movement in our April issue. And Thatcher's election may have turned the clock back, but that was no excuse for dating our last issue May-June 1978!

Finally, Socialist Review has had to join in the present inflationary upsurge situation. We are lifting our price to 40p. Unfortunately small socialist magazines are not free from the pressures of the capitalist market and our costs have increased frightfully. Hopefully we will be able to avoid a further price increase for some time to come.

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Cover photo: Syd Shelton

Socialist Review is a monthly magazine of analysis and discussion sponsored by the Socialist Workers Party. Contributions and correspondence should be sent to the editor by the beginning of the month preceding publication.

Please make all cheques and postal orders payable to SWP

Socialist Review is sent free to prisoners on request.

The leaders of the western capitalist world are, at the time of writing, assembling in Tokyo. Like King Canute they will tell the waves to go back, issuing communiques on the need for 'decisive action' to prevent another international recession. They are likely to have as much success as their illustrious predecessor.

The plum pudding
(see back page)

To quote the Economist: 'In four of these big seven economies (represented at Tokyo—AC), inflation over the past year is in double figures, and in the fifth (Canada) it is teetering on the brink.

Economists are competitively shaving down their growth forecasts to figures lower than the rich world has scored since
the dog days of 1975. A middle-of-the-road forecast for the developed world in 1980 would be a sober three per cent growth, which is too slow to stop the queue lengthening or make the steam out of protectionist pressure.

The most serious case is that of the US economy, whose stability is very much at risk. The oil crisis has caused a sharp rise in the prices of manufactured goods imported from the US, and the demand for textiles and apparel has fallen sharply. The effect of this has been to reduce the incentive for Western oil-producing countries to make serious efforts in energy conservation. The incentive is the high price of oil, which has contributed greatly to the wave of inflation that has taken place in the US in recent years. A number of factors have contributed to this wave of inflation, but the main one is the high price of oil, which has contributed to the overall inflationary pressure.

Oil

The US economy is now recovering from the oil shock of 1973-4, but the recovery is slow and uneven. The US economy is now growing at a rate of about 3 per cent, but this is well below the rate of growth in the US economy in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The oil crisis has caused a sharp rise in the prices of manufactured goods imported from the US, and the demand for textiles and apparel has fallen sharply. The effect of this has been to reduce the incentive for Western oil-producing countries to make serious efforts in energy conservation. The incentive is the high price of oil, which has contributed greatly to the wave of inflation that has taken place in the US in recent years. A number of factors have contributed to this wave of inflation, but the main one is the high price of oil, which has contributed to the overall inflationary pressure.

Over the last year, the US economy has been showing signs of weakness, with the unemployment rate rising and the inflation rate falling. The US economy is now growing at a rate of about 3 per cent, but this is well below the rate of growth in the US economy in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The oil crisis has caused a sharp rise in the prices of manufactured goods imported from the US, and the demand for textiles and apparel has fallen sharply. The effect of this has been to reduce the incentive for Western oil-producing countries to make serious efforts in energy conservation. The incentive is the high price of oil, which has contributed greatly to the wave of inflation that has taken place in the US in recent years. A number of factors have contributed to this wave of inflation, but the main one is the high price of oil, which has contributed to the overall inflationary pressure.

Not even the US Marines can now prevent a recession. The EEC commission now expects economic growth of around 2.8 per cent in the Common Market countries next year, while, as we have seen, the US economy was already expected to slow down.

Of course there will be beneficiaries. Even before the oil price increases at the beginning of April, oil companies were making a profit of 40 dollars on every tonne of oil products they sell in Europe—a total of 50 million dollars a week!

Money

Another force driving the world economy towards recession is the upward trend in interest rates, which is making credit more expensive in most of the major industrial countries. A major factor here has been the changing fortunes of the dollar.

Until late last year the dollar was falling fast. Demand in the US economy rose faster than its competitors (domestic demand up 5 per cent in the US, 2½ per cent in the rest of the OECD in the 18 months to mid-1978) and the declining competitiveness of American industry made it more difficult to sell goods abroad for these imports. So the dollar fell.

Since the emergency package introduced by Carter last November the dollar has been climbing in the international exchanges. This has been achieved at a price：tight-money policies and rising interest rates which threaten to strangle economic growth before the oil price rises (real money supply in the US fell in the first quarter of 1979, presaging a fall in industrial production).

Meanwhile, the international economic balance shifted. West Germany and Japan, both with huge balances of payments surpluses and ultra-strong
The economic miracle

The German "economic miracle" may not have ended yet, but there are signs, as with all western countries, that problems are developing.

The employers, acutely aware of the possible difficulties ahead, have managed to foist 15-month wage agreements on both the print and steel workers—despite the tremendous struggle waged by the latter—as against the normal 12-month contracts.

In virtually identical agreements made in both industries, the employers have succeeded in burying any discussion of the 35-hour week until 1984—the small price they had to pay being an extra weeks' holiday!

In some industries they obviously fear that their room to manoeuvre is even less, and two current strikes in Lower Saxony are the result of an employers' offer: an extra week's holiday! Perhaps more important in the long term is the attempt by some large firms where the union organisation is weak, completely to swallow up any vestige of independent trade unionism— an issue which will take up later.

And how have the unions reacted to all this? The problem for the bureaucracies (you can't call them "leaderships") is that the crisis will destroy their cosy relationship with the employers.

If the struggle in Steel is anything to go by, much of the membership are increasingly willing to fight (albeit, unlikable in Britain, Steel tends to be one of the leaders in the 'battle line'), and certainly the hierarchy in IG Metall, the union involved had to pull out every stop to get some areas back to work.

Even at the final ballot, having struggled through Christmas etc., some of the massive plants were voting 70:30 (Mannesmann-Huckingen 8,500 members) and 60:40 (Thyssen-Hamborn 12,500 members) to stay out, and it was only because the final ballot included all steel plants even those that had worked all through the strike—that the vote was lost!

The complexities of the reactions of the workers' union hierarchy to membership to the beginnings of a crisis are perhaps best illustrated by some recent events in the Broil-Papier-Ceramic workers union, IG Chemie, the third largest DGB (TUC)-affiliated union.

German workers have two types of workplace representation: The Verbrauermeile (VU) are the shop floor union reps who come from the workers within the particular shop, although their job doesn't involve negotiating with the management, since this is done by the Betriebsrat, the Works Council members elected by all employees, union and non-union alike, on a slate basis within the whole plant.

Now some of the large employers in the chemical industry, like Bayer or Hoechst, where union organisation is weak, decided they weren't happy even with this system. Perhaps because of worries as to what the future might bring, they wanted to undermine the union shop reps even more.

They wanted to introduce a new type of shop rep, elected by both union and non-union, to work alongside the existing VUs. Known as Betriebliche VU (BVU) their job would be to communicate shop problems to management, and help in their solving.

Not surprisingly, the Works Councils in Bayer and Hoechst agreed to this, but so also did IG Chemie! Not only that, but the union leadership said that where BVUs happened to be Union members, then the union would appoint them as the BVUs as well!

The result: the only real democratic representative of the Union members on the shop floor would disappear. To top it all, the person responsible for appointing the BVUs would be the local full-time official—who is himself elected by those same BVUs. It's the sort of utopian control over your membership that some of our right-wing union leaders still only dream about.

Unfortunately for the IG Chemie executive, the union members stood in their way—it stated quite clearly that BVUs were supposed to be elected. Not to be thwarted, the leadership proposed a rule change to incorporate 'either...
The result was reinstatement! The organised protest also managed to secure 120,000 signatures for the emergency conference (sort of the mark, but no mean achievement), and the proposed rule-change has been altered yet again. This time appointment is still an exception, but if five members disagree an election has to be held.

Obviously, IG Chemie members still have much to do. Their conference is in 1980, and much organising is required before then to ensure the rule-change is thrown out once and for all.

But we in Britain should not underestimate the magnitude of what has already been achieved. Reinstatement by a union after rank-and-file pressure is unheard of in Germany, and this didn't take place in the Industrial Ruhr area, but in the agricultural backwaters of Lower Saxony.

Of course, in this case the action was directed against the union itself, but clearly, in the coming months, employers are not going to have everything their own way, as Honechst and Bayer have discovered.

If inflation continues to crawl steadily upwards, then when wage agreements come up for renewal in a year or two, the dormant unionism of West Germany that we have all come to expect may well begin to be transformed.

Paul Latener

Economic

Budget 1

‘Deindustrialisation’ is a long world much favoured by economists at the present time. They use it to refer to the steady decline of Britain as a producer and exporter of manufactured goods. The ostensibly aimed at the new Tory government's first budget introduced on 12 June was to reverse this process.

The Economist (which, for some reason, best known to itself, welcomed the budget) outlined the Tory strategy as follows:

'It involves the abandonment of the public sector as the prime engine of Britain’s economic growth and its replacement by private initiative achieved through a progressive reduction in personal (and ultimately capital) taxation.'

'Sir Geoffrey (Howe, the Tory chancellor) thus depends on those who will gain most from his proposals—those in work and paying higher rates of income tax—to increase their output dramatically.'

The net effects of the budget tax changes are skewed sharply in favour of the rich. Cuts in income tax—three per cent off the standard rate, the top rate cut by 23 per cent, the threshold for investment income surcharge lifted to £5,000—are to be financed by raising VAT to 15 per cent, cutting public expenditure by 12½ billion and selling off £1 billion of public assets. You don't need a pocket calculator to work out who benefits from these changes.

The idea is that by putting more money into people’s (especially top people's) pockets they will be encouraged to work harder, save more, invest more, and somehow drag Britain back into the good old days some time before 1979 when she was the unchallenged workshop of the world. In fact, the effect of the budget will, most probably, be to accelerate the process of 'deindustrialisation'.

The treasury forecasts accompanying the budget paint a grim picture. Real gross domestic product is expected to fall by one per cent in the year to 30 June 1980, while the retail price index will rise by 16 per cent between the third quarters of 1978 and 1979.

The VAT increases alone will add three to four per cent to the RPI. And the pressures building up in the world economy (see accompanying article) could push prices even higher and output even lower.

The effect of a stable, even rising, pound has been to make British exports less competitive on the world market. Moreover, it has reduced imports.

The depressed state of British manufacturing industry is reflected in the fact that the real post-tax rate of return on capital in 1978 was 4.7 per cent, compared to 10-12 per cent in the 1960s. In the first three months of 1979 the trading profits of industrial and commercial companies fell by 13% per cent. The fall would have been steeper were it not for a sharp rise in North Sea oil profits.

The budget is likely to make matters worse. Howe lifted the minimum lending rate to 14 per cent, thus making loans to industry considerably more expensive.

The sale of public sector assets, which will enable the Tories’ claim to keep the public spending borrowing requirement this year within the limit of £8½ billion inherited from Denis Healey and while it will allow some of their supporters in the City to get their hands on profitable BP shares, will also have the effect of taking out of the market funds which might otherwise have been invested in industry. The Tories’ decision to keep the pound high means that Britain’s competitive position will continue to weaken.

We look set for a re-run of the early 1970s. The money transferred from working people to the rich by the budget will be spent, not on industrial investment, but on more profitable speculative activities like the property market and fringe banking.

Looking across the Channel at Giscard d’Estaing’s “liberal economic policy” introduced after the March 1978 legislative elections, we see that the abolition of price controls, aimed at “setting industry free”, led to a stock market boom which pushed share prices through the ceiling, but to no significant increase in industrial investment.
stable, so the theory goes, and people will stop demanding excessive wages because they will know that prices will not rise further and that they will risk bankrupting their employer. But the budget, by pushing the rate of price increases up towards 20 per cent, has given ‘inflationary expectations’ a tremendous boost.

Shopfloor reactions to the budget are discussed elsewhere in this issue. It is possible that workers will accept the fall in their living standards implied in the budget, thereby taking some of the pressure off profits. Possible, but unlikely.

Thatcher may soon find herself caught between a world recession and wage militancy at home.

Perhaps history does repeat itself after all. Alex Callinicos.

Birmingham lorry drivers (again) is some of the other claims that are worrying the bosses. The question is: this time round, employers have got away with pay increases of eight per cent in one plant, 13 per cent in another and 20 per cent somewhere else.

The fragmentation has been enormous. Productivity deals have eaten away at workers’ strength. In the coming months the toughest employers will be looking to get more and more concessions on productivity, line speeds, manning and the like.

This is where the rank-and-file seven-point plan could prove crucial in support of the new coming out or shut out—in defence of their living standards, jobs and organisation.

Political

Budget 2

The day after the Budget, GKN chairman Sir Barrie Heath must have been feeling pretty good. With around £10,500 a year extra in his pocket from the Tories tax bonanza (compared with about £100 for most of his employees) and the promise of anti-union legislation to come, it was a good day to be a rich company director.

GKN’s personnel director, a leading member of the Economic League, can still have been so happy. Because the immediate euphoria of the Budget has not fooled industrial relations management. They are at least aware that for all the talk of incentives and ‘more money in the pocket’ there is a hidden steam behind some wage claims already which is likely to be overwhelming once 18½ to 20 per cent inflation becomes a reality in November: December this year.

Those ‘experts’ who have praised the Tory strategy argue along the following lines: union leaders are wary of militancy after the winter’s strikes; sections of the MRA and FIE are demoralised; certain powerful private sector groups of workers can be allowed to keep up with inflation; others can be fought through employer solidarity and the police; we can force through anti-picketing laws if the time is right; 2 million plus on the dole will loosen the militancy’s control.

There is something in these arguments. The Rand and File Conference on 23 June echoed stories of recent defeats. There was a general recognition of the weakening of shopfloor organisation during the time of the Labour government. The experience of 1976 showed that unemployment could mean a serious—though temporary—effect on the wages struggle.

The whole of the national press is committed to tighter curbs on picketing—legal (Mail, Express, Sun etc) or ‘voluntary’ (Mirror, Guardian). There’s little doubt that even a moderately well-orchestrated campaign would produce a ‘public demand’ for changes in the law.

That arch-clown Paul Johnson may have been right when he suggested in the London Evening Standard that the Budget was deliberately provocative, to enable the Tories to force through the changes they want in a climate of hysteria.

The propaganda offensive against political industrial action which is now being taken up throughout the press bears directly on this. And as usual the most insidious attack comes from the Labour right in the shape of ‘keep politics out of politics’ James Callaghan.

It is almost as though the type has already been set, the ‘in-depth’ interviews already recorded in preparation for the attack on: strikes to keep shipyards open, to prevent the sell-out of British Aerospace, to keep civil service jobs, to keep hospitals open... and even to push wages up in line with inflation.

It is this last element which the Tories seem least worried about and is causing most personnel managers sleepless nights. After the last two years’ experience, the British Oxygen pay deal is the one most feared to start the ball rolling towards £20/20 per cent settlements.

And it’s worth noting that BOC management are trying to do their damnedest to shift the pay deal from October 1979 to May 1980.

Metal Box, ICI and the

Indexation

Danger:UXB

‘Unions are planning to demand automatic pay rises linked with the monthly cost of living’ according to the Sunday Mirror on 24 June. It has taken a long time for ‘index-linking’ of wages to come up again.

The employers remember what happened to Heath’s threshold policy in 1974 (wages went up 40p for each one per cent rise in prices above seven per cent), it coincided with the oil price boom and fuelled wage demands of 40 to 50 per cent. How curious TUC leaders should think of it now...

But it ought to be remembered also that it was the TUC which first brought up the idea. In 1971 the TUC had a conference proposing limiting wage rises to the cost-of-living increase and TUC general secretary Victor ‘White’ Feather declared that ‘cost of living threshold clauses lend themselves particularly well to company corporate planning of longer-term agreements...

If I were the head of a large business corporation I would be very interested in the idea of getting a degree of forward planning so far as wages and labour costs were concerned.’ (TUC press release, 4th February 1971).

This time round there is a real danger on this front—not so much from the Tories, who are at the moment committed to staying out of collective bargaining, but from union leaders, right and left. The idea is even supported in a modified form—by some of the revolutionary groups, largely because Trotsky said it was a good idea in 1938.

However it’s disguised, wage indexation at the moment represents a slide into defeatism. It would encourage employers to go for two or three-year agreements—some of them are already on to the idea. It reduces arguments over wages to arguments over statistics. And most important of all it opens the door for employers to say ‘You’ve got your cost-of-living clause; now we’ll talk about jobs and work practices.

Indexation is as yet an unexplained device—it will need to be opposed whether it comes from Terry Duffy or from revolutionaries with a sliding-scale of stupid demands.
7 steps to heaven

...or something like it. The seven-point code of practice agreed by the Rank and File Defend Our Unions conference on 23 June may be a crucial step in rebuilding basic trade union principles at the grassroots over the coming few months.

The fact that the commitments called for are so elementary—solidarity, respect for picket lines, collecting money, organising blacking—shouldn’t disguise the point that to get such a code widely approved by branches, districts, stewards committees and union membership would represent a real shift of emphasis from some of the more disgraceful episodes of recent years.

Many of the defectors—and much of the detail of shopping weakness were spelled out to the conference’s 1,100 delegates. It may have been a subject of debate inside the left but the consensus of the conference was that workplace organisation is now much weaker and more flabby than it was when Labour took office back in 1974.

But the conference itself represented only the highest point so far reached for the idea of rank-and-file unity of the activists across all industry and services. In fact the attendance means it was the second largest genuine national rank-and-file gathering since the early days of the Liaison Committee for Defence of Trade Unions in 1970.

More important the spectrum of workers represented was far wider than before. Far more of the experienced industrial militants than before, more women and more realism.

The depth of experience and breadth of representation—from the public sector also really reflected for the first time the actual changes which have been taking place in the health service, local authorities and civil service.

So a gathering that was far bigger than might have been expected now faces the task of winning the trade union rank and file to a programme of practical unity.

One of the main tasks will be to convince those organisations still wedded to the idea of the Liaison Committee and the Liaison Committee itself that a very widespread agreement can be reached on the basis of the Code of Practice. At the same moment that the conference was taking place, a 250-strong meeting in London heard Tony Benn, Bob Wright and Ron Todd call for resistance to the Tories.

The real test of the strength of rank and file politics is not in calling a very successful conference but in getting the re-emergent trade left and its leaders to agree on practical action for rank and file unity rather than a simple repetition of the ‘need for alternative policies.’

Unions

Conferences

GMWU

This year’s GMWU conference was notable for three reasons. First, general secretary David Basnett’s defence of the social contract and the concordat; second, national officer for local government and the health service Charlie Donnett’s attack on NUPE and Alan Fisher; and third, the outrageous outburst that the executive was outvoted three times, prompting one delegate to remark, ‘this union is getting too democratic’.

David Basnett’s defence of Labour’s record was to be expected. What was interesting was the stress he laid on the TUC’s role when Labour was last in opposition under led Health.

Between 1972 and 1974 Basnett was a leading member of the TUC/Labour Party liaison committee, during which time the social contract was worked out, ready to sell to the membership once Labour regained power. At this year’s conference Basnett made it quite clear that he wanted to lead the TUC into manoeuvrings with the Labour leaders to produce something similar, ready for the return of a Labour government in a few years time.

The bitterness that exists between the leaders of the public sector unions cannot be overstated, and probably the worst friction exists between the GMWU and NUPE. When the NUPE members voted to stay on strike last winter the other union’s officials complained that Fisher could not control his members. At the GMWU conference Donnett described Alan Fisher as ‘a wide-boy who had been run over by his own barrel’. Hearing Donnett’s speech was like listening to a Labour cabinet minister.

He said Fisher ‘lost control of his officers and his officers abdicated to the militants. As a result, there were instances of abuse which were the daily diet of the gutter press. They brought the whole movement into disrepute...’

‘They forced further unnecessary hardship on the sick and the elderly and the children for another three weeks in the health service while they looked for a face-saver... I want to say categorically now that the general and municipal workers will never be led by the nose by the NUPE militants to advance far-left politics.’

Thankfully Donnett didn’t get the level of applause he was seeking from the delegates.

It is not all bad news. On three occasions the normally monolithic executive of the GMWU was outvoted by the delegates. Despite executive opposition the conference resolved to campaign for a target figure of £55 basic pay for a basic week.

Sadly, the standing orders committee ruled out of order a polite motion from the Edgware branch. It read, ‘Congress is appalled by the statement made by the prime minister regarding workers crossing the picket line. This is advocating a scabs’ charter. Congress demands that the minister withdraws his statement, and if he refuses, he shall be expelled from his association with the GMWU.’

ASTMS

There was good and bad news waiting for militants who went to Blackpool this year for the ASTMS national conference. The bad news was a significant move to the right by the leadership.

While delegates were expecting a clear fighting response to the new Tory government, expecting hard opposition to any incomes policy or any attempt to attack the labour movement, they were presented with a package that agreed to talks with Thatcher and which only opposed unilaterally imposed pay policies.

Even before the conference had ended, Clive Jenkins rushed off to join his TUC pals in meeting with Thatcher. Following closely after Jenkins’ sponsorship of the concordat, this leaves members wondering whether the tough ‘left-wing’ public image of the union has gone.

The good news was the ‘revolt’ of the delegates against the hopelessly undemocratic agenda of rule-change proposals. The very first decision conference made was to throw out the entire two-day agenda for the rulebook debate. 24 hours later delegates agreed to revert to this programme of business, mainly because they were offered no alternative.

But the mood was set—90 per cent of the resolutions sent in from the rank and file had been manoeuvred off the order paper and delegates were hopping mad.

Many of the agenda items were presented to conference as 'tidying-up' amendments, but in fact would have significantly
changed the power structure of the union so as to favour the
divisional councils—bodies on
which the broad left had most
influence.

Most of these motions were
defeated, not because delegates
favoured the rule of the national
erector to that of the
divisional councils, but because
they did not want yet another
level of bureaucratic control
over them: the members have
had enough of the political
power games going on over
their heads.

A further pleasant surprise
was the way this anger found an
outlet in the increased support
for the Red Collar rank-and-file
group: the conference bulletins
had more popular each day.
and, despite some wild opposi-
tion from NEC members, evening
meetings drew over 60 sup-
porters.

Things are stirring at the
bottom of the ASTMS pool,
however still it is up top. Big fish
beware. Collin Brown

USDAW

This year's conference of the
Union of Shop, Distributive
and Allied Workers brought
out into the open signs of
change inside this traditionally
right-wing union which have
been taking place over the past
few years.

Traditionally dominated by
old style Labour Party
moderates, USDAW's enor-
mous conference has seemed
more like an extended works
outing than anything else—
particularly with the bevy of
management men and women
always in the visitors' gallery.

This year the platform also
had things largely its own
way—through the new deputy
general secretary, Flood, who
deleted on three out of the four
items he spoke to. With

USDAW's equivalent of Jack
Jones and Lord Allen, now depar-
ting to retirement, the union's
right wing is by no means the
confident force it has recently
been.

Meanwhile, despite a depar-
t for the broad left candidate for
the union's general
secretyship the recent
USDAW branch ballot also
pointed to a weakening of the
right-wing hold.

John Duits, the left's can-
didate, in fact 'withdrew' from
his campaign right in the
middle of the election after
losing his Midlands executive
position. Despite this, he
secured some 40 per cent of the
defeated in a ballot where
right-wing branch block votes
still dominate.

At the same time, two SWP
members polled well in recent
elections, particularly in the
North West division which is
the right's strongest base (and
the union's headquarters).

Behind this change is a new
militancy inside the unions,
chiefly from the recently
organised private retail trade
Tesco, Fine Fare, Woolworth,
Littlewoods etc—where
shopworkers have had to fight
for their jobs for the first time
in years.

Even the Co-ops, traditionally
passive on the retail side, with
management cronies in control,
this year voted heavily to reject
a 'strongly recommended' pay
deal—the first time this has ever
happened. On the Co-op
warehouse and wholesale side
there have been several recent
bitter disputes.

There is now a likelihood of
a special recall conference of
the union taking place this
year. The union's wages policy
has been outdated by the fall of
the Callaghan government and
the union's Eastern division (which
includes London) has just
agreed a resolution for a recall.

The union's constitution
demands a motion passed by
100 branches before a special
conference is held.

At the tribunals

Fewer than one in ten women
wanting equal pay claims to
industrial tribunals last year
finally won their cases at
hearings. Nearly half the 343 cases
were settled out of court for reasons
'not known' by the Department of
Employment.

Three-quarters of the women trying
to gain redress earned less
than £50 a week and the largest
groups of applicants came, not
surprisingly, from shops and the
clothiing and textile trades. With
sex discrimination the operation of
the 'equality laws' was even
more pathetic; just 13 out of 130
women won their cases at
tribunals.

As with equal pay cases the
ergest number of women workers at
the tribunals were in clerical jobs.

Results: Equal Pay and Discrimination

Consolidated cases 51
Cases withdrawn 248
Tribunal victories 36
Tribunal defeats 87
TOTAL 422

*excluding men

Equal opportunities

Shifting women

Exemptions shouldn't be the rule, said an Equal
Opportunities Commission report recently reccommending
the abolition of legislation preventing women being made
to work nights, double
day shifts. Sundays etc. Prominent on the team making the
recommendation was a director of Joseph Lucas and Mr Fuller,
last seen championing women's rights as director of the South-Est
Lancashire engineering employers which fought long battles and
issued secret circulars against equal pay as long ago as 1971-72.

Meanwhile the number of employers seeking exemption orders
from health and safety laws seems to be growing. Out of more than
4,000 such orders in 1978, over 1,000 were new ones, almost all
for the maximum period of a year. Just over 200,000 women are
currently affected, including:

59,034 on night shifts
39,362 on double days
44,085 working Sundays
21,065 working 'extended hours'

Of course huge numbers of women outside factories—in
hospitals, catering and other services—have to work these hours
without any exemption possibilities and frequently without a shift
payment. And some companies, for example Vauxhall and
Elettrolux, have made it a condition of equal pay that women agree
to work at night.

Quote of the year (so far):
'Of course, I never advocated industrial action for political
ends,' Lord Hugh Scanlon, while playing golf with Peter Alliss (BBC2, 22
June).

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Turkey

The race against time

SASA, the major producers of polyester in Turkey, recently had to stop production, due to the unavailability of imported raw materials. As a result, numerous textile firms which use polyester had to curtail their operations, lay off workers and put their prices up.

Several, including some large and well-established ones, went out of business altogether. Mensucat Santral, Turkey's fourth largest firm and largest textile company, can stand the crisis better than most as its production is down by about 50 per cent.

Oyak-Renault which assembles automobiles in Turkey closed its plant in Bursa in January, due to power cuts and shortages of raw materials, fuel oil and spare parts. 4,500 partly completed cars, in need of imported parts, were waiting in the depot. Turkey's largest tyre factory, Lassa, had to cut production by 25 per cent for similar reasons.

These two examples draw a picture which is presented by every branch of Turkish industry. Overall manufacturing production is around 50 per cent of capacity and hardly a day passes without news of another small or medium scale company going bust.

Each bankruptcy and closure means that another commodity becomes scarce; another shortage is created or aggravated, a new blackmarket springs up, another firm has to close down or cut back production, more workers are made redundant. The circle is vicious: the capitalist finds he cannot produce and therefore hikes up the price of what he can produce.

On the other hand, with a wage freeze and more and more workers losing their jobs and income, demand for several commodities does not even meet the reduced level of output.

The result of this situation has been that while Prime Minister Ecevit tours the West in search of foreign aid and hopes to entice foreign capital into Turkey, hardly a Lira of Turkish capital was invested in Turkish industry over the past year.

Quite the opposite: the usual trickle of Turkish money which flows to Switzerland has become a steady stream. The Turkish ruling class is no longer confident that it can rule firmly or produce profitably.

In February a German diplomat was quoted as saying that unless Turkey was economically bailed out soon 'we would then have a solid headache from the Bosphorus to Afghanistan'.

And indeed at the recent Guadaloupe Conference Western leaders agreed to give Turkey a loan of $1.5 billion. The magnitude of the crisis, however, is illustrated by this figure itself: 1.5 billion dollars do not even meet Turkey's short term debts which are up for repayment and are currently being rescheduled.

Alternatively, this amount could possibly just buy Turkey's oil imports for one year, hardly scratching the surface of the 16 billion dollar foreign debt or the 4 billion dollar balance of payments deficit.

The roots of Turkey's economic problems lie in the very structure of the economy. While agriculture accounts for only 20 per cent of GNP and industry for 25 per cent and the population is almost equally divided between rural and urban areas, exports are still predominantly agricultural.

Cotton, hazelnuts, tobacco and raisins constitute 40 per cent of the country's exports. 40 per cent of imports, on the other hand, are investment goods, mainly machinery and equipment. In spite of repeated efforts to cut back imports and raise exports, Turkey's foreign trade deficit was 3.3 billion dollars in 1975, 3.2 billion in 1976 and 4.1 billion in 1977.

With foreign exchange reserves of 410 million dollars in 1977, it was not even possible to service the foreign debt.

The effects of this foreign exchange bottleneck has been disastrous. Only 3.7 per cent of total imports are consumption goods. The rest are investment goods and raw materials necessary for both industrial and agricultural production.

Apart from machinery and equipment, such imports as crude oil, fuel oil, fertilizers, cement, iron and steel, etc. are clearly absolutely crucial. And the reduction of imports over the past year has inevitably had to be in such commodities. There was very little room for manoeuvre: first there were no substantial imports of consumption goods to be cut.

Second, there is a limit to how much the production and export of nuts and raisins can be increased, the deficits have thus persisted, imports have progressively been curtailed and industry has consequently been staved off at the door of import inputs.

The results of industry being half inoperative are twofold: inflation and unemployment. In both these fields Turkey leads Europe. Both have direct and measurable effects on the population. In early 1979 inflation had reached 70 per cent. In mid-March the prices of several state-produced goods (tobacco, cement, coal, sugar, iron and steel) were increased by an average of 20 per cent. Petrol went up by 50 per cent.

The rising prices are accompanied by shortages of a whole range of basic commodities: petrol, coffee, diesel oil, sugar, cigarettes, tea, etc.

Unemployment has now reached a figure above 20 per cent. That means something between 3 and 4 million people, two-thirds of whom in urban areas. And there is no system of social security in Turkey. The frightening rise in non-political street violence in the big cities is hardly surprising.

Apart from seeking foreign aid and attempting to reduce the foreign trade deficit (both with very little success), the government has tried two other IMF-suggested solutions. To devalue the Turkish currency repeatedly and to load the burden of the crisis onto the working-class.

The first of these has very little chance of success. A devaluation aims to increase exports and reduce imports: how can exports be increased when production is half-crippled, and how can imports be reduced when industry is already half-starving?

As for further squeezing the working-class, this brings us to the ruling class' crisis of social and political control.

The ability to make workers pay for economic crises necessitates one of several...
preconditions. A weak, unorganised working-class without organizations and traditions of self-defence would enable the regime to slash wages, make working conditions unbearable, extend the working day, etc. Similarly with workers suffering the demoralization of recent defeat.

Alternatively, the existence of organizations within the working-class which are willing and able to convince workers of the necessity or resistant and sacrifice, might allow the system to weather the crisis.

The Turkish working-class is neither weak and unorganized nor does it suffer from a long tradition of reformism. While Turkey is one of those countries which conjure up images of a vast peasantry slaving away on the land, this is fast ceasing to be a realistic picture. Like in numerous other Middle-Eastern countries, the 1960s witnessed massive attempts at planned industrialization and development in Turkey. In 1963-67, the First Five-Year Plan, with an average of 5.8% per annum. This figure rose to 7.1% in 1966-67, and was 6.7% in 1973-77. Regardless of how one evaluates the process was, whether all plan targets were met or not, the result was that the structure of society and its class formations were changed rapidly and irreversibly.

45% of the population is now urban-based. A similar percentage of the economically active population is employed in industry and services.

Today the industrial working-class numbers around 4 million. It is therefore still small, and it is young. Its level of militancy and organization, however, belies these facts.

The Turkish working-class boasts the only independent trade unions in the whole of the Middle-East. There are two Confederations, TURK-IS, originally a yellow union, now independent, with a membership of about 1.5 million, and DISK, the Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions, a militant break-away from TURK-IS, with a membership nearing 1 million. In addition, white-collar workers, legally barred from unionization, are organized in professional associations, which are often even more militant and vociferous than the unions.

These organizations, DISK in particular, have successfully fended off several direct attacks on the working class in recent years. In 1970, an attempt was made to legislate against trade unions. Hundreds of thousands of workers rioted in the streets of Istanbul, fighting pitched battle with the police and troops for two days in June. The bill was killed stone dead.

In 1976, it was attempted to extend the lifetime of State Security Courts which were established in the preceding period of martial law. 2 of the 3 judges of these courts were appointed by the military.

Nearly half a million workers responded to DISK's call for a general strike. The courts were shelved. Numerous epic struggles of the past ten years indicate that open attacks on the working-class do not represent an option the ruling class can contemplate lightly.

The left in Turkey presents a rather less encouraging picture. While working-class organization survived the military coup of 1971 more or less intact, the left did not. It was thoroughly smashed and still carries the scars.

There exists 5 or more parliamentary socialist parties, mostly pro-Moscow, innumerable Maoist groups of both Chinese and Albanian varieties, and numerous other groups of indefatigable politics. The two significant forces on the left are the Communist Party (which together with its Greek and Cypriot counterparts is the last of Moscow's henchmen in Europe) and a loosely structured organization, Revolutionary Youth, which masterfully combine Mao, Stalin and Guevara!

One thing shared by almost all groups is the concept of revolution in two stages, with the Democratic revolution carried out by all sections of society which are anti-imperialist, preceding socialist revolution. While all pay their daily respects to the working class, hope seems to lie with relatively moderate fronts, or armed men of steel. 'Socialist revolution or counter-revolution' has yet to be accepted.

Turkey's present government, Ecevit's Republican People's Party, is a social-democratic party along traditional lines. However, it is operating under conditions where social democracy has little chance of success. It cannot afford to grant the minimum reforms.

It therefore cannot hope to retain its working-class base. It cannot provide a smoothly-running economy with a contented working class. As we would expect, after 18 months in power Ecevit is steadily losing support among both workers and capitalists.

The most viable indication of social democracy's inability to rule came in December last year, when martial law was declared for a period of 2 months in 13 of Turkey's 63 provinces.

There can be no clearer admission of defeat by a liberal 'People's Party' than calling the troops in to do the dirty work. Martial law has already been twice extended for further 2 month periods. At the end of April it was also geographically extended to cover the five Kurdish provinces in South-Eastern Turkey, following a visit by the Turkish Chief of Staff to Iraq.

Any revival of the struggle for autonomy among Turkey's 8 million Kurds will clearly be met in the traditional fashion: brutal repression.

The period since the announcement of martial law has witnessed the gradual transfer of power from the government to the military. On Mayday (which for the past 3 years has seen half a million workers in the streets of Istanbul) control by the military was total.

The march was banned, a 30 hour curfew was declared, Istanbul was sealed off, widespread searches were carried out, over 3000 were arrested, including the leaders of DISK. All this was ordered and implemented by the military, with the government silently watching.

In short, Ecevit has failed. He was unable to satisfy the ruling class: the economy is still in a rut, with little chance of recovery. Profit rates are still low, political violence is still
23rd Congress of the Communist Party

Not surprisingly the 23rd Congress of the French Communist Party—which was held in St. Ouen, near Paris, from 9-13 May—has confirmed the turn taken since the end of 1977: violent attacks against the Socialist Party (which was accused of being an 'accomplice' of the right wing), proclamation of the need for a 'new unity of the left.

But, this time, not only based on an alliance with the SP leadership but with the Socialist rank and file militants as well, and a call for the defence of the national interests of the French bourgeoisie inside the Common Market.

The proposals for the 'new unity' are very vague and completely unrealistic since the SP rank and file militants have no reason to ally themselves with the CP against the will of their own leadership. 'New, rank and file unity' was an empty slogan used by the CP leaders to hide their lack of political or electoral perspectives. However, the Congress was very careful not to rule out the possibility of a new agreement with the SP leadership in the future.

At this Congress it was not possible to hear the voice of the opponents who, since the defeat of the 'Union of the Left' in the March 1978 Parliamentary election, have regularly accused the CP leadership of being too radical, too 'anti-SP' and too workerist.

During the preparations for the Congress the bureaucrats intervened to ban all represen-

tation by the opponents. In at least one place, Arcueil (a small town in Southern Paris and one of the strongholds of Georges Marchais, the CP general secretary) an opponent was beaten up by CP full timers during a local conference of the party.

All of the Congress preparations showed further that the CP was no more democratic than before and that its Stalinist methods were not only not dead and buried. As far as its membership was concerned, the CP claimed a total of 700,000 organised in 28,000 cells.

But a small proportion of its membership participated in the pre-Congress conferences at every level. It seems in fact that since March 1979 many members decided to withdraw from any activity, not only within the Party but within the CP-led CGT trade union as well.

For the moment the CP leadership is at a dead end. On the one hand, as a reformist party, its only hope to take part in a government is through an electoral alliance with the SP; but, on the other hand, it has clearly been shown since 1972 that such an alliance is more profitable to the SP than to the CP.

The results of some elections held over the last few years help to illustrate the CP's dilemma.

In fact over the last seven years, the SP has regularly increased its electoral influence while the CP has, at best kept its votes without making any advance, at worst, has lost ground to the SP from its own voters.

For a party which, during its 23rd Congress in 1976, kept its distance from Moscow and dropped all references to the dictatorship of the proletariat from its programme, these results were very disappointing.

Faced with a choice between two reformist working class parties with the same programme (the 'Common Programme of the Left'), the 'moderate' electorate of the left combined to choose the SP at the CP's expense. As for the CP leadership, there was a danger in seeing the gap between it and the SP widen and the possibility of the SP coming to power without the CP.

This possibility was made more likely by the fact that, due to the French electoral system and the gerrymandering of the constituencies, many more votes are needed to elect a CP member of Parliament than an SP one.

So, in 1977 after the huge progress made by the SP in a dozen or so by-elections, the CP made every effort to convince its own membership and electorate that the CP and the SP were different parties with different goals... in spite of the fact that their programmes were absolutely identical.

The CP leadership started to attack Mitterrand and ended the honeymoon with its own intellectuals who, up to then, were considered to be the forerunners in the alliance with the Social-Democrats (in particular Jean Jaurès).

In order to get the support of the old-type Stalinist militants against the Eurocommunist intellectuals, Marchais at the Congress stopped his criticisms of the Eastern Europe countries and of the Soviet Union. Meanwhile he decided the departure of Roland Leroy, the editor of the daily L'Humanité and one of the most well-known hard-liners against the SP from the Secretariat of the Central Committee.
party compared with those of the SP.

It was difficult for the CP to explain to its members why the leadership has supported Francois Mitterrand for such a long period (to be precise since 1965) without any criticism.

And then to discover suddenly that Mitterrand was a bourgeois politician, a minister in a dozen of openly anti-communist governments during the Fourth Republic (1945-58) and someone who took an active role, as a Minister of Interior, against the Algerian people fighting for their independence.

In order to justify both its past and its present policies the CP invented a non-existent 'right turn' of the SP. According to the CP theorists, Mitterrand was an acceptable ally from 1965 to the last months of 1977. He then suddenly turned right and started to plot with Giscard d'Estaing and other right wingers.

This explanation was not particularly convincing since the SP did not change its policies at all over the last few years. But it was the only explanation the CP found to sell its new policies to its membership.

The new line created some trouble among the CP intellectuals almost immediately. With the rebirth of the SP (at least as an electoral party) many CP fellow travellers particularly in the artistic and academic milieu began to switch their sympathies from the CP to the SP.

Among the CP intellectuals themselves, the prospect of being in office with the Social Democrats became very popular and some of them even proposed that the party drops its 'communist' name and label.

The CP's attacks against Mitterrand were considered by these people as sectarian madness. Intellectuals like Ellenstein, Fremontrie, Pommier or Louis Althusser the latter wrongly considered in this country as a left-wing critic because he was in favour of keeping the dictatorship of the proletarian in the party programme) then accused the party of not having done enough for the victory of the Left, even if such victory would have meant a weakening of the CP.

They asked for more freedom of discussion (but were against the right of building tendencies) and claimed to be closer to the Italian and Spanish CP leaders than to the French one.

However, these opponents never criticised the CP's policy from the left, from the point of view of workers' interests. They came mainly from a right wing opposition which reproached the CP not to be one sufficiently Social Democrat.

For instance, in a series of articles published in the daily Le Monde (21, 22, 23 February 1979) Ellenstein wrote:

'We must have the courage to tell the truth to the workers and take the measures needed to improve the economic situation. This could sometimes mean, for some factories, some branches of the economy and some regional areas, the adoption of 'salvation measures' for which sacrifices should be asked from everyone.'

Such a statement could have been signed by Callaghan, Mauoy or Healey. In fact, while the opposition inside the CP pointed out the late 'Union of the Left' it had no revolutionary perspectives to offer to the CP rank and file militants.

The turn of the CP means that sometimes it is forced to appear more radical than the SP and to act accordingly. For instance, during the fight of the steelworkers in Northern and Eastern France, the CP leaders adopted a very militant stand locally.

Not only did they very often take the lead in demonstrations but Le Humanite proclaimed its solidarity with the workers who attacked police stations. This was in sharp contrast with May 1968 when any action against the police was then condemned by the CP as 'provocative' and 'irresponsible'.

However the CP's radical stand in France and in the north is in no way related to any radical policy at a national level. The CP and the CP-led CGT trade union movement have been very careful to avoid spreading workers' struggles nationally and to keep them divided into regional areas, industrial branches and so on.

While the CP has supported the steel workers' fight, the only national action undertaken has been to associate itself with the Socialist and the Gaulist MPs in asking for a special session of the Parliament, a session which took place with no result.

The CP's new policies are not a left turn in the sense that the Party opposes nothing more to the workers than the Social Democrats do. It's a turn imposed not by pressure from the workers but by the Party's own electoral interests. Ray Whitley.
Women at work bear the double burden of their exploitation as workers and their oppression as women. In the following article Anna Pollert shows some of the ways women are gaining confidence at work but how at the same time the system of gender relations in the workplace weakens their ability to fight. It is part of a wider study based on interviews and conversations with women working on the shop floor of a tobacco factory in Bristol.

The Grand Tobacco Company, of which Redcliffe's was one tiny segment, had the reputation of being 'a good employer' which 'looked after' its employees. It had a history of paternalism, organising welfare schemes, sports, entertainments and outings for its workers. Now, it had been brought up to date with the concepts of modern, progressive management, which recognised the benefits of 'union participation' and 'good communications' with the workers.

It had established a well-oiled machine of joint consultations and collective bargaining with the unions involved in the tobacco industry, all centralised into a National Joint Negotiating Committee for the Tobacco Industry. It prided itself on good labour relations and a strike-free record; conflicts and disagreements were officially blamed on 'communication breakdowns' or lack of information. It used the familiar language of modern corporate capitalism, and 'sensible' management 'participatory discussion', cooperation and compromise.

At the local factory, or branch level, management were given a fairly free hand to set up their own conciliatory arrangements. Redcliffe's had a 'factory council' at which worker representatives 'participated with management. The main production union, in this case the Transport and General Workers' Union, was fully recognised, and while it did not operate a closed shop policy, women were encouraged to join, not just by shop stewards, but by management. Membership was facilitated by the check-off system, with union subscriptions deducted from the wage packet at source, so that it became an automatic, effortless part of being a worker.

At the same time, the relationship between the shop floor and supervisors, was encouraged to be as friendly as possible. Foremen and chargehands were trained not to 'talk down' to the girls, to avoid confrontations and aim for co-operation. The idea that everyone in the factory, manual workers, staff, supervisors, managers, were 'workers' was emphasised, with frequent shop floor visits by managers, who in their shirt sleeves showed both a 'personal interest' and a willingness to get their hands dirty—occasionally.

The 'close family' approach was particularly suited to a small factory like Redcliffe's but it also fitted in well with the sophisticated running of the parts of a giant monopolistic corporation like the Grand Tobacco.

For the women having some trade union representation was undoubtedly better than none, but behind the 'friendly relations' the girls had little more organisation, or control over their lives than in the days of the iron-fisted boss. They did not need to be bossed, because they had their hands tied anyway. Tied by the incorporation of trade unionism into capital through a complex web of centralised procedures which were as distant as the stars, and filtered down their effects through an invisible, unknown bureaucracy. Power and decisions were somewhere 'out there', never in the factory, let alone the shop floor.

The women's impotence was exacerbated further
by their alienation from their shop stewards. A
good part of this resulted directly from the check
off system which removed all need for regular,
personal contact with them. It made less likely that
women could approach them, simply because the
union, like everything else in the factory, was
something that happened to them; from the
outside, it was something they thought about
let alone fought for.

Another, more important wedge divided the
women from their union. All their stewards—not
to mention the branch secretaries and full time
officials—were men. They had far more in common
with male chargehands and foremen than the
women who were their members and fellow
workers. Many of them were hand-picked by
management and went for the union post as a step
up to foreman anyway. Which made the job of
supervision that much easier, because women were
held in check from both sides, management and
union.

This is not to say that shop stewards actually
gave orders about work, they were simply
unsympathetic and patronising and even the most
well-meaning and popular was so divorced from
women’s problems and experience, that he was
unusually and unwilling to represent their issues.

But women were hamstrung at another level too
for another aspect of management’s strategy of
control was the minute hold over the labour
process enforced by the application of
scientific management. This was the system,
developed by Taylor and Gilbreth in the USA at
the turn of the last century, of analysing and
standardising the increasingly specialised motions
of each job of the ‘detail labourer’, the product of
the increasing division of labour in the capitalist
mode of production.

In the Grand Tobacco Company, work study
and measurement were gradually introduced into
different factories as ‘experiments’ in the 1950s.
Before this, most jobs were paid according to a
simple piece-rate system, or time-rates with added
bonus schemes, depending on the nature of the
productive process. But this system was neither
efficient, nor productive enough: it allowed
workers too much freedom over how actually to
perform the job, and too much discretion as to
whether and when to work hard or not.

What the Proficiency Pay Scheme, or PPS,
introduced in 1965 meant to the individual worker,
was becoming tied to a particular grade which
dictated the exact rate of doing a job. To keep up,
demanded perfect ‘economy’ of movements; in
other words, not using one nerve, muscle or limb
which was not directly necessary to do the job. It
meant keeping part of the body still, and turning
arms, wrists, hands and fingers into a high speed
machine. Luxuries like turning the head to talk
or having a stretch, were only permitted if you opted
for a lower rate and lower pay grade, or if you were
a super-efficient machine.

Like all incentive schemes, the PPS was more
stick than carrot. A girl was allocated to or opted
for a particular grade or rate within one job. If her
output fell below the precise amount required over
a period of a month, she was downgraded, and
received the lower grade of pay for the next month,
regardless of any subsequent improvements. Only
after she had ‘proved herself’ over another month,
could she be reinstated to the higher grade;
meanwhile working at a highly intensified rate of
exploitation.

This threat of demotion hung over every girl
and secured her more tightly to her job than the
strictest supervision. PPS guaranteed stability of
output to the company, stability of earnings to
those who could keep up and stability of
downsizing to those who could not. It was a
brilliant device of super-exploitation, one which
only the poorest union organisation would let slip
through. It was the classic iron fist in the
velvet glove.

But in addition to these basic conditions of work,
the every day lives of the Redcliffe women were
circumscribed by other controls: the welter of
elaborate small-print in the ‘Rule Book’ which
affects the majority of factory workers, men or
women. There were basic conditions of
employment, like compulsory overtime, or flexibility
agreements between departments and even
branches of the Grand Tobacco group, which only
trade union organisation could challenge.

Thus Rule 27: ‘Any employee transferred from
one Department to another or from one of the
Factories of the Company to another (either
temporarily or permanently) must conform to the
Rules and the hours of work of the Factory in which
he or she is working for the time being.’

But there were other petty, personal rules. There
was Rule 7, against moving between departments
and ‘loitering on the staircases, in the corridors, at
the entrance doors or in the lobbies.’. There
was No 18: ‘No employee is allowed to enter any
lavatory or cloakroom except the one provided for
his or her use.’ There was No 15 the Right of
Search ‘Every employee is liable to be searched at
any time’—in case they smuggled out any tobacco.
And then there was the, in the circumstances, ironic
‘no smoking’ rule, No 9.

It was in the context of their general
powerlessness over the labour process, together
with the minute constraints over how they went,
that the Redcliffe women created their own shop
floor culture. Those elements of shop-floor life
directed at assuring informal controls over the
labour process, that 30 per cent of the day which
previous to PPS had been spent in various
strategies of restricting output, working to rule, or
‘going backward and forward’—were now gone.
But there were other formal controls which could
be broken, and were. Regularly.

They replaced the Rule Book, as far as
possible without conscious, deliberate
organisation, with an informal code of resistance to
being turned into machines, to boredom, to the
humiliation of being ordered around. Only they did this
within very tight limits, that is, conscious
cooperating with production. Whatever forms of
diversion, entertainment, intransigence, assertions of dignity
they adopted, tobacco rushed through their
fingers, into the endless packets and cartons while
the machines rattled on.

Among the younger girls, informal groups or
crowds were what gave shop-floor life its
distinctive flavour. There was a sharp contrast
between departments in which the girls remained
isolated or just in couples and those where they
‘mucked in together’. Collective confidence
completely transformed girls’ approach to each other,
their work and their supervisors. Far from the
hushed coyness of the couple, they could be as
brash and daunting as wild school girls, while in
some departments, notably the BUR (Baking-Up
Room, or machine-weighing room), the girls’
cliques gave rise to non-conformist, to the regular
practice of breaking and bending the rules.

Why the strong cliques developed among the
girls at Redcliffe is not a simple or academic
matter. There were workplace traditions and practices
which, once established, were hard to break. But one aspect of this process, was the way the immediate experience of their work situation pushed off onto the girls.

The BUR was the largest department of the factory, producing the popular A1 brand of hand-rolling tobacco. There were about sixty girls here, including nine crews of six each 'straight line' read, could scarcely spell, and was the property of her husband.

It was certainly an odd monster that one made up by reading the historians first and the poets afterwards—a worm winged like an eagle; the spirit of life and beauty in a kitchen chopping up meat. But these monsters, however amusing to the imagination, have no existence in fact.

What one must do to bring her to life was to think poetically and prosaically at once and the same moment, thus keeping in touch with fact that she is this Martin aged thirty six, dressed in blue, wearing a black hat and brown shoes, but not losing sight of fiction either—that she is a vessel in which all sorts of spirits and forces are conversing and flashing perpetually.

Virginia Woolf
A Room of One’s Own
Panther 60p

weighing machine. It was the machines which dominated—great clattering metal boxes cutting across the room, each producing its never ending stream of little gold packs down the moving belt to the labeller and wrapper. The noise was deafening. You had to shout to be heard. And there was something hectic about the little red lights blinking on the scales, and the frenzy of hands to keep up, fill and refill the tiny weighing buckets which were always ready for more.

Yet partly because of this brutal, rowdy atmosphere, there was a certain status about working here. It was big. This was the place for bravado and laughs, because you had to put up a fight to survive. And there was also the skill and pay of being a 'straight line' weigher. It took three months training to 'pass out' as a machine weaver, and if a girl managed the top grade she could earn close to the best woman's wage.

Ironic as it sounds, the BUR had a certain 'machismo' about it: the girls were tougher and tougher than the others. Though as we shall see, only in a certain, peculiar, feminine way. For supervision was male, and all encounters with authority were mediated by openly patriarchal and implicitly sexual relations. So the intrusiveness of the 'non-conformists' had its own quality, a combination of female defiance and coquetry, which gave the BUR its distinctive shop floor 'style'.

The two hand-packing rooms were much smaller, each employing only ten girls. They were quieter, because the tobacco was weighed on hand scales, and then hand packed. Girls could actually talk in normal tones. They were less harassed, because, although they worked to a grade, they were not tyrannised by an incessant, unyielding machine. They set their own pace. And because they were up against less, there was less need to build up resistance.

At the same time, they felt cut off physically from the majority of girls in the BUR, and because they were few, turned into a crowd, partly defensive inroverty. They worked quietly, 'serenely,' without aggression, teasing, laughter. But there was more to it than that. For, because they were 'easier' departments, and there was no machinery to superintend, they had women supervisors. There was none of the sexual innuendos and frolics of the BUR. Authority relations were more rigid, rather like a classroom in an all-girls' school except there were fewer discipline problems.

But in addition to the physical work environment a vital influence was what happened outside work. For wider social alliances and interests led inside groups, particularly as there was a traditional link between the factory and two local areas in Provincial. Many of the youngest girls came from the same schools, and carried on with their own old gangs, cliques and rivalries which overlapped with their work crowds. The stronger these all-female ties, the more collective spirit, self-assured, assertive and 'non-conformists' were the girls at work. Those who were isolated at home, were naturally quieter at work, and found it harder to gain entry into a gang.

But girls' non-conformity at work meant more than resistance to authority. It was also inspired by a general confidence with boys learned from their experience of female group solidarity. In groups, they did things that a girl on her own or with a friend would never dare: going to their own youth clubs and discos together were the least exceptional. But they also went to pubs, independently of boys, and what is more, dined them up. This is how one sixteen year old described a Saturday night:

"Jenny: 'At weekends, we go drinking, and when we're a bit pissed we all let ourselves go—go up to the blues, pinch their sandwiches, tease them like. Then they do the same to us. We end up dancing on the tables and things. It's a laugh.'"

While girls could be quite a dazzling, spectator together, in intimate relationships with boys, they acted differently: more passively. That kind of feeling was the privilege of the group, and disappeared when the crowd dispersed. Yet it did leave its mark, and taught the girls they could, by strength of numbers, subvert dolce, acquiescent femininity into frank boldness. Which at work turned into what the older women described as being 'generally defiant': mesing around, shouting across the department, talking back at their supervisors, being generally intransigent. This was undoubtedly infectious for others who, because they were 'courting' or 'married' were outside the age of girl gangs, joined in the collective spirit of the BUR.

The girls' resistance to authority ranged from sullen indifference to active provocation of authority. Living up to their reputation as dumb creatures of kids was the girls' best means of defiance, and succeeded in infuriating their supervisors, male and female. Quite often this was just to relieve boredom: messing around with the "rag" (tobacco or anything available like trollies or boxes, teasing, playing on each other's weak spots, anything that could produce a laugh."

Vol (BUR): "When we don't talk for two hours, 1
starts tormenting them, pulling the rag about, much about, sort of thing. I starts a row with the Irish, you know, I picks on them, only mucking about like. I don’t mean it. But I get so bored, I got to do something.’

‘Having a laugh’ is the way people survive work. Of course, it should not be idealized or exaggerated either. While the most serious at Redcliffe fooled around least of all, the others did not exactly roll around day. The overwhelming feature of factory life was drudgery; monotony and boredom; laughs only standing out as welcome exceptions.

But humour was important, among older women as much as younger girls. One of the favourite tactics of fun was subtly pushing unwritten factory rules to their limits, or exploiting the policy of permissive supervision. This happened in many different versions. Singing was supposedly forbidden. So the older women in the stripping room would have a sing-song, inviting their chargehand to join in and sing as loudly as possible. They had dirty songs—not as vulgar perhaps as men—but lascivious enough to make the male chargehand look very uneasy.

If laughs were rare in the hand-packing rooms, they did occur, especially when a ‘non-conformist’ from the BUR ‘stirred things up’. Great satisfaction was derived from being as rude and shocking as possible, provoking each other, and the female supervisor as far as she would go.

Cheryl: (giggles). ‘What do you think about polo?’
Anne: ‘Polo’.
Cheryl: (giggles up a pitch): ‘Yeh! The mint with the hole!’ (Upfear all round).
Jane: ‘Want a banana?’
(Scream.
Cheryl: ‘Ooh — a banana!’
Jane: ‘Can I have it peeled please?’ (Fits of laughter).

They then turn to Cheryl, whose face is burnt red by a sun lamp.

Irene: ‘You’ve got radiation.’
(They repeat this timelessly, in an upfear of hysterics. ‘Radiation! Only three weeks to the! Never mind, aye. What are you going to do?’
Cheryl: ‘I don’t want to be a virgin all my life.’ (A good minute’s uninterrupted ribaldry.)
Jane: (to the supervisor, calling from her desk): ‘I hope you’re talking in a proper manner up there, not being rude or anything.’

However, this was not nearly such good entertainment as flirting with men. Older women recalled how much more fun they had in the factory during the war, when they worked with the men.

Grace: ‘I worked with the young fellows then. We used to have more fun: they chased us, we chased them, used to gang up on each other, all sorts.’

Now there were only a few men who came up to the BUR from the dispatch departments. The machine operators and mechanics, and the supervisors. Men, especially young men, were a rarity. So the girls took every opportunity to flirt, giggle, tease, and get into playful pranks. But the men they were in most frequent contact with were their supervisors. And here was the catch. For sexual banter became something more than a laugh; it became the language of discipline.

Derek Brown (section chargehand, BUR): ‘You see, believe in a friendly basis. Believe in saying, “You help me and I’ll help you.” But the environment of the girls has changed. This permissive society — now these girls are changing with it. Well I’m afraid they’re not so mature, not so reliable as they used to be. That makes our job harder.’

The peculiar struggle over rules between supervises and girls was a complex, tense balance between confrontation and collaboration. Complex, because class control was mediated by patriarchal control, and neither side of the relationship could separate them. Tense because if either side went too far in the sexy word play, the girls’ flirtatious repartee turned to disrespect or the chargehand’s cuffing turned to obscene sexism. The rules of the game could snap.

As we shall see, supervision was a much more subtle exercise than it had been twenty years earlier. For, in addition to the swing to a more diplomatic approach, management had to contend with the fact that girls and women had become more confident at work. Times had changed.

The experience of the second world war was largely responsible. While we cannot analyse in any detail here the changes in working women’s consciousness from this period, four factors stand out clearly. First, the enormous demand for female labour during the war brought married women into the labour force on a large scale, and gave them the confidence of being indispensable to the economy and the war effort. Second, the very movement, together with ongoing concern over the birth rate, health and welfare since the 1930s, focused public attention and government policy on the family and women’s role in reproduction, again emphasizing women’s importance. Thirdly, the post-war boom increased the demand for women workers and put them in a much stronger position in terms of labour security than before.

And fourthly, because of this they became organized in trade unions on an unprecedented scale.

The relationship between such movements, and different sections of the working class, women in particular, is obviously complicated and uneven. While, for instance, some sectors became more organized than others, many remained backward in terms of trade union consciousness, like the Redcliffe women. Nevertheless, the changes had percolated through here too, and the women themselves recalled the contrasts between the days of old-style, heavy-handed discipline, and the subtler techniques of the 1970s. In those pre-war days, it made little difference if a supervisor was male or female, because a dragon was a dragon whatever sex. There was the case of ‘Black Boss’.

Grace: ‘Years and years ago, the forewoman, they used to call her Black Boss. She was a black overall. Everybody was frightened of the forewoman, and then some married women came back (after the war), and they cowed her down, and frightened her to death in the end. They used to shout out, “Here is Black Boss coming” wouldn’t have dreamt of saying that a few years before. But she had you right down, the forewoman. You couldn’t do this, do that. You couldn’t turn round. Well the married women got back and she couldn’t do that to them, so they turned round and told her to keep her head round the right way on.’

Anna: ‘Weren’t they frightened to lose their jobs saying that?’

Grace: ‘Well, not really. Because they had their husbands, or they’d just get another job. And they were older. I suppose. They’d been out in the world and they came back and weren’t frightened. They stuck up for themselves.’

At Redcliffe there were severe limits to the degree they could ‘stick up for themselves’ in an organized way. But on the shop floor, they
demanded the same standards of politeness from their male supervisors, as they did from their husbands at home. Indeed, they had greater collective strength here, than at home.

As for the younger girls, the comments of older women, both as parents of daughters and as coworkers, suggested that younger girls were more confident than they had been.

Grace: 'They're as good as you are, sort of thing.'

Edna: 'The younger generation, well, they're not defiant, but they used to be more cowed down. The younger lot got together, collective. Good thing you've only got one life, but it can go too fast sometimes.'

What was important to shop floor life, was the cross-fertilisation between these two types of confidence, the married women's and the 'youthful intragentic'. For whatever doubts and criticisms they held about the girls, the older women respected their pride, and even admitted they had learned from them.

Edna: 'I've got a married daughter of twenty-five. I talk to her more freely than I did to my own mother. I used to be told to be “seen and not heard”. Now I'm more independent than I used to be.'

It was certainly the young girls, particularly those of the BUR, who were hardest to handle 'successfully'.

Derek Brown (supervisor): 'You can talk to a mature woman. She accepts responsibility, talks more sense. Now these kids of today, they've got no sense of responsibility in themselves. I don't think you could handle them responsibly.'

So it was in this context of the 'permissive society' and 'acting like children' that appealing to the girls' sexuality was the most effective form of control if they fell for it. Which, to a large extent, they did. The relationships between the men and the young girls on the shop floor were sexist, the manner caviling, friendly faced with sexy, often personal jokes, freely putting hands on the girls' shoulders or hands as they worked, combining insult with flattery. And the girls chuckled. It was so much part of everyday shop floor life, it was hard to pin down.

One example will serve to illustrate. On one occasion, one of the BUR girls was 'messing around' and was wheeled off to a lift on a trolley by a young man. Everybody joined in the joke.

Grace: 'It weren't my fault (shriek!)

Derek Brown: 'What are you up to? It's your sexy looks that always does it.'

Husky laughter all round.

There was no way he could have broken up the general 'laugh' without antagonising the girls. So he diffused it with similar flattery, never even approaching the young man who was responsible. The girl returned to work, put in her place but instead of sheepishly acknowledging his authority, she went on giggling, as if to demonstrate she did not feel humiliated.

But it did not always work this way. Brown could sometimes fall victim to his own game, when the girls took advantage of the sexual innuendo, and used it as their own weapon. I was once politely reprimanded for chewing on the factory premises (no confectionery of any kind, Rule 16!) in front of the girls. It was a case of the supervisor demonstrating his authority. But up came one of the girls, loudly telling me not to take any notice, gave him a half motherly half sexy hug. He was stunned. Utterly undermined. And yet, he still chose self control in favour of confrontation, making a shrewd assessment of long term diplomacy and success. No risks could be taken with a group.

Calculation and manipulation were the currency of patriarchal control. Brown had each individual and each 'crew' measured up. His strain came from occasionally 'forgetting himself'. The girls likewise knew their strength and how far they could go. The Number 7 crew were a particularly bold and 'defiant' lot and if Brown interfered when they thought it was none of his business, they just shouted at him—'Get off—'leave us alone'(always half joking).

He would reply 'how don't you cock?', but they would all laugh. Some genuinely liked him: 'He's as good as gold, don't tell him, mind or he'll get big headed.' Others more cynically thought him 'soft', 'pitable'. You can do what you want with him'. Others sensed their weakness with him, thought him 'a two faced bastard' and kept quiet.

Because girls derived some enjoyment from these skirmishes, it was a successful way of keeping them in line. Their use of female sex appeal as a way of getting round their supervisors, or even realising against authority, was always a double edged weapon, which, in the long term, hurt them and nobody else.

For if they won momentary victories of self assertion, it was only by colluding with the conventional role of female sex object, and laid them open to sexist advances whether they were in the mood or not. And some clearly resented it, and had no means of expressing it, if, if they did they could be labelled humourless, as women's liberties', and got little support from the girls. Those who represented the whole manoeuvring approach of supervision knew from experience its seamy side.

Vil: 'You've got to be brave eyes in a factory, you know what I mean? Your face has got to fit or else that's it.'

Because they would not or could not join the repertoire and fit the parts of both workers and sex objects, they fell prey to arbitrary victimisation, not only for breaches of discipline or work standards but for failing to please.

Val: 'Well my face don't fit that's for sure. Like when you goes in the office to Ray Carter (the senior foreman), well, he looks at you as though you were nothing. As though he could spit on you. He says to me, "We could do without girls like you!" I hates him.'

Anna: 'Are you scared of him?'

Val: 'I ain't scared of him, but you can't do nothing much. can you? I don't want to lose me job yet. Waits till I leave. Tell him right off what I think then. (my emphasis).

The ultimate perniciousness of femininity as a weapon of shop floor resistance was in individualism and competitiveness. It worked only in the isolated occasion. Because it took the sting out of conflicts, its very success detracted from developing collective, organised strategies of struggle, which left the individual and the group helpless if it came to a crunch—like arbitrary victimisation, or redundancies. This, the management knew too well.

Many of the 'inconformists' fell into the trap of becoming the new type ideal female worker: The docile mouse was an anachronism. The new teetohopper and disco girl made equally amenable wage slaves. The tone of the constant references to the 'more relaxed atmosphere' and 'free and easy managers', the older women, who remembered the crudely authoritarian days of the factory, expressed uneasiness about the present. The young girls who
They know, whether love last but one brief span of time or for eternity, it is the only creative, inspiring, elevating basis for a new race, a new world.

In our present pygmy state love is indeed a stranger to most people. Misunderstood and shunned, it rarely takes root; or if it does, it soon withers and dies. Its delicate fibre cannot endure the stress and strain of the daily grind.

Its soul is too complex to adjust itself to the sticky wool of our social fabric. It weeps and moans and suffers with those who have need of it, yet lack the capacity to rise to love's summit.

Some day, some day men and women will rise, they will reach the mountain peak, they will meet big and strong and free, ready to receive, ready to partake, and to bask in the gold rays of love.

What fancy, what imagination, what poetic genius can foresee even approximately the potentialities of such a force in the life of men and women. If the world is ever to give birth to true companionship and oneness, not marriage but love will be the parent.

*Fannie Goldmann*

*Red Emma Speaks: Selected Writings and Speeches*

*Vintage Books*

had more fun in the past.

*Gracie:* "I don't think the youngsters are getting the fun we did."

*Maggie:* "I used to like it better before - there was a better atmosphere, more fun."

When the older women tried to argue that the younger generation were 'having a better time than they had', they never referred to this much haunted 'defiance', or freedom. It was always in terms of consumer spending.

*Gracie:* "These youngsters today are getting a much nicer time than we had, really. With their clothes and cars and pocket money."

These confusions and apparent contradictions were the result of genuine conflicts between beliefs and experience. They had partly swallowed the managerial propaganda that things were better than before. It fitted in with their view of the world as a happy partnership between capital and labour and everyone, from the company, to their own union magazines were telling them they were getting a better deal, more freedom and security than before. To this extent, they were incorporated in management ideology and its strategy of control.

Yet daily experience told them otherwise. They recalled the comparative flexibility of doing their jobs before Job Assessment and grading, and knew that they now worked far harder. They knew in every nerve and muscle the exhaustion of being tied to a machine rate or a grade. If they were told it was a 'holiday camp' by their supervisors, it felt more like a prison. And as for their improved status as workers, it was a change from slaves to children. They were told to be responsible and treat like second-class citizens. As women, they had to contend with a more sophisticated but no less powerful and patronising system of patriarchal control, than before.

What did they really believe then? Most knew quite clearly how they were being used at one level. They knew that they were workers, and bosses were bosses. They knew who had money and power. They were also conscious of their position regarding men, both in the factory and in the family. Did they push this into the background or reconcile it with their daily experience, because they were satisfied with it? Did they forget about it if they didn’t? Why did they not work out a coherent view of how they were controlled and manipulated now, and why it was more oppressive than before?

The question has no easy answer, because it is an old riddle. For those who are most successfully controlled and manipulated are, by definition the least conscious of how it happens. If the women knew they had less freedom than before, in spite of the tyrant’s likes Black Bess, they could not point to any one event or change and say—that was the moment things began going wrong. For the whole skill of successful management and worker incorporation is the smooth, invisible operation.

Things happened to the women, new agreements between company and union, job assessment, grading, new machines, factory re-organisations, new supervisors, new treatment—they all happened. They were cut out so entirely from their union that they knew nothing of the details of negotiation which led to these changes.

Lacking this experience, they could articulate the effects the changes had on them, but not map out what had led to them. They lacked a casual explanation of their experience which could begin to connect one ‘symptom’ with another. Their lack of a coherent picture of what was happening, their piece-meal experience of ‘unfair grading’ and ‘having to be blue眼睛’ meant no links were made between the two.

Control issues remained individual, personalised. This was not because nobody had stood up and delivered a lecture on the theory of Scientific Management, The Human Relations Approach, Pattearchy and Incorporation. It was because they had no concrete experience of organisation and personal involvement in collective struggle. This was why resistance to control remained at the level of shop floor culture and bore no relation to shop floor organisation. On its own, it posed no threat.
'Where then is that general “women question”? Where is that unity of tasks and aspirations about which the feminists have so much to say? A sober glance at reality shows us that such unity does not and cannot exist. In vain the feminists try to assure themselves that the “woman question” has nothing to do with that of the political party and that its solution is only possible with the participation of all parties and of all women; but as one of the German feminists has said, the logic of the facts forces us to reject this comforting delusion of the feminists.

Alexandra Kollontai, a leading Bolshevik woman had that to say of the Russian feminist movement over 70 years ago. It has been said by contemporary feminists that the criticisms that Alexandra Kollontai made of the feminist movement then cannot be applied today: Ails Holt has written ‘Some of the polemics in which Kollontai was involved may now seem irrelevant: bourgeois feminism is, for example no longer an influential organised force. But the attempt to dismiss Kollontai’s arguments as being of historical interest only is mistaken.

Today ten years after the modern women’s liberation movement began, many different feminist ideal have emerged. There are some differences between those who call themselves radical feminists and the socialist feminists, although there are also many trends between. But there are some questions on which almost all women in the movement are agreed. Their views bear similarity to those criticised by the Bolshevik women 50 years ago: revolutionary socialist organisations are male dominated and therefore uninhabitable for women; socialism on its own cannot bring women liberation; women will achieve their liberation only through independent self activity and by building an autonomous women’s movement across class boundaries. These are views of which socialist feminists of the tradition represented by the Socialist Workers Party are as critical today, as the Bolshevik women were at the beginning of the century.

It is not difficult to agree with feminists who say that socialist organisations are male-dominated. It is also true that those countries which today call themselves socialist are blatantly male-dominated and treat women in an unequal and unliberated way. It is equally true that the women’s liberation movement has shown us in practice that developing and discussing feminist ideas along with other women can be infinitely more inspiring and fulfilling than fighting to wed a feminist contribution into the agenda of the socialist party.

But to extend all this into a full-blown theory which denies the revolutionary party a central role in the struggle for women’s liberation and to claim that socialism on its own cannot bring women’s liberation, is both illogical and mistaken. Such views stem from a fundamentally misunderstanding about what socialism is and hence about the relationship between party, the working class and the struggle for women’s liberation and socialism.

Socialism, the emancipation of the working class, is the act of the working class. In a society divided into those who sell their labour-power, and those who exploit that labour power, only the working class itself has both the economic power and the need to change society and run it in its own interests. No one else can do that for us, however well-intentioned they may be.

Many reformist thinkers believe in what they call ‘socialism’ which is something that they give to workers. This kind of socialism handed down from
women in Germany led a women's movement over 200,000 strong. The movement grew out of the struggle for the vote and went on to lead opposition to the first world war. Its leaders were among the founder members of the German Communist Party.

Early socialist literature considered and developed theories about the role of women under capitalism. Marx and Engels linked the development of the family to the way economic relations evolved in a society. Bebel's book on Women and Socialism was so popular it ran into several editions and was to be found in almost every working class home in Germany.

Women like Alexandra Kollontai in Russia, and Clara Zetkin in Germany were leaders in the socialist movement. They campaigned for the women's question to be central to the socialist struggle. They built and urged all socialists to build women's organisations to bring socialism to women. And in their writings and their activities these early socialists always fought for the women's question to be taken up as a class issue. They battled furiously with those feminists who argued that women's liberation could be gained by organisation across the classes. They believed the struggle for women's liberation was part of the class war.

But this tradition of socialist feminism has largely been lost. Like the whole of the independent socialist movement it was smothered by the rise of Stalinism. For 50 years, as the Communist Parties held hegemony in the left in the west, socialism became the image of a happy worker in Russia struggling cheerfully to meet a production norm imposed from above, and women's liberation was what happened to Russian women. It was typified by the women in dungarees, driving a tractor into the sunset on a collective farm.

This Stalinist image of liberated womanhood was not a picture of emancipation at all. It was a picture of the women forcibly drawn into production outside the home in order to meet the needs of an expanding economy. The Right to Work is a necessary precondition for emancipation, but it is not in itself emancipation. That is illustrated well by what happened to Russian women.

When a shortage of skilled labour became apparent in the late 1920s there were no colonies from which Russian could draw extra labour. Women's work could be found within the existing population. So women had to become workers in the factories and the collective farms.

"On instructions from the Central Committee of the Party and the USSR Council of People's Commissars, a five year plan to bring 1,600,000 women into industry was drawn up in 1930. The plan was overfulfilled. Between 1929 and 1936 the number of women workers and employees rose by more than five million" (From Soviet Women, in Progress Publishers, Moscow 1975)

But this work did not emancipate women. At the same time as they went out from the homes to work individual housework was glorified rather than socialized. Abortion was made illegal. So was homosexuality. Parents were made responsible for the behaviour of their children. And the sexual liberation of the revolutionary period was wiped away with theories of sexuality that claimed too much sex detracted energy from the revolution.

But Russia stood for socialism in people's heads for well over 50 years, until, in the 50s the image was shattered. The building workers in East Berlin in 1954, the Hungarian workers in 1956, the Polish workers in 1970 poured onto the streets fighting
against the 'workers states'. In western Europe thousands of the disillusioned streamed out of the Communist Parties. Others joined new left organisations which were critical of the Russian leadership and defended its socialist nature. A very few dared to go further and say that Russia was not socialist at all, but a society that oppressed and exploited workers in much the same way as western society. The theory of state capitalism, first developed in the late 1940s, explained why this was so.

It was not just a neat intellectual argument. It had enormous implications for political activity. The motion that socialism was something built by the workers themselves led to a theory and a practice oriented towards workers' self-organisation. It meant the development of a rank-and-file perspective based on workers' democracy and shopfloor power. It was a powerful anti-reformist ideal which did not rely on the good offices of MPs or left trade union leaders, but rather placed reliance on workers' collective strength.

But women were left out of this perspective completely, except in so far as they were part of the working class. There was no attempt to deal with the specific problems of women's oppression and women's particular relationship to production in the way the early socialists (including Marx and Engels) had done. There was certainly no attempt to organise women for socialism.

It is difficult to explain exactly why. Undoubtedly it was in large part due to the male chauvinism of the small band of males who developed the ideas. There was no independent struggle by women in eastern Europe to join their chauvinism. But it may also have been due to reconciling the traditional socialist ideal with reality at the time.

The classes had argued for women's economic emancipation. That was what women in Russia appeared to have, and it contrasted badly with the swinging London of the 1960s, where women were freer than they had ever been. Mini skirts and contraceptives combined to move fantasy into reality. The Beatles sang about sex, the film stars did it on the screen. For a minicure socialist grouping to counterpose this novel and exciting socialist tradition would have been difficult.

Immense changes were happening in women's lives. These were leading into changes inside women's heads. Technology developed many gadgets which cut down the amount of time women spent in housework. Contraceptives were available readily to women of all classes. Better health meant that women spent fewer years in childbirth and child rearing. And at the same time capitalist boom was sucking women out of their homes and their traditional roles as reproducers, whisking them into the factories.

Black workers, white workers, women and men were needed to fuel the boom. Recruiting vans from Plessey and Ultra toured the working-class housing estates recruiting women to the factories. Day shift, evening shift, double day shift, part time, full time, anything so long as women would work. So women began to think of themselves as producers at work as well as producers of children. The increase of women in the labour force was to be a permanent one. In 1961 8,064,000 women were in the workforce. By 1968 that number had risen to 9,141,000, an increase of 45 per cent. Over 52 per cent of married women went out to work.

The boom affected women of all classes. The increased demand for skilled labour put more women onto the university production line than ever before as the Robbins Report on higher education was implemented. It led to new aspira-

tions, to conflicts with traditional roles. These conflicts were expressed in different ways by different classes.

As working class women at Ford, Dagenham exploded into a strike for equal pay in 1968, students and middle class women began to organise women's groups, discuss sexually discrimina-
tion, protest against the end to discrimination based on sex. The different classes expressed their ideas with different actions. But the actions reinforced each other across the classes into a consciousness that women of all classes wanted change.

Socialist women went to women's liberation conferences and blew their minds. Socialist men tagged the embryonic women's movement as diversionary, or sniggered bawdy jokes about bras and lesbians. But the movement survived the jeers of the media and of the left. A movement was among the movement's early partici-
pants. It was perhaps the presence of these very women which led the movement to an early emphasis on demands for equality at work, and for the need to involve working-class women.

We were conscious of our middle class backdrops and because we were of the left we had a strong, although sometimes confused, notion of the need to involve working-class women. The struggles of women workers were viewed as important and inspiring. Women strikers were invited to speak at conferences and were warmly received.

The theme of the women's movement was the struggle against oppression, but as well as picketing Miss World and trying to stop the show that degraded all women, we also tried to bring trade unionism to unorganised women workers.

The Night Cleaners' Campaign, a saga of several years duration, was carried by socialists in the women's liberation movement. We went night after night into London's office blocks signing up women into the union, organising pickets and strikes. Determination kept us going when the wise men of the left asserted that it was a hopeless task. We proved the wise men wrong when the women were finally organised into a union.

But women's liberation remained a small and largely isolated struggle from the struggles of working-class women. Ideas about equality were being raised by all classes of women, but only a few individual women workers joined the movement. Feminism supported the struggles of working class women with messages of solidarity and money for the strike funds. But it had no strategy for winning the strikes, or for effectively combating the day-to-day pressures in the lives of working class women.

It was only when feminism and working class women came together that an effective intervention could be organised in the struggle of women workers. Feminism on its own could not do that because the women's movement had never had such a class-oriented perspective.

Two equal pay strikes in 1974 really illustrate the difference. One was a strike by women engineering workers at the SEI factory in Oldham, the other a strike by a similar group of women engineering workers at Wingrove Rogers in Merseyside. The Oldham women gained great support from the women's movement. Publicity, collections and large support meetings were organised. But the women's movement, like the local trade union official, regarded the strike as a separate women's struggle. No effective support was organised from other workers. There was little pressure to stop the men workers from scabbing on the strike. Blacking was promised but never organised. There never effective rank and file organisation at picket line.
level. The strike lost.

But in Merseyside events took a different turn. Those who visited the picket line believed in women's liberation, but they were active rank-and-file trade unionists as well. They advised the women to make a call for blacking. Support was organised from other workers to successfully prevent the men workers from scabbing on the strikers. They called me a right-wing capitaliste, and you a foreign devil of an imperialist! They are lauing at your clothing and your hair and your eyes," he explained.

On one occasion of us sat at the entrance of an old family temple in the empty stone halls of which we had piled our netted camp cots. On the other side of the canal rose the high walls of a factory, which soon began pouring forth black-clad girl workers, each with her tin dinner pail.

All wore wooden sandals which were fastened by a single leather slip across the toes and which cluttered as they walked. Their glossy black hair was combed back and hung in a heavy braid to the waist. At the neck of the neck the braid was caught in red yarn, making a band two or three inches wide—^a lovely splash of colour.

As they streamed along lines over the bridge into the canal and past the temple entrance, I felt I had never seen more handsome women.

Agnes Smedley Portraits of Women in the Chinese Revolution Feminist Press

strike, the Merseyside district of the AUEW promised a one-day strike in support of the women. They won their claim for equal pay.

The nature of the outcome of the strikes was due not to the difference between the air, or even the trade union officials in Merseyside and Manchester. It was due to the way the rank and file, organised themselves and their fellow workers. Self-organisation and feminist demands alone won the day.

The overall lack of a perspective for women's liberation which could draw working class women into the women's movement began to demonstrate those who were concerned about women workers, but failed to understand their absence in the movement. Feminisation led to some changes of emphasis and activity in the women's movement. At the same time developments in the economy itself were leading to changes in ideology about women in society at large.

By the mid 1970s the boom was over. The ideological weapons with which the ruling class divide workers one from the other were brought out of the bosses' armoury, as is the custom during economic downturns. Racism increased. Simultaneously there was a resurgence of ideas that treated women in their traditional role of producers of children tied to the home.

The tendency of capital to employ the cheapest labour possible meant that women remained in the labour force. But the change in ideology encouraged them to think of themselves as reproducers rather than producers.

The women's movement's initial reaction was to go on the offensive. So when the ideological attack manifested itself in a proposal to reverse the 1967 Abortion Act, the women's movement called on women and trade unionists of all classes to defend their rights. Thousands turned out on the streets to defeat the Benyon Bill. Other responses to the ideological attack led to the growth of Women's Aid and Rape Crisis, defending and helping women to be independent and un molested.

But an undercurrent was already developing which rejected the early aggressive stance of the women's liberation movement with regard to equal rights with men. Calling itself 'radical' it in fact represented a concession to the pressure to regard women as reproducers rather than producers.

It is not represented here by a statement from a recent article in Spare Rib by a radical feminist: In the past the stresses have been on the struggle for my head, and seemingly among feminists generally increasing to see women's functions as fine and good and wanting to reclaim them—to find out how they would be in a woman loving environment. This brand of feminism's verbal radicalism conceals a belief that women should remain in their traditional role the earners and carers of children.

The rhetoric of this position rejects the socialist alternative by alleging that men are inherently oppressive of women. But it caters only for those women who have the money and the leisure to work at enjoying being mothers. It is elitist as well as reactionary.

Many socialist feminists, although they reject this current, have been influenced by it. The belief that socialism and the socialist party are too male dominated to bring women's liberation stems from the same belief about the basic nature of men. Using the same ideas, but marxist jargon, some socialist feminists (notably Sheila Rowbotham) have rejected a class perspective in favour of reformist feminism and separatism.

Right across the feminist movement observers have pointed to the way that women are being driven back into the home by the downturn, and have condemned the unwillingness of the traditionally male-dominated trade union movement to do anything about this.

The picture is not as simple as that. Unemployment is rising among women, but so too is the overall number of women in employment. In fact there is an overall increase in the number of women in the permanent labour force, employed and unemployed. In 1968 the number of women in employment was 8,484,000 and had risen to 9,149,000 by 1978, an increase of 7.9 per cent. Unemployment rose among women by seven per cent between 1968 and 1978. Women are now 30 per cent of all the unemployed.

So while women are under ideological pressure to think of themselves as reproducers, more of them are at work as producers than ever before. Strikes for union recognition, Greenwicks most well known among them, show that women are still on the offensive as workers despite the increased influence of the ideas that encourage them to think...
individually about their problems in isolation from the rest of their class.

But much of women workers' potential has been undermined by the tendency to regard women's struggles as sectional rather than as part of the general working class fight against the bosses. In 1976 women at Trico's went out on strike for equal pay. When they won after 19 weeks on strike in the face of scabbing by male workers, many hailed it as a victory. The strike gave Trico women equal pay, but it undermined the confidence of other women. Five months at the factory gate was a tremendous price to have to pay for equal pay, and it undoubtedly made tribunals a more attractive prospect than shop floor action for other women aspiring to equal pay.

At the same time Trico's was being fought another strike for equal pay was being won which shows how women united within the rank and file can win and encourage others. In April 1976 women at Dublifiers engineering factory in Kirkby came out for six per cent and equal pay. The men continued working apart from the convent who found himself the only man on the picket line. He want back into work crossing the picket line for three days until he persuaded his workmates to support the women. Together they won the claim for equal pay. The men's action had not led to an increase in their own pay, but it had pointed the way for a feminist rank-and-file perspective, cutting across the divisions within the working class.

Where struggles by working-class women are isolated and separated from the rest of the rank and file, they are weakened. But where they are united they are strengthened. This applies only to those struggles by women at work, but to those at home too.

The women who organised against the high cost of heating on the Glantaff estate in Penypridd enlisted the support of the local mineworkers branch in their attempts to force the council to change the heating installations. The experience was revolutionary in that as one of them told Socialist Worker it made them feel not like isolated housewives, but as part of a wider movement and therefore stronger. Rank-and-file feminism is not just for those with work. It is a way of using the economic power of organised workers for all sections of the class.

Women are being attacked ideologically and economically. These attacks must be fought in an integrated way because they affect the whole of women's lives—both at work and in the home. This requires a perspective which sees the necessity of fighting both the women's oppression, organising events like Reclaim the Night marches, and of organising against the attacks on women as workers. One is not more important than the other. They are both part of the same struggle.

To be effective these struggles must be fought in the context of a class perspective which understands the system as a whole and the divisions within it. The separation of women's issues from a wider perspective only weakens the fight. Women united with the rest of rank and file are strong. We organise to build women's self-confidence and aspirations. We also organise for an understanding of our oppression as women and its problems. We founded and developed Women's Voice to this end. But this is not a separate struggle. It is a struggle that will enrich and broaden the struggle for socialism with women's experiences.

We are fighting to extend those basic principles of socialism, of workers self-organization, to all sections of the rank and file. This will best be done by an organised political leadership which sees the need to organise and extend the organisation and experience of the class as a whole. It cannot be done spontaneously. To win, all the struggles and all the aspirations of the working class must be integrated into a theory and an organisation that will cut across the divisions within the class. Women must be a part of that organisation.

To support it is not enough. We must work to integrate our demands into the centre of that movement. Not to do that is to condemn ourselves to the fate of our Iranian sisters who fought alongside men for the Shah to leave, but then had to lobby their own movement for women's rights. Because these had never been a vital and central part of the overall movement.

The struggle to integrate women's demands is a struggle from within the movement. It cannot be won from the outside, by organising women alone. The male chauvinism of socialist men and of the working class will only be defeated by joint political debate and joint political action. It will not be defeated by isolation from the sidelines. It's not an easy battle— but then what revolution ever was?

As Rosa Luxemburg said at the founding meeting of the German Communist Party in 1918, 'Socialism will not be created by decrees but will be accomplished by any government however socialist. Socialism must be created by the masses, by every proletarian. Where the chains of capitalism are forged, there they must be broken.
15 years ago, beyond discussion around a few feminist books imported from America, an Italian women's movement hardly existed. Today, it has become the expression of a radicalism that has permeated the whole of the Italian Left. In its short history, it has challenged the structures of the political organizations from which it originated. It has left them self-critical and, in some cases, torn apart. It has pushed to the forefront the slogan 'the personal is political' and with it, a whole new reappraisal of political orientation and organization.

It has radically questioned the family and the couple, and vociferously asserted a woman's right to self-determination, about her body and her role in society. 'Women, we have to change everything' was the slogan shouted on the abortion demonstration in Rome in 1975, the high point of the movement, and this radicalism has characterized the movement from then on.

However, now, the movement is beginning to realize that it is not enough to unite women in order to be strong. More often than not, consisting of students, intellectuals and only some white-collar workers, the movement has remained closed to wider layers of working women. Instead of women's liberation, we have obtained the emancipation of ourselves, of only a few of us, admitted even Effe (a women's liberation magazine something like Spare Rib) and certainly this feeling of isolation from the 'real struggle' is leading many of the feminist collectives to question their political role.

Furthermore, when last year, the movement was criticized for its incapacity to mobilize around the restrictive abortion law passed in May, it is clear that it was not only a problem of relating to wider social layers of women, but also one of incapacity to intervene effectively in trade unions and political organizations, even on women's questions. This 'ghettoization' threatening the Italian women's movement springs partly from the specific political situation of the Italian Left from which it was born. But it is also the result of a more general: conscious, political orientation, which we, socialist feminists in Britain, should draw the lessons from.

First, it is important to point out that the specific oppression confronting Italian women is qualitatively worse than that in Britain, and remains one of the most backward in Europe. Feudal and patriarchal customs continue to exist, with the law, in some cases, looking kindly on men who beat their wives—or even kill them in the case of 'adultery'. As in most Catholic countries, there is a tendency for men to regard women either as the 'madonna', to be married, made mother and respected, or as the 'prostitute', to be desired but despised.

In the case of Italy, 20 years of fascist dictatorship left the family rigidly authoritarian and the father with the unquestioned right to assert himself over the other members. Also, the comparatively recent urbanisation in Italy has meant that the peasant traditions of the primary of the family have very much persisted: very often fathers and grandfathers of young women today are themselves peasants. This petty bourgeois emphasis on the household-haven has meant that even today, the proportion of Italian women working in regular jobs is one of the lowest in Europe.

It was against this heavily patriarchal background that, in the 1960s, Italian women, as elsewhere in the developed countries, entered the boom of higher education. In Italy, however, despite the growing restriction of job openings, the intake of students university in Italy is nowhere near as selective as British universities are) continued at a rate comparable only to France, and even as unemployment increased.

With practically no grants offered to students, women entered university while trying to find jobs; thus they were experiencing not only the world outside the protected Italian home but also the economic hardship of being a proletarian. Large numbers of them were being given the access to education and culture; at the same time they were being denied the material privileges, at university and after, that would have tied them to the values of the ruling class.

The struggles of the workers and students in 1968-69 saw, therefore, women entering the
political arena in large numbers for the first time. Although some feminist groups had been set up previously (as, for example, the Milanese group Demai -Demistification of Authoritarianism, founded in 1966), it was largely into the growing groups to the left of the Communitarian Party that many of the women students flowed. In fact, even after 1969—unlike in other countries where an independent, well-organized women’s liberation movement was developing—the women’s movement in Italy was still in embryo, with many Italian women entering political struggle first and foremost as militants of the various far-left groups. This fact is important since it explains the virulence with which the feminists would later attack these organisations for their disregard of women’s questions and the women’s subsequent total disillusionment with male-dominated structures of any kind.

It was only really the divorce referendum in 1974 that propelled the movement forward towards an identity of its own. Although the Right’s attempt to abolish the law was quickly and opportunistically seized upon by the reformists it was also the occasion for the feminists to push women’s issues to the fore and raise sexual politics within the circles of the Left. In fact, so quickly did the confidence of the movement grow that, by December 1975, the women were calling for their first big national demonstration ‘for women only’.

This, however, was to mark not only the height of the confidence of the women’s movement, but also the beginning of a long and bitter battle between the women’s movement and the organisations of the revolutionary Left. For, at this women-only demonstration, Lotta Continua (LC), with 40,000 militants, one of the biggest organisations on the Left, refused to accept the exclusion of one of the women’s groups that it even claimed that Donna was ‘a paper of the women’s movement, and in no way connected to DP, even though the paper was originally financed and printed by them.

The women’s militancy decision to set up an ‘autonomous’ movement was then, not only done with the tacit approval of the organisations concerned, but seems also to flow directly from the organisation of the organisations themselves. The AO leaders stated in 1975: ‘the historical role given to the working classes by Marx is fulfilled today, developed in other social groups’. In other words, other social groups, whether it be women or other groups of the ‘movement’, are seen to have the same revolutionary potential as the working class, and as such should organise independently.

‘Dissolving in the movement’ becomes thus the recognition of the non-centrality of the working class and a conscious political choice. In the case of AO and I.C., the origins of this politics spring largely from the Maoist tradition of these groups, where the ‘revolutionary class’ is seen, not as workers, but as a vague entity—the ‘masses’—or the ‘movement’.

Thus the Italian women’s overriding claim to autonomy becomes not only the justifiable recognition of the need to organise independently because of the specific nature of women’s oppression, but also, with their inherited ‘populism’, a political analysis that advocated their independence as a social bloc. Of course, populist politics alone, do not explain fully the emergence of an autonomous women’s movement in Italy; they are however an important factor, and one to be remembered when attempts are made to slot the ‘autonomous’ argument into a British context. Certainly, it is this that has led the women’s movement in Italy to reject feminism as being too worker-oriented (as, indeed, have revolutionary organisations) and to move towards radical feminist positions which deny the centrality of the working class.

This fact is reflected in the forms of organisation
that the Italian women's movement has predominantly adopted up to now. These have
mainly been women's collectives (collettivi) which have sprung up all over Italy, of which the most
famous are Via Cherubini in Milan and Via del
Governo Vecchio in Rome. While many of them
have tried to intervene with women on estates, or
provided women's information centres, many of
them have also found themselves becoming
primarily consciousness-raising groups whose
interpersonal relationships and life-styles are
discussed.

Others have tried to provide an abortion service
which is still only very inadequately provided by
the state. Women, in these centres, have often found
that they end up having very little contact with the
women they abort and even, that providing the
service makes less urgent the demand on the state
to provide free abortion.

In some cases, groups have taken a radical anti-
men stance and refused to admit men to any of their
activities whatsoever. In others, remnants of the
problem of what is called 'double militancy' (i.e.
local groups who assert their claims against the
state because they are a male) have often led to a
total disenchchantment with working in political
organisations at all.

The 19 May edition of Donna summed up just
how removed from participation in politics many
of the women have become. In its only short
article on the elections, Donna calls for a 'cynical
anti-institutional vote' that will not delegate our
struggle to any party and blindly lumping the
Communist Party together with the new left, never
once mentions the importance for women to vote
against the Christian Democrats: 'Elections are
according to Donna merely a time of courtship for
them and time of separation for us'.

Many other women, however, are expressing
the need for more political intervention, and
particularly the need to organise women in the
trade unions. Despite women's issues having been
voiced and raised, the actual status of Italian
women in society, at home and at work, has seen
virtually no change over the past ten years.

Unionisation as a whole in Italy is lower than in
Britain, but women trade union members are
virtually non-existent in many industries. The
Unione delle Donne Italiane (UDI), originally the
women's section of the Communist Party, and once
spurred by the feminists as being ineffectual, is
beginning to take the lead around women in the
union. Four years ago, the UDI virtually lost all
credibility, so much so that on an abortion
demonstration last year, the few women from UDI
in the march held banners which read: 'we're from
UDI but we support you!'

Now unless other groups to the left of the CP
offer an alternative, and the UDI does not grow again, it will be the suffering the lack of
activity coming from other areas of the
movement. As one woman bank clerk from Reggio
Emilia told me: 'I want to get our women organised in my bank and the collectives can't help me. So I
think I'll have to join UDI even though I don't go
along with the Communist Party'.

If trade union militants are looking to UDI,
other women are beginning to look to immediate
all-out armed struggle against the state. Not that
the Brigate Rosse type organisations have even the
vaguest shred of feminism in their themes on
'revolution tomorrow'; merely that such groups
go for an immediate outlet to the frustrated student
energy stored up over the less spectacular years
since 1969. The numbers of women involved in
such groups must be small.

However, they are significant enough to have
been the subject of a recent conference on violence
at the Via del Governo Vecchio in Rome, where
violence was interpreted ambiguously as being
both violence against women and the need to
counteract it with violence. Whatever the case, it is
clear that frustration with the ghettoisation of the
collectives must make even the insane option of
permanent armed-struggle appear a more attractive
one.

There have also been attempts to organise from
sections of women hithe outside the 'women's
movement' as such and which the movement has
failed to integrate. For example in Milan last year
a group of working-class women spontaneously set
up a Mothers and Women's Anti-fascist Committee.
Two of their sons had been killed by a fascist squad.
In the climate following the Moro kidnapping only a few days before, the fascists had no
fear of thought that the murders would be drowned
in the rising wave of anti-terrorism. But these
women fought back. They proved that they could
organise. They claimed to be part of the struggle not through sitting around in
consciousness-raising groups, but taking to the
streets, lutteting the markets and organising their
areas against further fascist attacks.

One 50-year old woman put their case in a
nutshell: 'From on now, we're going on the streets
with our sons. And not only when there's a death
and a funeral. We've got to be in the everyday
struggles—the struggles for the hundreds of problems of their and our existence: unemployment,
black labour, rising prices and all the rest'.

(Expresso April 1978)

It is particularly this emphasis on the need to
intervene as women in everyday struggles that the
orientation of the women's collectives misses out
on. As a result the collectives find themselves
ghettoised and pushed outside the mainstream of
political activity. In their plea for autonomy from
political groups or even from a political strategy,
they inevitably find themselves marginalised from
struggles altogether. For 'autonomy' whether it be
for women or for marginalised groups, by rejecting
any notion of structured organisation, rejects also a
political analysis capable of inserting itself as a
movement into the general working-class struggle
of which it is part.

Many of the women of the Italian women's
movement do claim to be socialists and do see
the need for revolutionary politics in their struggle
as women. But without the organisations to the left
of the PCI taking any lead in the women's struggle,
without them fighting for women's politics inside
and outside their organisations, without them
attempting to break the women's movement out of
its ghetto, they cannot claim to be revolutionary
parties.

Similarly, as long as the women in the movement
who are revolutionaries continue to proclaim
autonomy as being the only way out of the male
chaos in the organisations, they will fail to
offer anything but a personal and individual
solution to many women, who, like the Milanese
mothers, are asking for much more. Ironically,
from their revolutionary stance of four years ago,
they now find themselves offering no more than the
reformists, since 'autonomy', as the experience of
the last few years, ends up being at best an
accommodation to capitalism, and not the
challenging of the system itself. Socialist feminists
in this country should learn from the Italian
experience that this is what 'autonomy' means.
Hooray for Hollywood?

Hollywood symbolises manipulation for many socialists. The usual response to "let's go to the flicks" is muttering about "escapist nonsense" and the "new opium of the people". The accusation that movies short-circuit workers' frustration is, almost as old as the cinema itself.

"You may have three halfpence in your pocket and not a prospect in the world; but in your new clothes you can stand on the street corner, indulging in a private daydream of yourself as Clark Gable or Greta Garbo, which compensates you for a great deal", wrote Orwell in The Road to Wigan Pier.

Certainly, the ruling class does not survive by naked force alone; it still front-page news in many countries when the army guns down people in the streets. The belief that nothing can change for the better, that what we've got is what we deserve, the cause of defeat you hear in the busineses and the Tesco check-out, is really more important to the bosses than the CS gas and the TSS.

Films, along with literature, the press, TV and pop-music are dominated by pessimism. The ways in which people act, their expectations about wealth, marriage and happiness are shaped by the culture around them; how many housewives feel guilty because they are not as glamorous as the women in the adverts and how many American kids died in Vietnam with John Wayne's celluloid blessings.

But Hollywood isn't the monolith it seems. Even in the 1930s, when Fred Astaire was dancing around impossible Art Deco palaces and Stalin's Russia was used as an amusing backdrop for Garbo's Ninotchka, movies were appearing like Blockade which supported the Spanish Republic and Dead End which sympathised with its heroines' involvement in industrial protests. Even President Roosevelt legalised union membership in 1933. A year later, unions of actors and screenwriters were formed, beginning six years of bitter action to secure recognition.

The successes of fascism prompted a committee of Hollywood employees, including Dashiel Hammett, then a screenwriter, to organise aid for China and Republican Spain. Screenwriters, including Dorothy Parker (who wrote John Waymes' first successful film Stagecoach) founded the Anti-Nazi League in 1936. This organisation exposed the Nazi German-American Bund, demonstrated against Leni Riefenstahl and Mussolini's son, and picketed the Joe Louis-Max Schmeling fight.

These achievements and the thriving Hollywood Communist Party had been enough to prompt the McCarthy investigations in the late 1940s. These stunts against radio and film-makers were unemployed for years. The typical Hollywood film of the 1950s and the 1960s evicted middle class values: blissful marriages of handsome young executives and Doris Day wives, set in expensive vulgar apartments.

So why have films like Rocky and Saturday Night Fever both pleased by working-class characters, been box office smashers? The unions have appeared again in FIST, Blue Collar and the as yet unreleased Norma Rae. After decades of war, working-class concerns are being depicted in Hollywood films again. Rocky was the first of these films and it is a simple success story in the classic mould. With guts and grit you too can be a contender. Its optimism is, like the leftist, in contrast to the bleakness of its post-Watergate contemporaries. This no doubt contributed to its financial success. The turn to workers as hero-fodder may also have something to do with the scarcity of traditional beefsteak amongst the cocaine-sniffing, easy living ruling class.

Encouraged by Rocky's box-office takings, Saturday Night Fever followed. It combined music and dancing with a background of gangwar, racial tension, dead-end jobs, and male contempt for women. It depicted a violent urban life, eased by drugs and disco. The film's happy ending, as Tony moves upward into Manhattan as hollow as its Bee Gees soundtrack.

These films are both fantasies on working-class themes and add little to our awareness of life in moderorsociety; they use unemployment, poverty, urban decay as a picturesque backdrop for conventional stories. Women's Rights serials with street credibility. But their popularity is not all depressing. It suggests that the movie goer is interested in the tensions and issues in post-Vietnam, post Watergate America.

The smug optimism of the 1960s had collapsed: it's hard to believe that wealth will just steadily increase as the X millennium passes. Tony's repressive check and the hippy-dream turned into the Manson nightmare. There seems a desire to relocate values in the rubble of the American Dream. These films, by returning to the basics of life (work, home, the bar) are part of that process.

The opening up of Hollywood has produced a spate of liberal films on women, Vietnam, and has granted critical acclaim to Harlan County. It has also permitted trade unionism to again become an acceptable subject. If these films would have been financed or released five years ago.

Both FIST and Blue Collar are realistic in that the day to day features of working class life are accurately recorded. They both present work as oppressive and there is no trace of the 'dignity of human labour' myth, which still lives in right-wing culture.

Set in the Checker Cab plant in Detroit, Blue Collar portrays work as unrelentingly grim; if the big corporations had allowed the film crew into one of their works the picture would have been even grimmer. Checker produces 50-60 vehicles each day! Ford produces that number each hour.

This realism hints at problems and issues close the the socialists' heart: the corruption in the unions, the inaccessible leadership, the inadequacy of the 'he-man' image, the futility of individual revolt and the violence of the police.

Neither of these two films has an overall cohesive message; neither suggests any solutions in the way that, say, The Grapes of Wrath advocated a return to goodwill and friendship. They leave the question open.

Perhaps it is this openness that has angered the left and brought down its disapproval: where is the call for a rank and file movement? For a reversal of the SWP card in every copy of Capital? The films show unresolved tensions because they reflect the unresolved class war.

How can FIST end happily? What if the characters' insurrection storms the White House? The men in Blue Collar treat women as they patronise their wives and use them as they use the unions. The film is about the film's depiction of them as mere objects, in their main functions. They could somehow find some non-sexist style, the film would become absurd, since this option does not exist for workers at large.

Realist films present problems which should be the concern of the left: they show what we should be talking about in the class. If we were a stronger, more working-class socialist movement, with the basic ideas about exploitation and oppression alive in the minds of hundreds and thousands of people, our conclusions would be drawn

Workers would adopt their own 'messages', as the pull of socialist ideas produced an entirely different audience reaction. FIST would not be just another film about the left, but one which leads up to a film about workers, a film which shows union leaders out of control. The audience and its ideas determined what a film represents culturally, as much as the intentions of its producers.

FIST is true even for The Deer Hunter, which uses the audience sympathy with the heroes to obscure the reasons for the US presence in Vietnam. As our views were as current as, say, the Communist Party's in Italy. The Deer Hunter's glib presentation of life would fall on sceptical eyes. It is a sign of our isolation that the outright leftist that film go unchallenged and that our assumptions about imperialism are not shared by viewers at large.

Realism is one of our cultural allies, not an enemy. We shouldn't sit back waiting for films which 'depict the working-class as it is'. Not more talk about the evils of the capitalist system, please! But try to expand the insights that films contain about workers' lives. This means that our reviews should be seen not as 'tellers' but as important statements and debates about politics in the broadest sense.

Audiences are stirred and unsettled by films as powerful as Blue Collar and The Deer Hunter, just as people were by the Hoover Report series. Let's not lose these opportunities to get across our case: Hollywood only manipulates if we let it.

Paul Cunningham.
Accidents happen

The Explosion
Hans Heinrich Ziemann
New English Library 64.95
The Prometheus Crisis
Thomas N Scortia and Frank M Robinson
Pan 80p

The development of widespread opposition to nuclear power is a comparatively recent phenomenon, yet nuclear power, its development and consequences, is a subject which has from time to time exercised the minds of science fiction writers.

As long ago as 1940, Robert Heinlein considered the dangers of a nuclear reactor going critical in his short story "Wakons Hayacinth". Lester del Rey developed the theme in 1956 in his novel "Nerves" which described an accident at a nuclear power plant. But there the interest seemed to die, not to revive until the early 1970s.

And perhaps this wasn't so surprising since in the late 1960's, nuclear power was being sold as the only large-scale source of energy available to replace the declining fossil fuels. The early 1970's saw a return to the theme by Kit Pedler and Gerry Davis in their novel "Brumark" (sadly out of print) and both "The Explosion" and "The Prometheus Crisis" are in the same mould, owing much to the growing feeling that nuclear power is not quite what those who sell it would have us believe.

Both novels use much factual information, most of it readily available from governmental sources, and it only requires a little imagination to develop stories which are far from incredible.

Once read, it becomes difficult to believe that nuclear power is really as safe as its defenders claim, that bodies like the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate really have things under control, and that the frequent accidents at plants like Windscale are not just "isolated incidents, well within acceptable limits".

So what are we to make of these offerings? Unfortunately "The Explosion" is in hardback and expensive, but it should be available in your local library and is worth reading.

Set in West Germany, significantly one of the most ambitious countries in the present development of nuclear power, it concerns the opening of Helios, the largest nuclear power plant in the world, a successful attempt to sabotage it, and the consequences for West Germany and Europe.

In spite of the security precautions which are shown to be pretty useless in reality the plant is easily sabotaged. The man who plants the bomb can best be described as an ecological activist, heavily influenced by the pacifist ideas of Bertrand Russell.

His aim in sabotaging the plant is not to destroy it but to show how easily a bomb can be planted and to use the incident as a focus for opposition to the development of nuclear power in general.

Contrasted to the attempt, eventually successful, of an individual to take on the nuclear menace are the attempts by local people to organise opposition and the response of the authorities to this.

In this the plant represents more than just an input to the national grid. It just happens that the local political bosses own the land on which the plant is built and that, more than the energy the plant will eventually produce, colours their attitude to the opposition and their crude attempts to crush it.

The sabotage attempt is successful but goes wrong. While one of the bombs is being removed it explodes and destroys the electronics which control the reactor. A meltdown follows and a huge cloud of radioactive dust and gas starts to drift across West Germany towards Frankfurt.

The remainder of the book concentrates on the response of the Federal authorities to a nuclear catastrophe. Attempts to decontaminate people in the immediate vicinity prove futile and in the mounting chaos, the decontamination squads are withdrawn and the people left to die.

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Inside the Nazi state

Economy and Class Structure of German Fascism

A Sohn-Rethel

CSE Books, £6.00

This is an extremely interesting book, but it is not one that I would wish to recommend to the general reader. If you are interested in the detailed economic relationships between the Nazis and German big business, you will find in this book a number of very provocative arguments and some surprising information. If, on the other hand, you want a general account of the subjects that the title suggests, you will not find it. Unfortunately, I do not know of any other Marxist source that you will find it from.

Much of the interest of the book arises from the peculiar situation of the author and original purpose behind writing the essays which make up the book. A Sohn-Rethel is a very distinguished Marxist, who was born in Germany but has lived in England for a great deal of his life.

In the early 1930s, while a secret communist, he organised a major agency of German big business. He was on the editorial board of what was, at all intents and purposes, the 'internal bulletin, for sale to members only' of the major German capitalists. He thus saw at first hand a great deal of the secret politicking which preceded the Nazis coming to power in 1933.

Incredibly, he managed to remain undetected in this post for three years until the Gestapo got too close and he was forced to flee to Britain.

Even more remarkable is the fact that the book was based on essays written at the request of Wickham Steed, former editor of The Times, who used them in his political alliance with, of all people, Winston Churchill.

What that ignorant old butcher of workers and peasants made of this particular example of Marxism we are not told.

In many ways, the book is a model of Marxist analysis. It moves very easily from complex theoretical questions to analysis of concrete situations and contains many valuable insights at both levels. Among the numerous questions it touches on are the nature of the imperialist needs of German big business, the way in which different productive techniques influence the political positions of big capitalist, the relationship between finance capital and industrial capital, the manner in which the bourgeoisie remained the 'ruling class' in Nazi Germany, the impact of new productive techniques on the labour force, etc.

It is obvious that such a wide range of questions cannot be
woman, a tenant of the Duchy of Cornwall, seems to have done so with impunity.

She is seen as a believer in the sound philosophy of enough to eat, and so, when her husband’s work was slack and the family income dwindled, she simply did not pay the rent at all, but spent all her money on food.

"The Prince’s Vale, we can’t sell our bits of sticks, and you won’t sell us up if we keep the place a credit to ‘em,” an argument which did not hold good for most of the women who were the subject of the investigation.

Lambeth people, met with little success, failing to realise that this foodstuff, whilst appetising enough when covered with milk and sugar, was rather less appealing when served, as it had to be in the poorer homes, without these relics, and carrying with it, very often the taste of the fish or ‘stew’ which might have been cooked in the one family saucepan the day before.

Sadly for the middle class philanthropist, the poor could not abide porridge on such terms. In fact, ‘they paved it at’. Children would go hungry.

The payment of rent was, for most women, the first priority, and expenditure on food, or, rarely, clothing, would be allocated according to the amount which remained once this obligation was met.

The diet of the respectable poor was, inevitably, monotonous. Bread and potatoes were the two single most important items, chosen for their cheapness, rather than for their nutritional value.

It was not ignorance which prevented mothers giving their children nutritious food—some do-panders so often suggested. It was simply lack of money which prevented them from indulging in the luxury of giving their children milk, or meat, with any regularity.

Middle-class philanthropists endeavoured to carry the gospel of porridge to the rather than eat it, and husbands threatened dire retaliation if the stuff appeared at their breakfast table.

Of course it was—and still is—often suggested that poverty derives from extravagance, drink, some other personal defect, peculiar to those who have no money and unknown amongst those who do. Commentators who do not have to ‘manage’ on a low income are often adept at suggesting the ease with which it can be done.

The implication is clear. The poor are poor as a result of their own personal failings and their own inability to use their money to the best advantage. It is not a view which is shared by Mrs Pember Reeves, who knocks down the arguments of the advocates of the poor, by detailing the inadequacy of the incomes of all of the women whose lives are documented in this book.

That the poorer London children suffer from insufficient and uneconomical nutrition she argues, but that the responsibility should be laid at the door of their mothers who show to be nothing short of ridiculous.

No-one, she argues, however fit, or well-trained for the task, could manage on such a limited income. So why should these women, for the most part overworked, uneducated, living in crowded, deplorable and suffering many privations, be competent to do so?

Mrs Pember Reeves was not so concerned to illustrate the potential for organisation and struggle on the part of the women whose lives she documents. As a Fabian, she accepted the need for state responsibility towards mothers and children in respect of the basic essentials of life and campaigned to that end.

But as the result of her work, together with other Fabian women, we have access to some of the details of the lives and problems of working class women in London over 60 years ago. Many writers have pointed to the problems of trying to understand working class life and experiences in past decades, and the difficulties are especially acute in relation to the lives of women.

Often outside of organisations which might have left some documentary evidence of their activities, and centered on the home and family, the experience and daily activities of housewives, even at the beginning of this century, are not easily uncovered.

The value of this book lies in its capacity to document something of that experience, although in accordance with the scope of a limited investigation, reflecting not only the formal organisation of the household, but the feelings and attitudes of the women themselves.

The volume is prefaced by a useful introduction, written by Sally Alexander, setting into context the work and preoccupations of the Fabian Women’s Group.

Virago, the feminist publishing company, have issued a number of interesting reprints, as well as new publications on women’s history in recent years. This one is well worth purchasing, at the not unreasonable price of £1.95.

Jan Drinker
Capitalism made difficult

The State, Capital and Economic Policy
Suzanne de Brunhoff
Pluto Press £2.95

Capitalism grew up in a Europe already divided into Nation-States. Its worldwide expansion went hand in hand with a territorial carve-up which left little but the oceans and a few desolate spaces free from the taxman, the customs-official, and the policeman.

At the same time in its classical form of private ownership Capitalism enforced a separation of State and society, politics and economics which has misled many into counterposing 'State' and 'Capital' as if they belonged to two distinct and antagonistic worlds.

The very attempt to relate two different sorts of abstraction is at fault. Any particular State exists only as part of a system of States, and it is that system which is integral to the world of Capital. All talk of the 'externality' of the State, or of its 'relative autonomy', and it pervades the work under review, tends to imply a State standing aloof from a Capitalist system which is implicitly confined within national boundaries.

Where the point being made is not simply bald, it leads into all sorts of unnecessary difficulties about exactly how the one relates to the other. The message of Bukharin has still not been grasped - that the existence of the world of State Capitalism is quite independent of the extent of any particular State's control over its national economy or the degree of nationalisation. Only once that is understood can we deal properly with the particular ways in which private Capital has sought both to use and limit the growth of the State, and the way in which States have served not just as the instruments of a property-owning class but as direct agents of Capital accumulation. In the absence of such a perspective this book falls into a familiar mould, vague generalities and empty abstractions on the one hand, scattered pieces of empirical analysis on the other. That said, serious attempts to use Marxist categories to investigate the 'economic' activities of the State are so rare that the translation of this work from the French is to be welcomed.

De Brunhoff's other work available in English, Marx on Money, was a disappointing study of an important subject little more than a restatement of what Marx himself said, in language if anything more difficult than the original.

In contrast the sections on money, inflation, and the effects of the decline of the dollar and floating exchange rates on the world economy are some of the best in this book.

The State, Capital and Economic Policy in fact includes much that is both useful and original in its discussion of the character and contradictions of Keynesian-inspired attempts to regulate national economies. But these attempts deprived their aura of success from an unprecedented worldwide boom for which they were not really responsible.

De Brunhoff offers no explanation of the boom, or indeed of the current crisis. As a result the arguments lack foundation, the overall assessment is unclear and this reviewer at least was left feeling rather frustrated at the end. Matters are not helped by the attempt, the product I suspect of the current economics of book-publishing, to compress a vast subject-matter into 150 pages.

An interesting but in the final analysis very unsatisfactory work. And if you're not already acquainted with the basic ideas of both Marx and Keynes you'll find much of it very hard going indeed. Pete Green
Hot Gossip

The History of Sexuality
Volume I: The Will to Knowledge
Michel Foucault
Allen Lane £5.95

There is a commonplace saying about sex: "if you are always talking about it, you can't be getting it." Michel Foucault seems to have taken this as a guiding principle for his latest book, which is declared to be a general introduction to a six-volume history of sexuality (though rumour has it that the other five are never to appear).

As such, it asserts an argument which awaits demonstration. We are asked to take its theory on trust, an experience not unlike agreeing to play the Marquis de Sade at snooker. As the game proceeds, everything is correctly observed, but you begin to suspect whose rules you are playing to...

The book is part of Foucault's project of analysing the relation between knowledge and power in our society. Its arrogance towards the reader is displayed in the assumption of complete familiarity with the rest of his writings (an arrogance which of course flatters intellectuals who read his other books, and attracts them to him). For example, the title, Will to Knowledge, refers to a concept fundamental to his whole analysis; but here it is itself hardly discussed. Broadly speaking, the term refers to the great destructive principle which he sees underlying the development of science since 1600.

It describes the changing sets of rules which, embodied in social institutions, lay down what can be said and by whom. Foucault makes a careful distinction between knowledge and truth.

For instance, the medical knowledge possessed in our society is not the sum of what is thought to be true about the human body; it is the sum of everything that can be said within the practice of medicine. This knowledge, which has a definite relation to what is true but cannot be reduced to it, defines 'medical discourse.'

And it is this concept of discourse which is central to the history Foucault is writing. "It is in discourse that knowledge and power are joined together'.

What he says is the accepted view about sex. We are all repressed. We cannot speak of it openly. But what makes Foucault suspicious of this view is the fact that it is so often stated. If society is looking so loudly about its own repressions, perhaps these protests are not so opposed to the established order as they appear to be.

The policing of the body operates through a regulated process, not prohibition. If the nineteenth century silenced sex in polite conversation, it also encouraged increasing eloquence in the medical profession, culminating in Freud's scientific 'discovery' of sexuality at the turn of the century.

More accurately, science produced a notion of sexuality, using confession as its main technique. Foucault continues to remind us that what we are led to believe is the most natural thing about us is in reality the historical product of a scientific and judicial process.

The objective of this process has been to connect knowledge and power in a pattern which maintains domination. Control over people's bodies through the production of sexuality rather than the repression of sex: this is Foucault's main argument.

Bourgeois society has made sex the most important thing about our existence. It is all we ever think about, as individuals. Sex has become, not just the secret life, but the secret of life. How has it happened? This is where the will-to-knowledge comes in. The scenario Foucault sketches out is a bit like those 'Invasion of the Body Snatchers' type movies.

The will to knowledge starts with the stars but is unwittingly brought down to earth by nutty professors like Galileo. Once established in our midst this alien force, which is basically a regular guy, only concerned to bring progress and material benefits to mankind, cannot help devouring everything in sight.

Having chomped its way through nature it invades the body and, despite its best intentions, kills off the soul. But, and here's where things get creepy, nobody knows their bodies have been invaded! The whole of civilisation as we know it is walking around thinking that their body is their own affair.

Enter our hero, not in specs and speckled jacket but in a Pierre Cardin raincoat, casually dragging on a Gauloise. He works out, scientifically of course, how the trick is done.

It seems that by substituting for the soul a new mystery of the self, a new unattainable secret for us to desire, in short by mesmerising us with the question of sex, the power-knowledge connection can have...
its evil way (we always knew that seductive blonde in the second reel was not to be trusted).

The marvels of science and technology definitely exert their hold over M. FauPont. He even eviscerates throughout his text metaphor such as "lines of force", "matrices of transformation", "networks of control" etc., rather like that of the attention-borne systems and lucifers which always surround the mad scientist of the movies.

But these metaphors are meant seriously. They describe the political technology of the body. To understand this we need a new concept of power.

Up to now, power has been conceived as a negative, restrictive force exercised through the rule of law and use of violence through the state apparatus. Against this, Foucault identifies the historical emergence of a new improved brand of power, one centred on techniques not rights, norms not laws, control not punishments.

It has been hailed by people who should know better as a theoretical breakthrough. But if this amazing new conceptual detergent begins to sound like the same old soap, do not be put off—it contains a magic ingredient, bio-power.

Bio-power was released when the will-to-knowledge invaded the body, bringing the human life process itself within the sphere of economic objectives. And it really does work wonders for capitalism, because it allows us to see the whole as a market mechanism, a machine whose foundation is the insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of population to economic processes.

The insertion of your body into the machinery does not hurt one bit, because science has already taught you to think of your body as a machine. This machine, which the bourgeois first tried to set up on itself, was fitted out with a sexuality and handed to the working class with instructions to keep it in good order—an ideology of health and hygiene.

From a healthy body to a healthy body politic is but a short step. Foucault made it. When John Tiede talks about us as the pans of society which must be eradicated if the health and vigour of the nation are to be restored, he reveals the extent to which the accepted images of the body have a political and ideological function.

From a Marxist position the decisive point in the analysis concerns the relationship between the will-to-knowledge and the institutional apparatus of the state. It underlies all the talk in this book (and in Foucault's previous one on prisons) about the historical shift from power to knowledge as a technological revolution. Yet it is precisely this relationship which Foucault ignores and mystifies by turn. The most plausible reason for this is that he believes it cannot be explained in any general way, but can be understood only as a result of separate 'localised' analyses corresponding to the localised nature of power.

For Foucault there is no unified structure of domination centred upon one state. Relations of power are everywhere, yet nowhere are they uniform. Such unity—by which I have in mind the whole of society which interlocks the various power struggles, like a general on a battlefield would carry out a strategy through the deployment of troops in local skirmishes—does not exist. Except that here there is no general (certainly not the ruling class).

What are the implications of this for revolutionary politics? Like those widely dispersed power points, "the swarms of resistance which resists the points of resistance that make a revolution possible". Doubtless. The emphasis is upon struggle in one's own backyard, which by some unspecified means—it cannot be through political parties: they are obviously anachronistic because they are based on a model of power which is itself the product of a co-ordinated executive, with others. The possibility of action at the level of a class is virtually excluded, and the seizure of state power becomes positively irrelevant. So do Foucault's analyses signal the end of Marxism as we knew it? Clearly. His work on knowledge and power cannot be gauged on to any branch of Marxist politics without a significant change in one or the other (and in most current attempts to do so it is Foucault who remains unmodified).

The most obvious examples of the political practice which Foucault's theory endorses are perhaps to be found within the women's movement—though his own language demands its inclusion in Western Man. And perhaps it will be within that movement that the questions which this book raises about the body will take on a new significance, as women seek to change their own experiences of power and sex to change their own experiences of power and sex.
For health read wealth

Class Struggle, the State and Medicine
Vincent Navarro
Martin Robertson £7.95

A book to be welcomed. Most accounts of social policy development are turgid. Dry, academic summaries of major developments swimming around in a social democratic soup. The NHS, in particular, is either seen as the product of humanitarian generosity or a victory for socialism.

Navarro's book, however, is one of his, and is exciting. His Marxist account places the evolution and present state of the NHS firmly within a capitalist mould. One by one he destroys the usual explanations offered by bourgeois commentators for the development of our health services.

He rejects entirely any account of the sudden rising class interest in workers' health during the early part of this century as due to the spread of debilitating values.

The National Insurance Act of 1911 is seen as a ruling class concession to the combined threat of the Triple Alliance, the 1905 revolution in Russia and mass unemployment. And health insurance is assessed more as a victory for commercial insurance interests than for the working class.

The NHS Act itself is not viewed as the far-sighted testament to socialism that the Labour Party always boasts about. Rather 1945-51 is seen as 'a golden opportunity missed by a thoroughly reformist party committed to capitalism'.

Bevan, the Left's hero, is quoted as claiming that 'he choked the consultants' mouths with gold'.

This of course, he did, and in so doing established a Health Service designed not to protect patients against the high cost of medical services but to insure doctors against patients' inability to pay.

Navarro pays attention to many vital topics that the usual books on the NHS ignore: Medicine, for him, has a double function under capitalism: it ameliorates and makes palatable the disarray created in the sphere of production and consumption. (There are short, but interesting, sections on occupational and environmental diseases.) But it also has an ideological role, i.e. to make people believe that what is politically and collectively caused can be individually cured.

The book provides interesting details too, e.g. about the inverse care law whereby health and resources tend to concentrate in urban, middle-class areas, and about how the 1974 Reorganisation of the NHS did not integrate care but centralised it in management well versed in capitalist business ethics.

The book does have faults, though. Occasional American sociological terms creep in such as post-industrial society (SIC). Mostly though Navarro is free of jargon and easy to read.

Too much energy is spent demonstrating how consultants are part of a class that actually owns the State in some way. The relations of production are what counts not personalities. And despite concluding that the Labour Party is as far away from socialism as the Vatican from the Mount, there is no discussion of viable socialist strategy in the health service, or anywhere else.

A real gap in a book that stresses class struggle as being of central importance in understanding the development of social policy.

Although shy of offering a political strategy, Navarro has written a fine book dedicated to those in Britain who are struggling for socialist change. His consistent warnings about how much working class pressure for reforms is always shaped by the ruling class' own purposes should serve as a salutary reminder to those who like to call themselves 'socialists' of their political bankruptcy. £7.95 is a lot for revolutionary socialists - hopefully the publishers will bring out a paperback version. If not, order it for your library.

Phil Lee
in brief

The Wealth Report
edited by Frank Field
Routledge and Kegan Paul £6.95

A new book written by a group of people best known for their book exposing poverty. Here they turn the tables with research on the wealthy, taking as their starting point R. H. Tawney's remark that 'what thoughtful rich people call the problem of poverty, thoughtful poor people call with equal justice the problem of riches'. While the research and the evidence put forward are excellent, we only get vague and unhelpful ideas about strategies to end the 'problem'.

Health in Danger: The Crisis in the National Health Service
David Widger MacMillan £2.95

What an immense pleasure to read a book on the National Health Service where every page seems to call for a fight, where the central conclusion(i.e. the thorough argument itself) is broad, well-thought-out and persuasive. An excellent prescription. This is a Bookmarks Club choice.

Einstein for Beginners
Joseph Schwartz, Michael McGuinness
Writers and Readers £1.95

The latest book in the successful beginners series of cartoons on physics, this work is written with clarity and accuracy. It is specially published for Einstein's centenary year.

Bisbee 17
Robert Houston
Writers and Readers £5.95

The events described in this novel are absolutely authentic. A fierce strike of copper miners at Bisbee, Arizona, in 1917 is the setting in which we begin to understand the impact of the 1917 American revolution in terms of workers' struggle and the importance of class struggle.

The Politics of Industrial Relations
Colin Crouch
Fontana £1.50

This is a dreadfuly repetititious and pretentious book written by a right-wing socialist democratic university lecturer. Reads like a 186 page preface to the Labour government's concordat. As an industrial relations text it is completely superfluous.

Trapped Within Welfare: Surviving Social Work
Mike Simpkin
MacMillan £2.95

Here Mike Simpkin, both socialist and social worker, makes a case for a socialist strategy in practice. He puts forward the case for a socialist strategy in a welfare state that's at crisis point. Strongly recommended.

The Workers' Report on Vickers
How Ryden, Hilary Wauwrigh
 Pluto £2.00

This is the Vickers shop stewards' report on their struggle. The report is a rare example of a company union report, and the shopfloor response focussing on the company-wide organisation and the problems and potential of combine committees. This is a Bookmarks Club choice.

The fight back on new technology

Is a machine after your job?
Chris Harman
SWP Training Dept, P.O. Box 82 London E2 40p plus 15p p&p

Job Massacre at the Office
The Women's Voice Word Processor pamphlet
Women's Voice, PO. 82.
London E2 40p plus 15p p&p

The New Technology
Counter Information Services,
9 Polman Street London W1 75p plus 20p p&p

New Technology
A Nalos Action Group
Pamphlet, 32 Kersley Road,
London N16 20p plus 15p p&p

The Collapse of Work
Clive Jenkins and Barrie Sherman
Fyre Methuen £3.50
(This is the collaborationist, reformist, official trade union view.)

All these books are available by post from Bookmarks. 265
Seven Sisters Road London N4
Alastair Hatchett

Socialist Review
PO Box 82
London E2

A manipulative Leninist sect

I'm really angry with Lionel Starling's article on gays and the left (Socialist Review May/June 1979).

As a libertarian I object to being associated with this argument that is too much for the left to accept. I object to the author's use of the word 'sect' and to his use of the word 'Leninist' (my emphasis).

I also object to the patronising and manipulative approach to gay politics - gay struggle should be directed to integrate gay struggle. 'Having homosexuals on the Right to Work marches' is the author's line. The SWP is a sect because they don't want to see what is happening to gay people.

And so for the gay movement to become middle-class and lack to turn the world revolutionary, the author's line is: 'the SWP has been historically been a middle-class movement of gay people and must learn to speak the language of the middle class'.

I'm afraid this article just confirms my worst view of the SWP as a manipulative Leninist sect that is trying to control what is happening to gay people.

Social liberation is all about...
Glad to be gay - and realistic

I was interested to read Lionel Starling’s article on the gay liberation movement (Socialist Review May/June 1979) because it seemed to say a lot about the movement which, on the face of things, appears to be true — and therefore I agree with many of his criticisms.

However, his over-generalised approach being left aside, I must disagree with his criticism that the movement is separatist, pie-in-the-sky and anti-heterosexual. To claim it is not that I disagree that the gay movement is separatist or anti-heterosexual, it probably is. I disagree that this is a major criticism.

It is Lionel Starling who is guilty of pie-in-the-sky talk if he is proposing that the majority movements — in particular the women’s movement and the gay movement should abandon their own identities and join in the socialist movement as a means of liberation.

Ideally, I whole-heartedly agree with him, but if he thinks that gays in Britain in 1979 are going to flock to the socialist movement and effectively deny their own group identity — an important trend (unfortunately) among the majority of gays he is sadly very much out of touch with gay people as a whole.

Such is the situation now that it is hard for many gay people to even come to terms with themselves let alone stand up and shout across the rooftops! That’s why the gay movement is separatist and that’s why it needs to be for the moment in order to reach gay people at all.

Finally, as for being anti-heterosexual? Possibly: but when we advertise around the Poly here in Sheffield that the Gaysos is open to all gays and non-gays it’s notable that not only do these posters rapidly disappear or are defaced but not a single heterosexual person ever turns up or contacts us. Of course the gay movement’s separatist it’s an unfortunate but realistic fact.

Derek Hillcoat
Sheffield

Who are the Rank and File?

David Beecham’s article ‘Room at the Top’ (Socialist Review May/June 1979) although providing a relatively clear analysis of the ‘birth of the new right’ in the trade-union leadership, provides yet another example of the ‘grey consensus’ mentioned by Paul Cunningham’s letter in the same issue.

In his conclusion Beecham triumphantly states that the right doesn’t seem capable of going on to force a new hard line to take them into the 1980s. It doesn’t look capable of reversing the trend towards stewards’ power.

This is yet another example of the simplistic idea prevalent on the left that one can analyse trade-union structure in terms of a dichotomy between the trade-union bureaucracy and the rank and file. The outcome of this analysis is a strategy that emphasises work-place-centred action and shop-steward militancy.

The notion of the rank and file is usually implicitly accepted as including shop stewards or other workplace union representatives. However, there are a couple of points (at least!) that must be mentioned before this idea becomes firmly embedded in the left’s collective conscious.

First, the left (as well as most academic writers on industrial relations since the 1956 Donovan commission on trade unions) have based their image of the shop steward on those centred in the majority large-scale industries. This is all well and good up to a point but reflects another preoccupation of the left, that of the increasingly concentrated and multinational nature of companies.

This trend is obviously vitally important and must be understood. However, to concentrate on large-scale industries means that you tend to ignore small to medium businesses (except for special cases such as Gwinwick). With the latter sector, stewards face quite different problems (and organisation, poor facilities, etc.) to those in large-scale industry.

This leads to a situation in which the autonomy of stewards’ organisation, presupposed in the left’s analysis, does not exist in the small-scale sector where stewards must rely quite heavily on full-time officials. The separation between rank and file and bureaucracy is nothing like so clear-cut in this situation as it is presumed to be.

Furthermore, to rely on an image of the shop steward drawn mainly from shipbuilding, heavy engineering etc. in effect excludes women shop stewards from one’s analysis.

I would imagine that the majority of female stewards would find it hard to square Beecham’s ‘trend towards stewards’ power’ with their own situation of low pay, poor conditions, low (though fast increasing) levels of unionisation and the myriad problems associated with the sexual division of labour.

Even if you examine the development of stewards’ organisation in industries with the best traditions you have got to be careful about including stewards within the definition of ‘rank and file’. The concentration and centralisation of British capital since the 1950s produced pressures for the parallel centralisation of trade-union structure which have affected stewards’ organisation.

The growth in the number of full-time stewards and convenors is symptomatic of this trend. Their role is changing from co-ordination to control — of other stewards as well as ‘disobedient’ rank-and-file. Perhaps the outcome will be unofficial, rank-and-file organisations like the Ford Workers’ Combine.

The final point concerns the positive efforts now being made by both the state and the employers to separate stewards from the rank and file. The Donovan commission reported in 1968 that it was imperative to ‘recognise, define and control the part played by shop stewards in our collective bargaining system’.

This effort to control stewards has manifested itself in two ways. First, through management actively participating in the establishment of stewards’ organisations so that total autonomy can be denied them from the start.

Second, increasing management recognition of stewards — but on the basis of their competence in bargaining — has led to the introduction (now enshrined as a right under the Employment Protection Act) of time off with pay for training. The emphasis in shop stewards’ courses is on the professional ability of the steward as negotiator, organiser, etc. rather than as the leader/co-ordinator of militant mass action.

The term ‘rank and file’ has become increasingly meaningless over the last ten years. Devoid of any theoretical content it has simply become a password for an alternative within the labour movement to the trade union bureaucracy. However, it is imperative for both theoretical and practical reasons that some definite meaning is attached to the phrase.

Richard Hyman has brought this matter to the attention of the left (Socialist Review June 1978, Revolutionary Socialist No 3) — so far with little obvious effect. It’s about time some-one took some notice before the left’s theories of trade-union action assume all the relevance of the Flat Earth Society’s rantings — with disastrous consequences for practice.

Al Rainnie
Newcastle
The Communist Party (CPGB) in 1979

A demand that has been raised in contract negotiation in the US car industry for years has been 'Sixty and Out'. Retirement at sixty on full pension for all earworkers. Next year the Communist Party of Great Britain will itself be sixty years old. Will it finally be out?

This question may appear a little extreme or even downright insulting, depending on your political stance. It is neither.

It is quite a fair question to ask at this stage in the life of the CPGB. For the Communist Party is presently undergoing its deepest crisis for forty years, and one that although not yet fatal in the strict sense of the word, is nevertheless, the closest thing to death agony.

Two small but public incidents give an indication of the terminal nature of the crisis. Thus on April Fool’s Day this year, the Executive Committee of the CP was summoned to its first emergency meeting for over ten years since Russia invaded Czechoslovakia in 1968. Why? To consider the resignation of Gerry Cohen as London Organiser in protest at the Political Committee’s decision to send Morton Simon as a leading Right-Eurocommunist critic of Stalin and stalinism, on an official CPGB delegation to a world Communist meeting in Hungary.

And in the June 1979 issue of Marxism Today, Mick Costello, the National CP Industrial Organiser openly attacks the interpretation of the British Road to Socialism that Dave Cook, the CP National Organiser and fellow Political Committee member, presented in an earlier article.

After the biggest, longest pre-conference discussion ever leading to the 1977 CP Congress and the adoption of a new edition of the CP programme the British Road to Socialism, there is more open and internal major disagreement than ever before. Not just about the nature of ‘socialism’ in Eastern Europe, but also about the very core of the new British Road strategy itself.

The present crisis arises from two open wounds inflicted on the CP under the 1974-79 Labour Government. Its industrial strategy sank like the Titanic. And its political and organisational cohesion was shattered as its right-wing political drift forced a new attack on its very raison-d’etre: support for Russia.

The statistics of the crisis are stark: In 1974 the CP claimed some 30,000 members. In July 1975, 28,500; in July 1977, 25,300; some 23,000 by Autumn 1978; and around 20,000 by Summer 1979. The claimed YCL membership fell from 1,876 in November 1976, to 1,663 in November 1977 and to 1,282 in November 1978. In 1976 the average daily circulation of the Morning Star in Britain fell by 2,000 to 19,000 (with a further 14,000 going overseas to Eastern Europe).

CP membership is thus well below the earlier post-War low point of 25,000 members in 1957/58 after the Khrushchev revelations about Stalin and the suppression of the Hungarian revolution. And it is even lower than in 1940/41 before Hitler invaded Russia and the Red Army entered the Second World War to make it a war against fascism.

Membership totals themselves don’t, however, tell the full story. For there is a major difference in the activity-level of most CP members now and of those in the 1940s and before. When the late Sid French led a Russian Embassy-inspired breakaway from the CP in the summer of 1977, the New Communist Party, he estimated CP membership as 10,000 of whom only 3,500 were at all active.

The gap between this inside estimate (French was Surrey District Organiser for many years) and the official ‘club membership’ (A) was an increasingly small and important bureaucracy. The basic division is between ‘Right-Eurocommunists’ and, the ‘Left Eurocommunists’.

The former are the architects of the 1977 British Road to Socialism which launched the key notion of the ‘Broad Democratic Alliance’ (BDA) strategy for socialism in Britain. This involves stress on general political movements and democratic demands within them as being the basis for democratising society in the direction of socialism.

The latter are the defenders of the strategy of the 1968 edition of the British Road, described as the Anti-Monopoly Alliance (AMA). This emphasises the need to build an anti-monopoly capitalist movement and hence sees the role of the working class and the trade unions as being decisive. But the division goes very much deeper as we will see later, with lines drawn between the ‘post-1968’ and the ‘pre-1968’ generations, between the ‘anti-Stalinists’ and the ‘Stalinists’, between the ‘pluralists’ and the ‘democratic centralists’ and between the ‘intellectuals’ and the workers.

How did this crisis develop? Part One of this article looks at the CP’s industrial strategy. Part Two at the disappearance of its political cohesion and finally where the arguments are likely to take the CP.
The industrial disaster

From 1945, when the CP re-organised itself away from factory branches onto a geographical basis more suitable for constituency electoral intervention, electioneering became an increasing part of regular CP activity. And this included CP work inside the trade unions. Since the CP remained barred from affiliation to the Labour Party, the major way it saw of influencing Labour Party policy was through CP-led trade unions and their way at Labour Party Conference.

The 1961 ballot-rigging episode, when a High Court decision removed the CP leadership of the ETU because of its complicity in fiddling the vote, led to a major shift in CP policy. The ETU case coincided with the 1960, 1961 period of struggle within the Labour Party where the Galifskile right-wing were for the first time deserted by the trade union bloc vote when they tried to remove the 'socialist' Clause 4 from the Labour Party constitution.

The evidence of political life within the Labour Party (and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament) at the very point that direct CP control of a trade union was firmly discredited, caused the CP to turn to a 'Broad Left' approach to trade union work. Whereas previously it had openly fought for CPers to be elected and appointed to office, it now sought to work with Labour Lefts and non-affiliated socialists against the right-wing.

The result was a further downplaying of CP factory branches, since the priority was to convince the left Labourite of the honesty of the CP's intentions, and a further boost to electioneering as anti-rank-and-file organising on other issues, like wages and conditions.

In the late 1960's this Broad Left strategy was reawarded in the AEU: Hugh Scallon was elected president. Dozens of other victories for the Broad Left accompanied the big one at the level of full-time district secretaries, sectional and national organisers. The Scallon era ended finally in 1978, with the victory of Terry Duffy, a right-wing militancy, over Bob Wright, the Broad Left candidate.

But the debate of illusions had begun much earlier. Even the Broad Left stopped talking about 'our' Hughie some time in 1975 when he openly supported the Labour government's phase one wage controls. It took them another three years to put it down on paper - and the Morning Star has still not made a critical evaluation of the period.

The August/September 1978 edition of Engineering Gazette, the CP side of the 1978 split in the Broad Left, wrote: 'Hugh Scallon, like many before him, came in as a determined radical only to be swallowed by the Establishment machine. After leaving the AUEW opposition to the Tory Industrial Relations Court, Scallon slipped away, taken in by the Social Con-trick. Other left members of the Executive decided not to rock the boat and pinned their hopes on Scallon. Perhaps they now regret it. But it's not only Bob Wright who now regrets it. During the 1970s the Broad Left electoral machine in the AUEW also 'slipped away' since the CP refused to accept the need to establish a rank and file organisation independent of Scallon and electoral vagaries. CP workplace branches either disappeared, atrophied or turned to stone.

The reduced leading role of 'CP industrial advisory' committees run from King St as the key decision-making bodies encouraged the collapse of occasions, discipline among trade union members, particularly their full-time officials.

Leading CP trade union figures increasingly operated on their own, shifting openly to the right, without ever being publicly called to book by the CP (which was anyway flirting with other 'left' full-time officials and would not give the impression it actually 'disciplined' recruits).

This 'slipping away' of CP industrial work was inevitable given the looseness of their 'Broad Left' popular front formula. This identified trade union officials who were strong exponents of more state intervention and import controls and other aspects of economic nationalism as 'progressive'.

If they were also less hysterical about the threat posed by CP members, and if they were rationalising trade union organisation to take account of the expansion of membership from 1969 to 1974, then they were perhaps right.

When David Basinett succeeded the right-wing Lord Cooper as General Secretary of the GMWU in 1972, the Morning Star heralded the fact that Basinett (the official in charge of the 1970 Pilkington strike) was different from Cooper in an interview called 'Neither left nor right Basinett'. And during the 1979 pay dispute, by which time most were aware of exactly how right-wing Basinett is, the Morning Star actually featured front-page pictures of Basinett on three strike occassions, once with the headline 'building him up as a great fighter against unemployment'.

The politics of the CP also identified 'workers participation' within British Leyland as a means of 'proving' that nationalisation works. Derek Robinson, the Leyland Longbridge Convenor and a CP member, told Comment (5 August 1978): 'If we make Leyland successful it will be a political victory. It will prove that ordinary working people have got the intelligence and determination to run industry.'

In turn, these politics encouraged the emergence of the CP shopfloor-the full-time convenor or shop steward who, for the sake of the nationalised company, would not fight the victimisation of militants nor for basic solidarity with workers elsewhere.

The fact that a whole layer of CP industrial members had been brought up in the 1950s and 1960s as 'pure' wage militants-refusing to take other political issues into their workplaces, without factory bulletins arguing for socialist politics, without a commitment to rank and file organisation linking workers in different factories and industries-as dangerous as the political strategy was more difficult with the increasing pressure of corporate interests-they were unable to resist.

Equally inevitable, then, was a constant decline through the 1960s and 1970s in the actual manual working class composition of the CP. In the areas where the CP remained strong, like Glasgow, into the 1970s it could still keep card-carrying members as 'club supporters'—members who paid up once a year to be in a 'club of militants'. But all over the proportion of manual worker activists fell. During the 1950s engineering workers made up 22 per cent of delegates to CP Congresses and teachers 8 per cent.

At the 1977 Congress engineering workers were only 14 per cent, teachers (in higher and lower education) were 15 per cent and students 10 per cent. As the composition of the CP shifted towards areas where the 'norm' was low (or non-existent) level of industrial struggle, then the CP increasingly recruited members not on the basis of any form of class struggle or support for that struggle, but on the basis of machine bureaucratism.

The CP itself only fully realised the extent of its own decline when Duffy's victory was announced on 2 May 1978: the final chapter in a six year period of right-wing recovery from 1972 when Scallon's strategy led to the smashing of the engineering wage claim. On 16 June 1978 Mick Costello, the new CP industrial organiser, wrote an appeal of CP industrial strategy in the Morning Star. He was not at all self-critical, but argued (a) for 'mobilisation of the rank and file', and (b) for 'more Party branches built at the place of work for the day-to-day campaigning issues to be related to building political understanding of the need to end capitalism'.

At the March 1979 CP Executive Committee, Costello returned to the problem, arguing for a new "turn to industry" by the Party. 'All branches, area and city organisations must,' Costello went on,
redirect attention to the workplace, to ensure a "presence" especially at major factories in their areas, ensuring our policies are put to the workers. Such attention to work can help overcome a tendency for a separation in the minds of many comrades between "industrial work" and "general party activity."

And in a section of his report entitled 'Rank and File base for broad left', Costello argued:

"The broad left is not something that starts at or ends among the upper echelons of trade union organisations. We see it is as based in the rank and file of the movement, providing forums for debate on policy and action, as well as all else, a fighting and campaigning living body.

This requires organisation. The broad left needs many more journals like Engineering Gazette, Industrial-Sectional, Trade Unions in the Community, Building Workers' Charter, the higher education Broad Left and civil service's Roundtable.

Can this "turn to industry" succeed? The first thing to point out is that the failure of the previous strategy has unleashed a major debate which, for the first time, is gradually putting the industrial members' activities for lack of them under the spotlight. It used to be absolute heroes within the CP to raise any questions about the automatic character of the 'left advances' the CP was allegedly encouraging along through the trade unions.

But in the September 1978 issue of Marxism Today, the leading CP intellectual historian Eric Hebborn, actually mentions the idea of a 'left advance', the CP was allegedly encouraging along through the trade unions. The trade union movement today, he goes on to argue, is more sectionalised, less political, and less class-conscious than twenty-five or thirty years ago. Ken Gill, the appointed General Secretary of AUEW/FASS, a union the CP now controls thanks to consistent work among branches and delegates to conference during the 1960s, responded immediately. The set-back is only temporary, Gill argued in the December 1978 Marxism Today.

The Social Contract was a "political bargain" and hence a sign of progress, but on "mistrust" terms. It should not have exchanged wage bargaining for promises of social improvements. But it does not mean that the 'advances' have been "false". Indeed recent history shows the substantial advances have been made. Organised labour is now a political power in the land.

Even more explicitly critical of recent industrial work, has been the argument raised at before 1977 Congress but then suppressed as a Congress discussion by Bert Rathbone, Chairman of Standing Orders, that CP militancy is "economistic". Closely allied to this argument is that advanced most stridently by Dave Purdy, a Manchester University economics lecturer and prominent CP Right Eurocommunist, that the CP should not be negatively hostile to incomes policies. Instead, Purdy argues, the left should argue for a 'socialist pay policy.'

In The Leader, February 1979, Purdy wrote:

"...The issue for socialists is not whether, but how and on what terms to enter the debate and negotiation surrounding policies for pay.... The current tendency to climb aboard the bandwagon of disillusionment with the social contract, and to identify progress with every pay dispute, is simply mistaken. We are losing ground from a consequent socialist strategy for Britain. The main reason for this assertion is that the key to contemporary socialist strategy lies in the unification of diverse areas of struggle and the creation of a broad social and political alliance around consensus, and at least the main directions of social and economic policy."

Not surprisingly, this argument's explicit acceptance of state capitalist 'consensus' created a wave of anger among CP trade union militants. They were being lectured that their class instincts were 'heading away' from socialism.

The argument kept cropping up in the letters columns of the Morning Star and Communist. In the CP fortnightly. This rubbed itself in the wounds. In strength lay the fact that it offered an explanation for the evident industrial failure which could not be answered by simply repeating that no retreat had taken place.

Yet this was the only answer that Gill and Costello could give. For as soon as you accept that a cross-class 'alliance' is the key strategy for socialism, then any explanation for our failure can only be in terms of the 'alliance' not being "broad" enough. You have to admit to 'wider forces' if you want to be popular.

Aside from an odd individual here or there the only real alternative, the fight for a revolutionary strategy aimed at breaking the 'national interest' consensus which traps workers politically (through the Labour Party) and organisationally (through the narrow workplace horizons of the shop stewards' organisation), is not present within the modern CP.

The attempt at a 'turn to industry' is taking place then, at a time when the industrial trade union membership of the CP is incredibly on the defensive. In large areas of the country the prospect of being taken over by the local geographical branch with its Right-Eurocommunist activists is not welcomed by the factory workers to say the least. And since the Right-Eurocommunists are equally disdainful of the necessity for the long slog outside the factory gates, the nuts and bolts of the 'turn' are unlikely to get tightened.

Meanwhile, even within the trade unions, the new 'rank and file' orientation is unlikely to get off the ground in those unions and industries where the CP has any base amongst the full-time officials. These officials have for years been totally unaccustomed to CP activity and discipline, and their long-term role as official activity as a threat to their control.

In these unions the CP control, like the Scottish miners, the CP-dominated leadership will argue there's no need for a rank and file movement or journal, and where they have a few dozen appointed officials, as in NUPE, these officials will oppose CP-supported rank-and-file organisation since they would upset the existing leadership and cut their promotion and expansion chances. In factories where they are the senior stewards they will likewise argue that 'everything should go through the proper channels', since anything else would be a threat.

The reality is that with a handful of exceptions the CP is too much a part of the trade union establishment to be able to 'turn' to build rank-and-file organisation as a fighting and campaigning living body.

To do so, for example in the TGWU, would have meant openly denouncing the activities of their man Alex Kitson, now deputy general secretary, in January 1979, when he took responsibility for 'controlling' unofficial picketing during the ferry drivers' strike.

As it was, the Morning Star coverage was totally split between defending the right to picket against the ferry and right-wing Labour attacks on the one hand, and, on the other suggesting that really the pickets were being highly 'responsible'. On January 19, their front-page report began: 'There was no evidence in Liverpool yesterday to back charges that pickets were floating union requests to let essential goods through'.

Thus the intention is to carry through the 'turn to industry' without embarrassing the trade union leaders who are CP members or fellow-travellers. That means, of course, that the policy of 'soft-pedalling' as far as 'progressive' trade union leaders are concerned will continue. And this means that the verbal argument for rank-and-file activity and organisation will remain just that: words.

Steve Jewell.

The second part of this article will appear in our next issue.
E is for EXPLOITATION

In 1806 Gillray drew his startling cartoon of William Pitt and Napoleon Bonaparte carving up the globe: 'The Plumb Pudding in Danger'. Sweeping, dramatic in its simplicity, stark and true, this drawing predates re-carves. Nowadays the USA and Russia wield the knives; perhaps in fifty years it will be a Euro-superstate and China. Exploitation, in a strict Marxist sense, is the process by which surplus value is extracted from the worker.

The value of his labour over and above that needed to feed and clothe him or her and generally keep him or her quiet is stolen by the employer. But in a wider sense, it's not only the worker—his blood, bones and brain that is exploited by a worldwide system, not just the worker who is treated as a convenient piece of productive flesh.

But the very world itself is seen as an object to strip of its life and richness and independence. The trees; the rivers; the sea; the land and the air. Capitalist exploitation is thorough. Our beautiful little planet, blue green and silver, whirling magically through space, carrying its population of intelligent people, incredible animals, plants and birds, fish and tigers, jungles, prairies and mountains is being ruined.

In the days of Pitt and Bonaparte capitalism was on a very small scale. In the days of Churchill and the Boat People, a quantitative change. But it's not qualitative; then as now the world was tortured by a writhing mass of competing capital blocs struggling for control of the same market—then, the brain—now the Earth, rich and life-giving, which is, as Gillray pointed out, in danger.

Phil Evans