Getting away with it
How workers can beat the law
The Wages and Inflation Show

It is almost as if Thatcher and Howe were reading verbatim from the texts of speeches of Callaghan and Healey from two years ago. If inflation has doubled, the responsibility does not lie with government policy, but with the 'irresponsible' trade unionists in pushing for wage increases which the country cannot afford.

The message is going to be repeated ad nauseam from now until the autumn, until the government really has a chance, in Thatcher's words, 'to set an example in the public sector'. i.e., to pick on some sector of workers and try to beat them into the ground. So now is the time to begin releasing some of the old wages and inflation arguments.

The first and most obvious candidate to blame when it comes to prices is the government itself. Its attempts to solve the capitalist crisis by making it worse, so frightening workers with the spectre of unemployment and driving inefficient firms out of business, has meant:

- The raising of VAT in last year's budget and of tax on drink, cigarettes and petrol this year, gave a direct upwards push to prices. This raising of taxes on goods was supposed to be more than compensated for by a reduction in income tax. But the Institute of Fiscal Studies has reported that in 1980-81, the real burden of direct taxation will be higher than it was in 1979-80. (Financial Times, 31 March)

- 'Cash limits', allegedly a 'counter-inflationary' measure, have encouraged nationalised industries such as the Electricity Board, Post Office Telecommunications and British Rail to put up prices considerably faster than any increases in wages for their workers.

- Then there has been the order to the Gas Board to increase the price of gas 30 per cent per year, despite its already colossal profits.

- Government-induced high interest rates have put the squeeze on local councils, encouraging them to raise rates and rents (most councils now pay out in interest charges to money lending institutions on housing more than they collect in rents). They have also pushed up the level of mortgage repayments and the costs of industry, as industrial capital has to pay out bigger amounts to finance capital. So while the firm you work for may complain it is not very profitable, the banks can be making a bomb out of your labour (see graph).

- The government presents rising oil prices as an 'external factor', the greed of the 'oil-producing states', but Britain is now about 90 per cent self-sufficient in the production of oil. If the price of oil is continuing to go up, it is because government-induced price rises over the last year are not an accident. They are an integral part of its 'monetarist' policy for the revitalisation of British big business.

And the Common Market side show:

One cause of price rises we haven't mentioned yet, the one cause of price rises we are all supposed to believe in, is 'thumping' Common Market and EEC prices. The government has attempted to keep prices of food 2.1 per cent lower than they would have been otherwise. According to the Financial Times, 'Other EU governments were astounded by Britain's sudden switch from protecting consumers to looking after exporters and farmers. For the first time since the Common Market there will be a tax on imported foodstuffs.' 14 April 1980.

The government hit in fact been demanding an even higher figure than the EEC would allow - 3.5 per cent as against the 2.1 per cent implemented.

This has been in line with a succession of government moves over the last year. By four successive devaluations of the 'green pound' (i.e., a time when the value of the ordinary pound has been rising), the government has increased food prices four per cent more than would otherwise have been the case, transferring £150m from the pockets of consumers to those of well-off farmers.

The point is reinforced by the row with the French over sheep meat. The government's demand for British farmers to be able to sell mutton and lamb in France would, if implemented, mean farmers being able to take advantage of the much higher prices they can get in France to force up prices here.
A day to be ashamed of?

'Some ministers believe the only way to stem public sector pay demands this autumn will be for several major nationalised industries to face it out with their unions through prolonged strikes. They feel the government should use its relative popularity now to prepare public opinion for what may be a difficult autumn.' (Financial Times 19 May)

Confrontation between the government and the working class movement is far from over. In recent weeks the government has felt a confidence lacking in the earlier part of the winter, when even senior ministers were letting slip jibes about 'The Mad Monk' and 'That woman.' The confidence comes from success in riding out the steel strike, success in imposing the cuts, success in pushing through the Employment Bill, and, finally, success in facing up to the TUC on 14 May.

Their problem is that these successes have not yet been translated into victory where it really matters, on the wages front. Earnings are still more or less keeping abreast of prices. And it is this that the government is determined to stop by renewed confrontation in key sectors in the months ahead.

The starting point of government thinking has been the Day of Action. This was a symbolic display of strength, with the TUC and the government each trying to show the extent of its support. It was the first time since 1926 the TUC had ever gone as far as to say it wanted workers to stop work in protest at government policy. It was the first time the government and the press had employed the scab tactics previously used with effect against particular groups of workers or unions against the TUC as such (witness the ludicrous Daily Express talk of 'Lenin Murray'). And the government came out best from this contest.

Everything was not gloomy from the left's point of view on 14 May. The number taking strike action—it must have been about a million—was greater than in the unofficial one day political strikes of 1969, 1970 and 1971 or even in the official TUC day of action in 1973. And the number demonstrating—about a quarter of a million altogether—was an extraordinarily high proportion of the strikers for this country. The determination and bitterness of the minority who did take action was impressive. Nevertheless, the day had been build up before hand by the union leaders as a national stoppage (Murray had at one stage gone so far as to say it would be like Christmas Day) and by the press as a one-day general strike. And by those standards, it was a flop.

A strengthening of the right

It is not only the government that has gained new heart from 14 May. So too have the right wing inside the trade union movement nationally. They are using the low turnout to argue that the left is out of touch with the mood of the membership. They can be expected to push for a retreat even from verbal opposition to the Employment Bill and, in particular, step up their arguments to accept government money for secret ballots. As they gain in confidence, the Chapple-Duffy axis will be joined by new figures. What that means is shown graphically at the Isle of Grain, where they are organising official scabbing against even the ultra-moderate GMWU.

The 'left' bureaucrats also have got something out of 14 May, even if the overall result will mean that they must take second place to the right within the inner councils of the TUC. They now have a free ready answer to any rank and file who calls for generalised industrial action against the government's policies, or for solidarity with other workers fighting back. They will say: 'We stuck our necks out on 14 May and look what happened. You can't expect us to do that again.' Talk of 'general strikes' has been effectively silenced for at least the next few months.

One early casualty of the shift to the right is likely to be the left inside the Labour Party. What has given them their appeal to activists in the last year has been their success in dominating the Labour Party Executive and victories at the annual conference. They soundedcreditable when they argued: 'Join us in one last push to get control of the selection of MPs and the choice of the Labour Party leader and then we will work wonders'. Their reply was to argue that the left's victories would still leave decisive power with entrenched, elected-for-life bureaucrats who control the general union block votes at the party conferences. While a section of some these bureaucrats were prepared to go along with the left, our argument lacked a cutting edge. Now that they are moving back to the right, the chickens will come home to roost.

In fact, that process has already started. First Alex Kitson, a leading left trade union figure, agreed to withdraw from the crucial inquiry on party organisation. Then the AEUE National Committee removed from the left-dominated Labour Party delegation their control over the casting of the block vote at Conference. The results of May 14 will accelerate that process.

Cover photograph shows striking London dockers in 1951 chairing their comrades out of court.

Edited by Chris Harman
Assisted by Colin Sparks, Simon Turner, Pete Goodwin, Andrew Milner, Su Cockrell, Stuart Axe, Jane Ure Smith, Colin Brown, Dave Beecham, Gareth Jenkins.

Produced by Peter Court, Colin Brown, Pete Goodwin, Andrew Milner.

Business Pete Goodwin, Jane Ure Smith.

Correspondence and subscriptions to Socialist Review, PO Box 82, London E2. Please make cheques and postal order payable to SWD. Socialist Review is sent free to all prisoners on request.

ISSN 0141-2442
Printed by East End (Offset) Ltd, PO Box 82, London E2
The Wages Front
The relative failure of May 14th is not going to mean an end to industrial action. The pattern of the last nine months has been for one big sectional battle to follow another as different groups of employers have taken the offensive against their workers. Only in the case of Leyland have the employers achieved complete success. In commercial television, engineering, steel and, recently, general printing the results have been much more mixed. But that has not stopped the offensive. On the contrary, it has encouraged the employers to widen their scope in search of a resounding victory. Like the government, they will be further encouraged by 14 May.

And so the battle over pay is going to be one of the areas in which the small, hard left minorities which were prepared to face out the press and the government and strike and demonstrate last month will be crucial. The test will be how far it can be mobilised in solidarity with those workers who are fighting back.

The new law
Another area will be the Employment Bill. The Day of Action was initially going to be over that, but in the run up the trade union leaders quietly downplayed it. They are likely to play it down even more now.

The contrast with 1970/71 is marked. Then the struggle against the Industrial Relations Act was the focus for the great strikes and demonstrations. The consequence was that the time came for defiance of the law there was already a widespread feeling of solidarity upon which to build. Without this build-up it is going to be very much harder to fight the new bill.

This is especially true over the question of secret ballots, which is always a difficult issue to argue anyway. But it will also be true with threats to sue "unlawful" pickets for damages and with injunctions against "secondary" blacking. There will be a special Industrial Relations Court which the unions are pledged to boycott in advance. Instead, there is the danger that it will be apparently isolated individual strikers and weak groups of workers who will face the ordinary courts.

All of these difficulties mean that the socialists will have to step up our campaign against the Bill. If the law is not successfully defeated in its first couple of years, then union activists at every level will begin to take it for granted that there are secret ballots, that the number of pickets has to be restricted and that certain sorts of blacking are ruled out in advance. The employers will have succeeded in altering the established framework of industrial relations and will have gone part of the way towards altering the balance of power in industry to their advantage.

It will be to that minority of workers who fought on May 14th and who want both to support new wage battles and defy the new law that the revolutionary left will have to look in the months ahead. The right wing may be able to deflect our slogans from having an impact on the movement as a whole. But there is an enormous amount of ground to be made by addressing ourselves to the minority and by calling upon them to join us in united fronts of resistance to the Tory offensive.

In unions where the right wing is on the offensive both individual revolutionaries and rank and file groups can gain a good deal of ground by addressing themselves to activist disturbed by this trend, organised or disorganised. There is a real possibility that we can provide the focus for resistance to any attempt by the right to consolidate its advance.

An example of what can be done is shown in the engineering union where the rank and file groups in the Charter has called on other sections of the left to join it in a conference to discuss how to stop the retreat with suitable modifications, the same strategy can be applied in other unions and in the localities. And, in addition to providing a focus for a fightback, the likely difficulties of the Labour left mean that there will be an increasing number of people ready to take seriously the arguments for revolution socialism.

The day itself
A lot of what actually happened on May 14th still remains clouded in mystery. Four weeks later the attitude of almost all union leaderships to the Day of Action was typified by the fact that none of them—let alone the TUC—had any clear idea of how many or who came out. So any analysis of the response is bound to be partial and inadequate.

There are, however, several general points which stand out.

i) There was much weaker backing for strike action in private industry—especially engineering—than in the public sector.

ii) The numbers who came out were pretty much the same as on the only previous occasion when the TUC backed political strike action—May 1st 1973—but the places which stopped were very different.

iii) There were rather notable industries—above all the car industry—where the call for action was hardly even put, let alone turned down.

iv) While a lot of big factories worked "normally" (or nearly so) there were stoppages in some places.

v) There was a fantastic variation between regions in support for strike actions— and in Scotland the picture was of a near general strike.

vi) In nearly all the places where the arguments were put strongly and boldly, there was considerable support for stoppages, even in places not noted for their past militancy.

So we have a general picture which bears out a lot of what has been said in Socialist Review and much of Workers' World over the past nine months. Real problems with struggles organisation in a lot of industries; fears of recession and closure sapping militancy—though not when the counter-arguments are being put, organisation in some smaller places considerably better than in the "traditionally militant like Longbridge or Ford's Dagenham; still a lot of militancy in the public sector—particularly teachers and local government workers.

The difference between stopping and not stopping seems to have depended in most cases on how militants responded to the offensive from the press and the right wing. They were faced with orchestrated hostility to action, of the sort which many had never seen before. From one factory after another came reports of those in favour of the "stoppage being called 'the Communists', with groups of workers under right wing influence showing a rare determination to work if they got the chance.

The easiest thing in the world was to retreat before they hysteria and say nothing. This was especially the case where stewards had in the past tended to rest on their laurels and not worry over much about explaining clearly to the membership what they were doing and why elementary trade union organisation was so important. The steward calling for action could seem as remote to most of the members as the local trade union official calling on them to make a display of individual conscience and give up a day's money.

Yet the very bitterness of the opposition to the call polarised attitudes and opened up other groups of workers to the arguments of militant socialists where these were put. It was here that the effectiveness of things argued for some time by the SWP really showed itself: the taking of political arguments onto the shop floor, the refusal to place all your hopes on resolutions passed by union bodies or stewards committees, the production of bulletins explaining to the ordinary members what is happening, the organisation of sectional meetings to discuss issues at length before going to mass meetings to take an all-party vote. Where this approach was adopted, the indications are that activists had a lot more than an even chance of putting action on the 14th.

Even in a place where the call for action sparked a considerable backlash, Gardeners in Manchester, the fact that a series of leaflets, from the stewards, the SWP, the CP, had been put round meant a reasonable—50%—response on the day itself. The fact that so few people are putting this line was also shown in Manchester when the convenor of GEC Transmissions (the old Metro Vickers plant that used to dominate the Manchester trade union movement) approached the SWP to get a leaflet out.

Manchester was not exceptional in any sense—though the AUEW Stockport district committee was one of the very few which produced its own leaflets and had rather a good response on the shop floor. A few significant plants stopped or had large numbers on strike—GEC Open-hall, Francis Shaw, Gardeners, GEC Transmissions; but other traditional 'left' factories were working pretty normally. A lot of 'unknown' places, with a few hundred workers or so, had
NALGO members out as well—again it is very hard to estimate the size of the stoppage. Both teachers and local government workers were prominent—sometimes the largest contingents—on all the local demonstrations. The civil service stoppages were complicated both by the uneven effect of the transport strike in London and by the fact that a large number of CPSA activists were at conference. In the Health Service the stoppages were still further confused by union instructions to maintain emergency services. This guaranteed a very partial support among key groups of worker.

What is clear about the public sector is that there was much more widespread activity in every area than in private industry. The significance of this is that it is looking more and more clear that the government's next step on the wages front is going to involve some major confrontation in the Health Service, in local authorities or in teaching—the three areas which contributed most support, in terms of numbers, to the action on May 14th.

David Beecham.

---

**Crusader cops out**

Paradoxically, May 14 itself provides one of the most powerful arguments for the possibility of beating the Tory Employment Bill. The way in which the print union, NAT-SOPA, defied with impunity a injunction forbidding a strike.

It was Trafalgar House, the owners of the Express who tried to use the courts to intimidate their workforce. Matthews has long been known for connections with employers' organisations like the Economic League. But all the other Fleet Street employers and, indeed, bosses elsewhere were eagerly watching Mr. 'Right to Manage' Matthews' efforts.

The reason why it should be NAT-SOPA, alone of the four unions involved, that defined the ruling is very interesting. The NGA had just had a big success in its dispute with the general print employers' group, the British Printing Industries Federation (BPIF). NAT-SOPA and SOGAT had already settled with the BPIF and the newspaper society on terms which were not only worse financially but which also had other extremely bad strings attached. Apparently, the provincial members of the NAT-SOPA Executive Council rebelled over the injunction because they felt that NAT-SOPA had been shown up badly by the NGA's achievements in its dispute, and needed to repair its credentials as a fighting union.

But, whatever the reasons, the NAT-SOPA decision was important. And Express Newspapers' reaction to their defiance was even more important. They backed down completely and decided not to go back to the court to get the injunction enforced, and they withdrew their letter to employees threatening dismissal for anyone not reporting for work on May 14.

At the time of writing, the Express has said that they may not let the matter stand there. But their climbdown in the face of a solid stand by just one union was a significant defeat.

Just to add insult to injury for Matthews, Express workers stopped the Express and Star for the 15th time in retaliation for the production in Manchester of 180,000 copies of the Express issued on May 14.

The lessons of the episode are two-fold. In the first place, a defeat for the employers in one area—the BPIF dispute—can have a knock-on effect with workers taking a more militant position elsewhere. Secondly, and very importantly, if unions stand up to the law then the law may well back down, for the last thing the ruling class wants at the moment is general secretaries in jail.

Jane Bernstein
A knife at the giant's throat
Mike Gonzales looks at recent events

Eighteen months ago, Latin America presented a gloomy picture. In Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay military regimes 'defended Western civilisation' (according to Argentina's Videla) by brutal and systematic repression. These 'garrison states', as they have been called, were capitalism's reply to the attempts at reform and economic growth briefly set in motion at the beginning of the decade.

It had become very clear very quickly that any reform, however mild, would call into question the unequal and subordinate relationship between the countries of Latin America and a world market organised according to the interests of the 'developed' world. The alternative to reform had already been set in motion in Brazil in 1964, and exposed in its most cynical and savage form in the Chino of the Gorillas after 1973.

In Central America the entrenched military dynasties oversaw societies where even reform was impossible, as the brief regime of Arbenz in Guatemala (1953-4) had shown. The alternative strategy was to remintegrate the economies of Latin America into the world market as producers of primary or raw materials and as providers of a non-unionised and militarised labour force for the multinationals companies.

Today the picture is very different.

The Nicaraguan revolution overturned the oldest dynasty of them all - Somoza's. In El Salvador there is naked confrontation between the army and the masses as governments look on impotently. And Honduras has been obliged to hold elections for the first time in many years.

Brazil, during the last year, has seen the beginnings of organised political opposition to the most sophisticated and 'successful' military regime of them all, coupled with a series of militant political strikes by powerful sections of the working class.

On the other hand, it would be dangerous and foolhardy to shout 'triumph' without recognising how much is at stake - and how high the price that must be paid. Faced with the Nicaraguan revolution, the government of Guatemala has received massive injections of US military aid which have been used to murder and terrorise and all and any political opponents - be they bourgeois politicians or striking peasants. Uruguay, Argentina and Chile are still seeking their thousands of missing political prisoners, and working class organisation is still undertaken at the risk of torture or death.

Yet the balance of forces has changed; the working class has again become a key actor in the political life of the continent. And it is, at this time, in Peru and Bolivia that the next step will be determined. In Peru, Presidential and Congressional elections have just taken place; in Bolivia the new government will be elected on June 29.

It is not a matter in either case of the left winning the elections; that is not possible. What is important is that in Peru the elections were only called after national strikes and demonstrations by workers in 1977; in the Constituent elections a year later the left won nearly 30 per cent of the vote. The task for the revolutionary organisations then was to translate that electoral support into permanent forms of organisation for struggle. The results of the recent elections, though not yet complete, seem to suggest that a left that could not establish a united front for the elections has lost a large part of that support; but the task remains the same - and the Peruvian working class have shown time and again over the last two years its willingness to fight.

In Bolivia the election results will be academic either way; but if there is an election it will be the direct result of the activity and mobilisation of the Bolivian workers through the COB (the national trade union organisation). Faced with attempts to carry through military coups, the workers have taken to the streets and organised against the military. Here too, the spectre of government have given way to a permanent and direct struggle between classes.

In the months to come the issue for workers is very clear. The situation is not identical in every country: there are no universal models to export from one state to another. One thing is very clear, however: the key to the future is not military strength, nor the heroism of the people. It is the political co-ordination of the mass movement led by an organised working class exercising its economic and political power and presenting a conscious political alternative.

Nicaragua

Nicaragua is still, in many ways, the key to the future of Central America. Faced with the demonstration effect in the countries bordering on Nicaragua, the US government has abandoned its attempts to 'buy' the Sandinistas and turned its attention instead to military containment, by rushing new arms to the armies of Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras.
Internally, Nicaragua remains a field of conflict between different and opposing interests, and the recent resignation of two leading figures in the original governing junta has not made the situation any clearer.

Sa Chamorro, wife of a powerful businessman assassinated before the overthrow of Somoza, was always an unlikely member of the government. She resigned two months ago, claiming ill health. In late April, Robelo, a figure much more closely associated with business interests, also resigned. Some months before, Robelo had formed his own party (the MDN National Democratic Movement) with an eye to the Council of State that was to be formed. And he had attacked the Sandinistas for using the literacy campaign as an opportunity for political education.

The ruling junta was reduced to three, and the question of its future composition—and of the Council of State about to be formed—would clearly now be crucial. Robelo, for his part, clearly felt that the time had come to draw the various bourgeois organisations into the background behind his MDN. Yet, despite previous rumours, the Sandinista government announced that two new members would be appointed to the junta and that neither would be a Sandinista.

Whatever its public criticism, the businessmen’s organisation COSEP clearly did not feel that the government had abandoned the moment of the revolutionary turn, and its representatives did join the Council of State. So what is the Council?

One view popular on the left internationally is that contained in International Press (5 May). It carried the headline ‘Sandinistas announce workers’ control over Council of State’. Clearly the magazine regarded this as a major victory in the class struggle. Yet in this they commit the same error as the Sandinistas. They assume that the class struggle is between the Sandinista government and the bourgeoisie; in other words, that the Sandinistas are the political voice of the working classes in Nicaragua.

If that were so, the workers and peasants in the Council of State would be elected delegates who would choose the government, which would then be the direct representative of working classes. Yet International Press fails to tell its readers that the 47-person Council has no power, its functions are purely advisory and it has no control over the actions or decisions of the government junta.

This suggests (as we have argued in previous articles) that the Nicaraguan state is not the highest expression of the interests of the working class, but a negotiator and arbitrator between interests. If, in the end, that conflict of interests resolves itself in the workers’ favour, it will be because the independent organisations of the working class have developed to the point where they can seize power. The government can certainly make it easier or more difficult to do so—but it cannot do it on behalf (or instead of) the class.

It’s against this background that we should look at the latest developments.

Economy and society

Significant sectors of the economy remain in private hands—especially the key cotton crop. U.S. economic aid of $75 million dollars with further billions blocked by Congress, and the Nicaraguans have now signed trade agreements with Russia and Cuba. But these new agreements have coincided with renewed guarantees (see Latin America Weekly Report (5 May) to private enterprise that the government would provide capital provided that production continued. It is true, of course, that local and factory Sandinista Defence Committees have been insisting that production does continue, much to the irritation of private capital. On the other hand, the government’s principal priority is production, and they have condemned strikes for wages as irresponsible, siding members of the Sandinista Nicaraguan Communist Party and the Maoist Frente Obrero for encouraging them.

Clearly, reconstruction and economic development is a central priority. Yet it is hard to see how the full reorganisation of the economy along new lines can take place while private capital continues to control key areas of production—and there is no strategy for changing that situation.

The last few weeks have provided some insights into Nicaragua’s foreign policy too. Sandinista representatives have attended two recent conferences; the first, organised by the Second International, was attended by Willy Brandt and Mario Soares among others; the second called by COPPPAL, brought together the social democratic and Christian Democratic parties of Latin America. The irony is that the object of both was to contain the impact of Nicaragua; for example, the reformist parties of Latin America have shown much less enthusiasm for supporting the growing movement in El Salvador than they did for the struggle against Somoza.

Here again the policy is one of containment; and the Sandinistas themselves clearly support the idea when they call for a ‘peace zone’ in Central America.

The Nicaraguan Revolution, then, remains afoot—but ambiguous; and the resignation of Chamorro and Robelo cannot be read as a reaction to further radicalisation of the process that in small country—only as a new tactic by sections of the bourgeoisie in their attempts to hold and advance their power over the Nicaraguan economy.

Little to lose in Peru

The new president of Peru is a man known as Federico Belaunde, or “Fidel Belaunde” as his friends call him (perhaps to emphasise) by Richard Gott, Guardian (22 May) because he so loves all things English. It is a sad end to a process that began 12 years ago with fanfares from all and sundry (including Fidel) proclaiming the new Latin American revolution.

When, in 1968, the army led by General Velasco took power, it was with a programme of radical social reform. The man the military ousted from government had come to power in 1963 with a similar-sounding programme promising far-reaching reforms. He rapidly betrayed all his promises then; his name...Federico Belaunde.

Belaunde became President in 1963 at the head of an organisation called Accion Popular. AP was an organisation led by the new urban middle class which had profited from the extension of foreign investment from mining and export agriculture into manufacturing industry in the 1950s. Peru had always been an open field for foreign investment; it was virtually the only country in Latin America which did not adopt some form of protectionism in the wake of the 1929 economic crisis.

Belaunde’s AP had no intention of changing this situation; but he hoped with his populist demagogy, to head off a growing discontent throughout the country. In 1961-2, a massive movement of peasants had developed in the high Andes; its best known leader was the Trotskyist Hugo Blanco (one of the candidates to the Presidential election this year). The rising had been brutally suppressed and Blanco jailed for 20 years (his original death sentence having been abandoned through international pressure).

Belaunde’s promise of nationalisations of Peru’s key resources (particularly oil) and of a wide-ranging agrarian reform came to nothing. In 1965, a guerrilla campaign was savagely put down by the army under Belaunde’s orders. By 1967, the “populist” president had built one major highway and vastly increased Perú’s dependence on foreign capital that once again controlled all the country’s important raw materials and agricultural exports.

The project for national economic growth had failed; the standard of living of the working class had fallen dramatically, and the demands of the peasantry remained unanswered.

Velasco’s government was seen as a “new, third, road” in Latin America. Velasco claimed his government would be “neither capitalist nor communist” - the object was state control over an economy in process of growth, and a shift of resources into industry. The experiment was a complex one, and too
contradictory to explore here. But by 1975 it was clear that, although Peru had shifted resources out of the traditional sectors (mining and export agriculture), the groupings of the old landowners and the foreign-owned mines, it had not escaped from the laws of capitalism. The lack of capital led it back into the hands of the IMF, where the 'third way' foundered and sank. Velasco was replaced by another, far more conservative, General, Morales, under whose government Peru again became the servant of the industrialized world and an unequal participant in the world economy.

Under Morales, the austerity measures insisted on by the IMF brought new unemployment, a falling standard of living for the working population, the suspension of civil rights and the suppression of all opposition. Yet in June and July 1977 a series of massive strikes culminated in a national general strike which opened a new period in Peru. Morales' response was to announce elections to a Constituent Assembly in 1978, and to the Presidency in 1980. The 1978 elections were a massive surprise for the organizations of the revolutionary left. Together, they received nearly 30 per cent of the total vote. This huge vote expressed both the strength and the weakness of the left. The strength, because the Peruvian people had not been deluded by the new barrage of populist promises. Weakness, because of the many organizations of the Peruvian left, none of them could claim political leadership of any significant number of workers in struggle. The issue was now to build that support - which was still merely electoral - into a permanent form organized within the working class movement. In 1978, no left group could claim more than a few hundred members at most, yet the class had shown its combativity and its anger in the struggles of the previous year.

There was never any question of the left winning the elections, of course. But that was not the issue, the point was to use the election campaign to draw workers towards the organizations of the left, towards socialist ideas, and to provide the mass movement, which already existed, with a political direction.

At the beginning of this year, the decision to draw all the left organizations into two united fronts looked promising (they were ARI, drawing in Maoist groups and Trotskyist organizations, with Hugo Blanco as their candidate; and FUL, including the CP and the party representing the original 'spirit of 1968', with Ledesma as its man).

The objective conditions of the working class were (and are) appalling. Wages were (in 1979) at 62 per cent of their 1973 level; around one million inhabitants of Lima were suffering from malnutrition, and unemployment was estimated at 29.6 per cent. The mass movement had shown its willingness to take the government on. By April, the coalitions had fragmented, and there were over 20 Presidential candidates. It appears that the left vote was around half what it had been in 1978; but that of itself is not important. The key issue is how far the left has built a base in the class, won the working class fighters and has a strategy for building, with them, a revolutionary mass party.

If Carter believes in elections, he can breathe easily again; the next year or two will show whether he has relaxed too soon. One thing is sure: for the Peruvian masses there is very little to lose, after 17 years of promises, but their chains.

---

There's little room for sunbathing on Miami Beach - just across from the devastated city. These days, as the refugee boats come in from Cuba and Haiti. At first, Carter must have been well pleased with this little diversion from the failures of the army in Iran. With Reagan breathing down his neck, Carter has turned hawk.

A year ago Carter was negotiating with the so-called Group of 75 to ease relations with Cuba. As a result, Cubans living in the US began to visit relatives in Cuba. Today, the atmosphere is very different, as the US fleet starts its 'Solid Shield 80' military exercise in the Caribbean. The change is partly to do with the elections in the USA and Carter's attempts to become the new champion of Cold War America. The other factor is the changing atmosphere in Latin America: first there was Nicaragua, then El Salvador, Brazil and political upheaval in the Caribbean. It is no coincidence that there are a large number of Cuban exiles among the American-backed forces marching on the border between Honduras and El Salvador.

That is why Carter seizes on the Cuban refugees - though he expected 2000, not the hundred of thousands that have said they want to leave Cuba. By coincidence, the Ku Klux Klan took to the streets of Miami as soon as the numbers grew. And unlike the black population of the State, the KKK were not immediately confronted by the National Guard.

So, who are these refugees? According to Fidel Castro they are 'common criminals and lumpen and anti-social elements' who 'find it difficult to satisfy their vices here' (in Cuba). The ironic thing is that Castro too is using the refugee issue to mobilize and reinforce support for the Cuban state - a lot more successfully than Carter!

Of course, there are petty criminals among the refugees who want to join the big time Cuban syndicates in Miami. There are also political prisoners, opponents of Castro (mostly from the left) who have been recently released. What the Cubans do not talk about are the other groups who are now trying to leave Cuba. On the one hand, there's little doubt that some of them are state employees and bureaucrats who have lost their jobs in recent purges of the state apparatus. For them, it's the loss of a comfortable and privileged position that has taken them into the Peruvian embassy compound.

Lastly, and the best kept secret of all, is that some of the refugees are unemployed workers. In January of this year, a labour rationalization plan was announced, which allowed the industries of Havana to make workers redundant in the pursuit of higher productivity. How many of the 'refugees' are urban workers looking for jobs?

Cuba is not exempt from economic crisis; and it has been made worse by a blight affecting both the tobacco and the sugar crops. The next three or four years, according to Fidel Castro, will be hard. The five million unemployed in the US will bear witness that there is no promised land to be found there. For both Castro and Carter, in their different ways, the refugees are a useful diversion yet it solves none of the problems of scarcity or unemployment that the crisis has produced.
When the cold war heated up

The uprising in Kwangju has pushed South Korea into the news just as the 30th anniversary of the Korean war has come up. The regime sustained by American—and British—guns in that war has proved to be as brutal now as it was then. 20 years of economic 'development' may have created large scale industry. But it has not wiped out poverty and oppression, which is why when students took to the streets they were joined by miners armed with dynamite.

South Korea's rulers will be looking at the future with trepidation. Kwangju has occurred just as the world economic crisis is beginning to affect them and as they face intensified competition from other Asian economies such as Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan.

Meanwhile, across the 38th parallel in North Korea, any glee at the events in South Korea will be dampened by an awareness that their own industrialisation has depended upon loans from Western banks which are becoming more difficult to repay. Such difficulties led to the last five year plan being abandoned and must be worrying to North Korea's rulers as they review the new world crisis.

But where do the two Koreas come from? And what was the war that was fought over the country 30 years ago? Ian Birchall looks at this murky episode in the first Cold War.

It is thirty years this month since the outbreak of the Korean War. The Korean War marked the most intense phase of the Cold War, and helped to launch the long post-war boom. It also produced McCarthyism in the United States and the final rightward lurch of the 1945 British Labour government. Last but not least it precipitated a crisis in the depleted ranks of British Trotskyism which gave birth to the Socialist Review group, ancestor of the SWP. (Indeed, many Socialist Review readers have doubtless been harangued about their position on Korea, generated by cut-throat rancour that was not born until some years after the cease-fire.)

As we enter a new phase of Cold War, an attempt to retrace the course of the Korean War may have some lessons for the present and the future.

After many centuries of national independence, Korea was annexed by Japan in 1910, and remained under Japanese occupation until the end of the Second World War. Unlike China or Vietnam, Korea did not have a strong Communist tradition in the twenties and thirties. A Korean Communist Party was founded in 1921 by émigrés in Moscow, but the movement was in disarray. At the Fourth Congress of the Comintern in November 1922, Eberlein reported that four Koreans had arrived, but dissensions in the Party were so great that it was impossible to discover who were the delegates; two were admitted as guests and two turned away. A new Korean CP was founded in 1925, but by the Sixth Congress of the Comintern in 1928 its status was to ensure that its delegates received only guest tickets. The party was again revived in the 1930s, and Kim II-Sung began to make his name as a guerrilla leader; however, Kim appears to have gone to Russia at some time between 1938 and 1942.

The Division of Korea
On August 14th, 1945, five days after the bombing of Nagasaki, Japan surrendered. The question of what was to be done with Japanese-occupied territories was now urgent. The main 'spheres of influence' into which the post-war world was to be divided had been settled at Yalta, but a number of loose ends remained. Korea was one; the USA had been angling for an international trusteeship (under US domination), and since this scheme had fallen through nuclear alternative had been cobbled up. So, on August 9th, the US president, Harry Truman, issued General Order Number One, which specified that Japanese troops south of the 38th Parallel should surrender to the Americans, and those north of the line should surrender to the Russians. A copy of General Order Number One was sent to Joseph Stalin, for information. Stalin in fact seems to have been quite happy with the curve-up, for Russian troops had already entered Korea two days earlier, and US troops arrived in the country only on September 8th. For the time being Stalin was glad to play along with the West.

Thus the two Korean states came into existence; in the North, Kim II-sung arrived wearing Russian uniform to head the government. Incidentally, the man who was sent away with a ruler and a pile of old maps to work out the best dividing line, and came back with the decision that it should be the 38th Parallel, was a brilliant young rising star called Dean Rusk, subsequently to be a hawkish US Secretary of State during the Vietnam War. (Those comrades who insist that 'workers' states' can come into existence without the self-activity of the working class are prone to run into difficulties; but it is hard to think of a more grotesque notion than attributing the paternity of a 'workers' state' to Dean Rusk.)

At no point along the line were the Korean people actually consulted as to whether they wanted one or two states, let alone what form such states should take. In the South the US gave short shrift to the revolutionary committees which had emerged out of the anti-Japanese resistance; where necessary Japanese forces were used against them.

In the North the resistance was incorporated into a pro-Russian régime, which was consolidated by a land reform from which 700,000 families benefited; the land, however, remained state property; the peasants rented it from the state and paid a tax in kind. The North contained the major industry of Korea (mines, chemicals, power stations) with a working class estimated at quarter of a million in 1945; there is no evidence of it being mobilised. By 1947 Kim
had established his political control after a faction fight with pro-Chinese elements in the Party.

In the South, the US military government established, in 1946, the quaintly named ‘Representative Democratic Council’, headed by Syngman Rhee, a seventy-year-old who had lived for thirty-seven years in the United States. His regime was based on landlords and other conservative groups, and delayed the progress of the land reform begun by the US military government. Rhee’s government rapidly became unpopular; thousands of his opponents were killed, and at one point a quarter of the country was under martial law. By 1947 a US-commissioned opinion poll showed that a majority of South Koreans thought they had been better off under the Japanese.

In 1947 the United Nations resolved that all foreign troops should withdraw from Korea. Russian forces had left by the end of 1945. but the US forces were asked to stay longer because of disturbances in the South Korean Constabulary, and they did not depart until June 1949. However, neither regime could be described as independent in any meaningful sense. Both originated, not from any popular movement or democratic process, but from the military intervention of the two leading world powers. Both continued to be armed by their superpower sponsors, and both owed their political credibility and their political loyalty to those same sponsors. Therefore in order to understand the outbreak of hostilities in June 1950 it is necessary to take a look at the overall picture of international relations at that date.

The Outbreak of War

The Cold War, which had begun in the spring of 1947, had reached something of a stalemate. The long-drawn-out Berlin blockade, from June 1948 to May 1949, had ended in a costly draw; further confrontation in Europe seemed futile. In the autumn of 1949 Russia had exploded its first atomic bomb, an important step towards the establishment of a nuclear balance of terror. In April 1950 US president Truman initiated a National Security Council paper which urged America to ‘undertake a massive rebuilding of its own and the free world’s defensive capabilities and adopt an unflinching “will to fight” posture towards its enemies.’ The proposed conclusion was a quadrupling of arms expenditure.

So, the post-war honeymoon between America and Russia had totally collapsed; neither side was capable or desirous of a total abandonment of the post-war ‘sphere of influence’, but both sides were ready to nibble around the edges, if necessary to risk a trial of strength to see how far the other side would go. Obviously the Third World provided the most expendable territory and forces for such a trial of strength. It was in this context that both sides responded to the opportunities offered by Korea.

It is a disputed question as to how the Korean War actually began. While the US claim was that North Korea launched an unprovoked invasion of the South, pro-Russian sources claim the opposite. Certainly Rhee had made many threats to invade the North over the preceding two years, and he acquired a strong incentive for war with the catastrophic defeat of his supporters in the elections held at the end of May. However, the rapid military advantage gained by the North (which occupied almost the whole of the South within two months) suggests that the North was well-prepared for war, and that if the South did take the initiative, it was an inept and ill-advised one.

From a revolutionary socialist point of view, however, the question as to who fired the first shot is a relatively minor one. What is at stake is the social nature of the regimes at war, and the way in which the major powers took up the issue.

The pro-Russian interpretation of the war has always been that if Rhee had started the war, he did so in close collusion with the United States. The facts suggest that this is unlikely. The United States had not given great priority to Korea in the preceding period. Between 1948 and 1950 General Bradley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, had put South Korea seventh on his priority list, with Europe at the head of the list. Nor was the US particularly well-prepared in military terms for the outbreak of war. As one pro-American historian records: ‘Apart from the disintegrating South Korean Army, the only forces immediately available to MacArthur lay in the four skeletonized American divisions garrisoning nearby Japan... In the United States itself only one army division and part of one marine division were ready for immediate service, and these could not be shipped to Korea for some weeks.’

The aims of West and East

Yet the United States did see the war as demanding immediate and massive intervention. Part of the American motivation was the so-called ‘domino theory’ to be much cited during the Vietnam War. President Truman’s daughter recalls: ‘My father walked over to the globe in front of the fireplace and gave it a spin. “I’m more worried about other parts of the world,” he said. “The Middle East, for instance.” He put his finger on Iran, and said, “Here is where they will start trouble if we aren’t careful.”’

More important was the concern to retain the control over the Pacific won in the Second World War. The Chinese Revolution had obviously been a major setback for the US in the Far East. But Chiang Kai-shek’s pre-revolutionary regime had been so corrupt and indefensible, and the terrain so vast and full of uninhabitable areas, that it was both socially and geographically terms, Korea seemed a better bet. The United States rapidly and fraudulently disguised itself as the United Nations, with token forces from Britain and other UN member-states in tow, and launched itself into the war.

Russia likewise seems to have been initially surprised by the outbreak of war. Russia was currently boycotting the UN Security Council in protest at the seating of the Chiang Kai-shek regime as the representative of China; it was this absence of Russia which allowed the US to get UN cover for its intervention in Korea, constituting at least a propaganda setback for Russia. Russia decided to keep out of direct involvement in the war, but gave unambiguously political and military backing to the North Korean regime.

In broader terms the Korean involvement fitted Russian strategy. Between 1948 and 1950 Communist Parties throughout the Far East - Burma, Malaya, Indonesia, the Philippines, India - had launched armed guerrilla struggles, often on an ill-prepared basis. Isaac Deutscher (who came near the end of being soft on the “state capitalist” analysis) gives an account of what he sees as Stalin’s motivation for involvement:

‘In June 1950 Kim Il-Sung, the head of the Communist administration, charged Syngman Rhee’s government of the South with aggression and ordered a general offensive across the 38th Parallel. The rapid initial success of the Northern troops indicated that the blow had been well prepared, so well, indeed, that it seemed plausible that Stalin and Mao had been consulted about it before and/or that they had even issued the marching orders. That Mao should have favoured the venture was not surprising. To him the Communist attempt to obtain control over the whole of Korea must have looked like a natural sequel to the Chinese revolution... Stalin’s motives were less clear. He was anxious to avoid armed conflict with the West; and his strategic interest in Korea was only slight. (Korea has a ten-mile frontier with the USSR, whereas her frontier with Chinese Manchuria stretches over 500 miles.) Yet Stalin acted with an enthusiasm to his latest rivalry with Mao. Having so recently and so scandalously misjudged the chances of the revolution in China, he was anxious to dispel the impression of political timidity he had given, and wanted to prove himself as a daring strategist of revolution as Mao.”

The cause of the war

The contradictions in the situation meant that the early course of the war was dramatic and horrifying. Under the corrupt Rhee dict
... and these were the consequences.

The war dragged on for two more years, with military stalemate accompanied by desultory peace negotiations. But it took political changes in both Washington and Moscow to liquegate the whole sorry affair.

In 1953 Eisenhower, a Republican, replaced Truman as president. Eisenhower was the representative of significant business groups that wanted an end to the war; moreover, it was easier for the traditionally right-wing Republicans to make peace than Democrats, who always ran the risk of being labeled 'soft on communism'. But the real confirmation that it was in essence a confrontation between the great powers, in which the Korean people were only the victims. Once again a contrast with Vietnam is instructive.

The Outcome
There were no victors in this barren war. One estimate puts the total casualties as high as four million. Korean agriculture and industry were laid waste. If the US hawks were denied the chance of using atomic weapons, they did get the opportunity of experimenting with a new and hideous weapon—napalm.

Korea remains divided, with ritual negotiations permanently trapped on the level of discussing what form negotiations should take. South Korea has achieved, in the quarter century since the war ended, an economic boom. But it was a boom bought by the massive superexploitation of Korean workers. And low wages can be maintained only by crude authoritarianism. In the fraud silent democracy of South Korea, the president preserves a majority by appointing a third of the members of parliament. Inflation, riot and repression remains the normal pattern of life.

The so-called socialism of North Korea offers no more appealing a prospect. While North Korea has massive debts to Japan and the West, democracy is replaced by the grotesque personality cult of the megalomaniac and nepotistic Kim II-Sung. (In 1977 the Central African Emperor Bokassa sent an emissary to North Korea to study how to organise a personality cult.)

The Korean War was not a revolution, not a national liberation struggle, not even a fight between the relatively more and less 'progressive'. It was a squalid trial of strength between two asymmetrical power blocs, carefully limited to the territory of an Asian people far from their own heartlands. The only response that revolutionary socialists could make was to denounce the fraud and to start looking elsewhere for the real potential for revolutionary change.

Ira Birkholtz

1. This article will not deal with the repercussions of the Korean War on British and world Trotskyism. For this see The Fourth International, Stalinism and the Origins of the International Socialists (Pluto, 1971) especially pp 11, 76-8, 96-8, 103-4.
2. The main source for this article are: T Higgins, Korea and the Fall of MacArthur (OUP, 1963); A.B Ullam, The Rivals (Allen Lane, 1971); G Kolko, The Politics of War (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1968); D Korotnick, From Yalta to Vietnam (Penguin, 1967); J Deutsch, Stalin (Penguin, 1966); DN ashes, The SS in Caucasus and Bureaucracy (Lawrence & Wishart, 1966); E O'Connell, Korea, 1950-1953 (Faber & Faber 1969); P Naville, La Guerre et la Revolution I. (EDI Paris, 1967); M Truman, Harry S Truman (Hammish Hamilton 1973). As will be seen, these sources range from openly pro-American, through liberal-critical, to Stalinist
Looking Backwards

Conservative cabinet ministers are holding a festival of hypocritical speechwriting. "Release the 51 individuals seized from the US Embassy in Teheran," they shriek, yet all this talk about respecting diplomatic procedures and practices relies upon one essential thing - a lack of knowledge on the part of their listeners.

For the British government behaved in 1918 with much less courtesy towards Soviet diplomats than the Iranians are doing today. The Russian ambassador, Maxim Litvinov, was arrested and imprisoned in Brixton jail. So was George Chicherin who, like Litvinov, was later to become Russian foreign minister. Similarly, John Maclean, that great Scottish socialist, found the Foreign Office not prepared to recognise his appointment as Soviet Consul in Scotland.

He, too, was quickly pushed behind bars. At that time, a large number of people from Eastern Europe, many of them political refugees, lived in this country. Without any diplomatic protection, they stood helpless before officially-backed persecution. For example, Peter Petroff, a wounded hero of the 1905 revolution and a close friend of Maclean, was imprisoned. Then the authorities threatened to hand him over to the White Russians, a decision that would have meant certain death. A campaign by British socialists and trade unionists, led by Mrs. Bridges-Adams, stopped this from happening. But they were unable to prevent the islands occurring to Petroff's wife. She was made to shag a cell in Aylesbury prison with a prostitute suffering from syphilis. They both had to use the same eating and washing utensils.

The main reason why Britain took such action was because its leaders were gripped by an anti-socialist frenzy. They desperately wanted to overthrow the newly-created workers' state in Russia. By the summer of 1918, British troops had already joined counter-revolutionary forces. This military intervention would have been put in jeopardy had the Soviet embassy in London continued to function. Britain was committing an act of naked aggression against the Soviet Union; doubtless Litvinov, if he had remained at liberty, would have been able to strengthen even further the mounting "Hands off Russia" agitation.

But there was another, less obvious, reason for the British government's action. After the revolution the bulging files of the Tsarist secret police fell into Bolshevik hands. At one stroke this gave the Soviet government not only the names of all Okhrana agents operating abroad but also of their contacts in the British secret service. Obviously, this was highly dangerous for British intelligence. Litvinov and his colleagues, therefore, had to be silenced to prevent them from using this sensitive information.

Revolutions have a knack of uncovering the murky corners in state archives. This is equally true of Iran as it was of Russia. Undoubtedly, revolutionaries in Teheran will have discovered some interesting papers. There will show how the Shah's cruel and despotic regime owed its very existence to the CIA; how America and Britain helped him to erect the panoply of his police state; and how for almost 30 years, Western support propped up this sadistic dictator.

It stretches credulity, in view of CIA subversion in various parts of the world, to suggest that a sizeable section of the American embassy staff in Teheran were not spies or CIA agents. Indeed, an interesting fact was implicit in the abortive rescue attempt; despite the detention of the 51 Americans, a network of US agents still operates in Iran.

It is fascinating to speculate what British reactions would have been if the Russians had behaved in 1918 in the same manner as the Americans did recently. Suppose a contingent of the Red Army had secretly landed in Britain with the intention of forcibly freeing Litvinov and his comrades from Brixton prison. The screams about "international piracy," and "unprovoked violation of British sovereignty" might have been even louder than the nauseating hypocrisy we hear from the politicians and press today.

Murky Connections

The files of the Tsarist secret police captured by the Bolsheviks after the revolution, proved to contain many surprises. They discovered an over-zealous police agent named Azev had cheated a plot which led to his employer, Interior Minister Pliev, being blown to pieces. That the same agent provocateur had even planned to assassinate the Tsar but fortuitously failed when one of his collaborators, a genuine revolutionary, dropped out of the conspiracy.

They also found out that Roman Malinovsky, a key man in the Bolshevik organisation and the leader of the Party's deputies in the Russian Duma, had for a long time been a police agent. Similarly, in 1918, when the Bolsheviks were going through a bad patch, seven of its eight members in Moscow were also police agents, a fact that had none-too-pleasant repercussions for the eighteenth.

The Tsarist state apparatus employed 40,000 spies in a desperate but vain attempt to eliminate subversion and so its files were detailed and voluminous. One murky area they threw light on was the close, intimate collaboration that existed between the Tsar's Okhrana and the Special Branch, who, undoubtedly, did everything to assist their opposite number.

Opponents of Russian autocracy in this country were harassed and imprisoned. A trade union—the Russian Seamen & Firemen's Union—that had set up its headquarters in London, after being outlawed in Russia, was smashed by the covert and its general secretary, Antchkov, arrested. Once the Civil War in Russia began, the British government exerted pressure on Russians still living in Britain, to enlist in the counter-revolutionary armies. Some of those who did were killed or injured, but Britain refused to accept liability and pay compensation to the next-of-kin.

This pattern of behaviour was not exactly new. In fact, Britain, at the very outset, modelled its force on its Tsarist counterpart. And how is this known? The information comes from a highly interesting source. William Briggs, the Chief Constable of Bradford, employed agent provocateurs and spies on a large scale to help him to quell Chartist uprisings in the city in 1840 and again in 1848. However, he became disenchanted with his anti-working class role. After resigning from office, in 1851 he wrote a pamphlet, "The Police Spy System Exposed," and, for good measure, got Engels' close friend, James Leach, to publish it.

The case of William Briggs reveals that, when society is undergoing profound and deep-seated changes, no section is immune from the impact. Undoubtedly, the police are the most conservative, the most backward part of the working class. Still the state cannot always be guaranteed of their loyalty. In the strike-torn Britain after 1918, not only did the police form their own trade union and come out on strike, but individuals like Inspector Sye completely identified himself with the workers' cause, addressing demonstrations, enduring hardships and even going to prison.

So, perhaps, Home Secretary William Whitelaw should not sleep too comfortably in his bed at night. How can he be certain of the continued loyalty of the men and women he is supposed to control? Who knows when a detector may not reveal the truth about the murder of Blair Peach and the other murders committed by the boys in blue?

Clearly, the lesson is easy to see. From Tsar Nicholas II to that shambles wrecking, the former Shah of Iran, it is obvious that even the most elaborately organised police system is not sufficient to protect a social order that is fundamentally rotten.

Ray Challinor

One of the individuals employed to sift through files of the Tsar's secret police was the revolutionary writer, Victor Serge. His booklet, "What Everyone Should Know About State Repression" (New Park Publications, £2.), has just been published for the first time in English, and is well worth reading. One of the lessons Serge draws is that socialist organisations have to consider counter-measures to protect themselves from state surveillance, but at the same time be unavowed by the might of the enemy's repressive apparatus.
Getting away with it

There is now no doubt that the Employment Bill will pass on to the statute book this summer. All sorts of things trade unionists have done so far will suddenly become illegal. But, Colin Sparks points out that this is not a new thing, and discusses how workers have dealt with the problem in the past.

The new Tory law attacking trade union rights means that, sooner or later, militant workers are going to break the law. There is nothing new in that. Even TUC leaders will remind audiences that the history of the trade unions is a history of law-breaking. Every year, Len Murray makes a speech in the little Dorset village of Tipopuddle where, in 1834, six farm labourers were sentenced to seven years transportation for "administering an illegal oath", i.e. recruiting for the union. The Tipopuddle Martyrs were not the first victims of anti-union laws and they certainly were not the last. From the start of capitalism the ruling class have tried to use the courts to prevent or hamper workers organising.

In the early days of capitalism there were a jumble of anti-union laws directed against particular groups of workers designed to stop them 'combining' on the feeble grounds that, since magistrates had the legal power to fix wage rates, any attempt to organise for better wages was interfering with the law. Magistrates were all men of property and either employers or their close friends; these laws were resented and widely broken, sometimes secretly, sometimes openly. By the late 1790's there were about 40 such laws on the books.

But, with the development of industrial capitalism and the rapid growth of a factory working class, a modern proletariat, even this great arsenal of legislation was inadequate. So, in 1799, and 1800 and sweeping 'combination Acts' were passed. Pushed through by the anti-slavery 'philanthropists' William Wilberforce, these Acts:

'Made liable (for the first offence) to three months in gaol, or two months hard labour, any working man who combine with another to gain and increase in wages or a decrease in hours, or solicit anyone else to leave work, or objected to working with any other workman. The sentence was to be given by two magistrates, who should not belong to the trade involved.... The Acts also nominally forbade employers' combinations. But this prohibition was never enforced.'

The mere passage of the laws did not stop workers organising but they did give the ruling class a powerful weapon. In 1810 the composers of The Times were prosecuted for the crime of combination and sentenced to banned for one year and two years in prison. The usual way around those laws was for a body of workers to organise themselves as a legal 'Friendly Society' and use it as a cover for clandestine trade union organisation. When 'combination' was finally legalised in 1824 there was a huge 'coming out' of these organisations and a wave of strike action.

It was this wave of organisation and industrial action which led the employers to make martyrs of the farm labourers from Tipopuddle. They ploughed to use the savage sentences (which were in reality almost death sentences) to discourage other workers. They failed. Trade unionism was too important for workers to be intimidated into inactivity. A massive campaign eventually secured the return of the surviving farm workers.

In fact, skilled workers in particular were able to maintain quite stable unions but, even when there were no actual martyrs, the law found other ways to attack unions.

In 1867. In the case of Hornby v. Close, the courts ruled that, although unions might be legal, they had no powers to dismiss dishonest officials for stealing the funds. This was obviously a major attack on union funds, since some of the skilled unions were very rich indeed. The Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE—now the AUEW) for example, charged rubs of one shilling a week in 1851—at a time when its 11,000 highly skilled members might earn about 40 shillings a week. In the terms of those days, it gave the union a huge income.

Even when, in 1871, a new Act regularised the position of unions it was immediately followed by another Act which made picketing illegal. Under it the leaders of the London gas workers were sent to prison for a year simply for preparing to strike.

The struggle with the courts has continued ever since. In 1900 an unofficial strike on the Taff Vale Rail Company led to a ruling that the union could be sued by the employers for the action of its members. There have been many other cases in which workers have gone to jail or been fined right up to the Pentonville Dockers and the Shrewsbury building workers.

Those two cases, however, focus a central question. In one case the workers were quickly released; in the other they served their time. What makes the difference? The question for us is not whether workers will break the law—they always have done and will continue in that grand tradition—but how you can get away with it.

Alternative responses

There are three possible ways of dealing with the law and the state.

(1) The approach favoured by most reformist leaders is to say that while we might not like the law, there is nothing that we can about it since it is the law. The best that can be done is to work for the next election and make sure that Labour wins.

The objections are obvious. In the first place, some workers will break the law and we cannot leave them in the lurch. Quite apart from the personal suffering of imprisonment and huge fines, the effect of defeats here and now might be to shatter the strength of the movement and make it impossible to get a Labour government next time.

What is more, there is no guarantee that a Labour government will not use the law against the trade unions. They have done in the past—against dockers in 1951 and with their attempt to push through In Place of Strike in 1969. Even the last Labour government dragged its feet about repealing the hated Tory Industrial Relations Act. The thing that forced its hand was the readiness of the AUEW to continue to call indefinite strike action against the seizure of its funds even under a Labour government.

(2) To try to find ways round the law—to bend it a bit here and there. That, for example, is essentially what the early trade unions did when they disguised themselves as Fri-
endly societies. There are problems with this too.

As a strategy it can only be piecemeal. While the better organised sectors might be able to get away with quite a lot the less organised cannot. For example, while some strong section, say the NGA on Fleet Street, might persuade the employers to turn a blind eye to certain things which are against the new law, a much weaker group, say Asian women workers, have no chance.

The weaker sections will get picked off one by one. Sooner or later the employers will judge that the time has come to take on the remainder. And by that time, of course, the strong sections will be on their own with no-one to help them fight the full power of the state.

The whole approach surrenders to the employers the initiative of when not to turn the blind eye. Because the strength, unity and consciousness of even the best-organised workers goes up and down with the overall rhythm of the class struggle, it is quite easy for the employers to pick the right time. The law may be an ass, but the ruling class as a whole certainly are not.

An example from history is the case in which unions were denied the right to recover their funds. This took place immediately after a parliamentary enquiry into what were called the 'Sheffield Outrages' - individual acts of terror by a small group of workers who waged the class struggle by means of blowing up managers' homes and assassinating scabs. The ruling class were able to build up a big campaign and isolate and intimidate all trades unionists. With the movement on the retreat, the courts then snapped back what workers had long thought they could get away with.

(3) Organised defiance of the law. Once again, there are problems, since there is no guarantee that such defiance will be successful. Our history is littered with victories and defeats.

However, if we look at two examples of successful defiance, we can see what are the general conditions which bring victory.

The Hargreaves Case

In 1916 the British government introduced conscription. Despite the general nationalist hysteria this was widely unpopular amongst the working class, so the government made concessions. One was that the executives of skilled unions should issue to their members a special card which would exempt them from call-up. Of course, for the employers, conscription was a wonderful thing. While they did not want to lose all of their profitably skilled workers they didn't mind some going. They wanted to replace as many skilled workers as possible with unskilled 'dilutes' and they were always glad to get rid of union militants. What better way to deal with a troublemaker than to bundle him into the army and let the military policemen or the enemy deal with him? Consequently, both the military authorities, hungry for fresh victims for the slaughter, and the employers were always trying it on.

One of the towns in which they tried hardest was Sheffield. In the course of the summer of 1916 the local district committee of the ASE had to fight the cases of 300 of its members. By the end of October things came to a head.

Leonard Hargreaves, a fitter and ASE member employed in the armaments factory of Vickers, was called up. His appeal was disallowed because the company refused to release papers which proved that he was exempted. The shop stewards at Vickers took up the case but the ASE executive did nothing. The district committee, which was led by left-wing militants, then called a mass meeting. Because of the official union line, they could not take action as the district committee, so they changed hats and turned the meeting over to themselves in the guise of the 'shop stewards' committee.

The meeting was a long and stormy one. It passed a resolution that, 'In the event of the military authorities attacking our members a down tools policy will be adopted.' It was resolved that the government be given one week in which to return Hargreaves to his job or there would be a strike.

The government tried to bluff and the official leaders of other unions refused to co-operate with the stewards while the ASE claimed to be going through the proper procedure. When the deadline - 4pm on 15 November 1915 - was reached, nothing had been heard.

One of the local leaders later described the day:

'There were not less than two hundred shop stewards waiting for the stroke of four on this eventful day. Standing outside was a fleet of motor-cycles with their cyclist shop stewards ready to be dispatched to the engineering centres, visited the previous weekend.

'In all cases arrangements were made to re-inforce them by delegates going by train who were to stay in the big centres under instructions not to return until directly instructed by the shop stewards' committee. This step was taken as a precaution against the press, in anticipation of the contradictory reports which they would undoubtedly issue concerning the strike.

'Four o'clock came. The government had not replied. The strike was called. The shop stewards rushed to the factories. The cyclists went off at once. At five o'clock the strike was complete. Ten thousand skilled workers walked out of the factories. Then the government got busy with the telegraph wires.'

The government sent a telegram to the stewards claiming that Hargreaves had been released. At the same time the local military command had drawn up a list of men for jailing. Unfortunately for the government, the shop stewards had taken other precautions. They had sent two delegates to wait at the military camp in which Hargreaves was being held with instructions to report regularly. Hargreaves himself sent a telegram denying his release and this was confirmed by the delegates at the camp.

The strike continued, with a mass meeting sending the government the message that, 'Hargreaves must be present in Sheffield before the men will agree to return to work.' Besides that, the strike was starting to spread. Mass meetings were being organised in all the major engineering centres and workers at Barrow-in-Furness were already committed to coming out in sympathy.

After three days of strike, the government capitulated and Hargreaves was escorted back to Sheffield by the two delegates. The day after his return, a mass meeting was held and voted for an organised return to work. The decisive action of the Sheffield engi-
The factors which led to the Sheffield victory are easy to list. There was a strong and militant work-place organisation. The issue at stake was one which all of the membership fully understood and the whole matter was conducted with full rank and file involvement. All of the major decisions were taken by mass meetings. Once the decision to strike had been taken, every effort was made to organise for its success. The strike was not confined to one factory or one locality; on the contrary, determined efforts were made to spread the strike as widely as possible. No trust was placed in trade union officials or the local leadership was prepared to act independently. No trust was placed in government promises or the word of high officials; the strike was only called off once it had achieved its object.

Above all, there was a firm and decisive leadership which, once it had decided to fight, fought hard. There was no wavering or indecision. There was no back-stage manoeuvring or bureaucratic manipulation. There was no empty rhetoric and no attempts to use the membership as a stage army.

Of course, the Sheffield stewards had limitations. Their struggle was a sectional one imbued with a good deal of craft elitism. They were fighting for the privileges of skilled men rather than against conscription or the war itself. They were unable to really spread the organisation on a national scale. Consequently, the government was able to hide its true isolation of workers in the newly founded Communist Party. But even with those limitations they were able to take on and defeat a government which did not flinch at the murder of millions in the trenches or the destruction of the centre of Dublin.

Betthshanger

The Second World War provided another example, this time involving the miners. The law, in the shape of the National Arbitration Order, made strikes in the pits illegal. However, after the failure of the arbitration procedure to settle a long-standing pay dispute, the miners of Betthshanger Colliery in Kent walked out in December 1941.

Out of the 4,000 strikers, about 1,000 were summoned to the magistrates' court. They marched there in a body, accompanied by delegations from other pits, women and children, banners and brass bands. They were cheered through the streets. They all pleaded guilty. The local officials, who supported the strike, were jailed. The rest were fined quite substantial sums. The law was satisfied. Unfortunately, the strike continued. There was mounting pressure for sympathy action in other pits.

In desperation, the Secretary for Mines and the national president of the miners went to the jail holding the strike leaders and opened negotiations. After five days of talks an agreement was signed in the prison.

The agreement conceded the strikers' demands but still, while the leaders were in jail, no coal was produced. The Secretary of Mines went to see the Home Secretary. He agreed to release the leaders. After 11 days of occupation the leaders were freed and the strikers went to work.

In fact, the leading stewards had no clear long-term strategy. The best of them recognised that when five years later they joined the matter drop.

The Betthshanger strike was clearly less militant than the Sheffield dispute. For one thing, Kent was almost in the front line and, for many workers, the war was seen as a struggle against fascism which they had a real interest.

On the other hand, it has the same basic features. Once again there was a determination to stick it out. Once again the local leaders acted independently of the national bureaucrats. Once again there was mass involvement. Once again, there was an attempt to win support in other workplaces. Once again, there was no return to work before the issue at stake was settled, signed, sealed and delivered.

Lessons

These lessons have been repeated in more recent successful struggles against the law. The difference between Pentonville and Shrewsbury in the end comes down to the fact that the dockers were supported by a massive strike wave while tragically, the building workers were not.

The rules for breaking the law and getting away with it are not that much different from the normal rules of the class struggle. The factors which allow workers to break the law with impunity are basic features of the working class: its numbers, its organisation and its position in production.

The law is designed to handle individuals or small groups. It can be overwhelmed by masses. It can crush even the bravest individual because it has a massive apparatus of courts, police and prisons. But these cannot cope with thousands or millions of defiant workers. We are simply too many for them.

The law is designed to smash the isolated individual. It aims to lock you in a cell and make that the end of the story. It cannot respond to an organised movement that grows with each fresh imprisonment.

The law does not work. It cannot make shells in Sheffield or produce coal in Kent. It is powerless against the fact that it is workers who actually do the things that keep society running.

The logic of all this is that any successful attempt to defy the new Tory laws must be a mass action. 'Superpeople' who rely on their own defiance will be crushed. A mass movement will win. That means that we have to start preparing the ground now and not wait until the first big trial of strength.

It will not only be vital that all of the workers directly involved are convinced that they are right, but that millions of other workers also understand the issues at stake and are prepared to act in sympathy.

We cannot rely on the leaders of the unions either to do the propaganda work for us or to act decisively on the day. To the extent that they do anything it will be within the rigid channels of the official machine. At best they will respond to pressure from below; at worst they will treat the members with contempt, use them as a stage army, get knocked back and use that as an excuse for doing nothing about the next case. The fight will have to be won with the rank and file or it will not be won at all.

Colin Sparks
Shock! Horror! Dave Spart answers back

I'm ashamed to admit it, but I still read Private Eye every fortnight. I know I shouldn't. Racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, anti-socialism, plain old-fashioned anti-working class prejudice, and even, in one awful moment of cruelty, a 'Blair Peach Memorial Joke' competition - Private Eye manages to indulge in just about everything to which I'm opposed.

It harks on relentlessly about Jews and foreigners, 'pseuds' (which very often merely means intellectuals) and 'pooves' (who else but the Eye would attack Martin Webster for what might well be his one blameless feature, his homosexuality?). It's hostile not merely to libelled women, but to women in general. Mrs Thatcher apart, women figure in Private Eye's world as the butts for an endless parade of sexist jokes, and as little else. Even Bill Tidy's The Cloggies' strip, often one of the more amusing things in Private Eye, comes fully furnished with the 'Blagdon amateur rapist' (OK, I know it's a joke; but no-one makes jokes about the Blagdon amateur murderer, do they?).

Its hostility to the trade union bureaucracy is often simply a hostility to the potential power of the organised working class. For much of the last Labour Government, the Eye ran a fortnightly cartoon strip, 'The Brothers' by John Kent, which worked to death a single joke based on that most ridiculous of Tory prejudices, the belief that 'the unions' are running the country.

And what goes for the Eye goes double for Auberon Waugh's 'Diary'. If you're desperately in need of an insight into the mind of a Toryism so meanderthali that it's unsure as to the merits, by comparison with feudalism, of capitalism, let alone socialism, you need look no further than here. (Yes, I know it too is all a joke, in part, at least, an exercise in self-parody. But the interesting thing about self-parody is the fact that if it's well done, and Waugh's is, it inevitably exposes certain truths about the mind of the author. Many a true word is spoken in jest.)

Private Eye is also often very boring, to use one of its own key insult words. Its 'specialist' sections, Groove's gossip column, Colonel Mad's 'Sporting Life', Bookworm's 'World of Books', 'In the Courts' by Justinian Forthmone, 'Street of Shame', and the rest, are probably fascinating to those who work or play amongst them to such inside gossip. But for the outsider it can be very dull.

The 'humour' is often a tiresome mix of 'in-jokes' (Alex Douglas Home is Baillie Vass, Heath is the Grocer, and so on), jokes on jokes (OK, so '60-70-80-Phew what a scrumch! Wasn't funny when they first used it ten years ago, but since then that one has run and run), and childish name-calling. Much of what was once lively and exciting about Private Eye has become so routinised that the formula has now become almost entirely predictable. Issue after issue, the matter grinds on. Eight-lipped Ron Kner Luchtime O'Boore, even my old friend and confrade Dave Spart, all come marching past, the same old characters, the same old jokes, and the same old prejudices.

So why read it? Well, of course, sometimes it is funny. Private Eye still publishes some of the best cartoons around. Sometimes its whimsy is surprisingly effective (I can't quite see why, but I do think it's funny to refer to Carter as President Toadbrash). Those regular columns by Claud Cockburn, the thinking man's Auberon Waugh, manage to locate and expose the absurdities of establishment rhetoric with deadly accuracy.

The Eye's cover pages, those photographs of both the famous and the infamous, with funny bubbles attached, can be hung on target. One of my favourites is the one of Enoch Powell, seated in armchair, manic glint in his eyes, and hands stretched wide apart, saying, "And I tell you some of them have got them this long." But the best of them all was surely the one which marked the death of Dr Verwoerd, the man who preceded Vorster as Prime Minister of South Africa. It showed a group of African warriers, in traditional warriers, leaping into the air, literally jumping with joy. The caption read: 'Verwoerd: A Nation Mourns'.

Sometimes Private Eye can produce good investigative, crusading journalism. It was the Eye which first named the Kray brothers, and which first warned students at the LSE that their new Director, the late unlaumented Sir Walter Adams, was a collaborator with and supporter of the Smith regime in Rhodesia. It was the Eye which revealed the full extent of the British (Labour) Government's involvement in the Nigerian Civil War. The Eye's 'Mental Health' column has taken the lid off the goings on inside the headquarters of the National Front.

And Private Eye in pursuit of a crooked businessman or a crooked politician can be a joy to behold: it hunted down and exposed Maudling and Thorpe. In the ranks of Private Eye's enemies can be found as nasty a bunch of villains as you could possibly expect to come across, including amongst others, the Shah (the Shit of Iran, as the Eye dubbed him), Ian Smith, and South Africa's Bureau of State Security.

Which all sounds very odd for a magazine that is racist, sexist, and anti-working class. But then, of course, Private Eye isn't merely any of these. Private Eye is well known for its savage proficiency at the noble art of the vendetta. But this savagery is oddly random. If it didn't like you, the Eye will get you for any reason it can. Thus its criticisms are surprisingly double-edged, at once both 'enlightening' and 'mocking'. For example, the Eye attacked Harold Wilson as a two-faced traitor to his 'socialist' principles, and at the same time it sneered at him for being 'common' and 'cheap' and for his Jewish business associates.

It's always very clear when the Eye doesn't like someone. But it's often not clear why it doesn't like them. Why does it disapprove of Jeremy Thorpe? Because he's a crook or because he's a homosexual? Or Robert Maxwell? Because he's a swindler or because he's a foreigner? Why doesn't the Eye like Rupert, the 'Dirty Digger', Murdoch? Because he's dirty, or because he's a 'dirty digger'? Ever since Kenneth Tynan (of all people!) first demanded it of it that it develop a point of view, the Eye has had an 'official' explanation for its own ambivalence that it is neither progressive nor reactionary, that it merely tells jokes and reports (occasionally true) information. As the Eye sees itself, it has no collective viewpoint.

But, of course, this is rubbish. The tone of voice in which Private Eye speaks is remarkably consistent and has been so for a remarkably long time. Such consistency in tone betrays an underlying
consistency in outlook. For *Private Eye* does have a viewpoint. It subscribes to 'the good egg theory of history', a view of the world as divided into good eggs and bad eggs, decent chaps and cutters, those who can play a straight bat and those who can't. Those who are virtuous, honest and good humoured and those who aren't.

*Private Eye* is interested in moral judgements about the worth of individuals, not in political judgements about the worth of social institutions or, still less, whole social systems. In *Private Eye*'s strange world there are good Tories and bad Tories, good Labourites and bad Labourites. There are even good revolutionaries, as Paul Foot, who worked on the *Eye* for years, and bad ones, like poor old Roger Protz, who made the mistake of writing to the *Eye* condemning its petty bourgeois reactionary politics, and subsequently found himself appearing regularly in the *Eye*'s columns, either as one of the famous Neasden F.C. own-goal scorers or as PC Protz, assistant to Inspector Knacker. I have heard it rumoured that so traumatic was this experience that as a result (Comrade Protz turned from socialist politics to drink).

*Private Eye* has often been taken to task for its 'public schoolboy' humour (i.e. its rather unattractive blend of snobbery, anti-semitism, naughty words, homophobia, and character assassination). But behind the public school humour there is something much more fundamental, this quintessentially public school ethic of the 'good chap', the morality of 'play up, play up, and play the game'. If the battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton, then the ethics of *Private Eye* were shaped in the classrooms of Shrewsbury (the public school which Richard Ingrams, William Rees-Mogg, Christopher Booker and Paul Foot all attended).

*Private Eye* is undoubtedly sincere in its claim that it simply judges individuals as individuals, and goes for the bad ones with everything to hand. But, in a class society, for those who don't positively reject the immorality of the system in the name of an alternative socialist morality, all that comes to hand are the prejudices and superstitions of the ruling class's own morality. Which is why, when *Private Eye* is looking around for brickbats to throw at the assorted collection of liars and cheats, crooks and swindlers, that it quite readily selects as targets, the ones that often come easiest to hand are 'poor' or 'palefaced', Jew or 'common'. (For which, read 'not educated at public school'.)

None of this presented much of a problem back in 1961 when *Private Eye* first started up (was it really so long ago?). In the last days of the Macmillan government, the *Eye*'s moralistic criticism of official corruption dovetailed nicely with left-wing politics. But the world has changed a great deal since then. One recession on, after more than a decade of heightened class struggle, 15 years of Labour betrayal and Tory reaction, a lot of water has passed under all that, and Paul Foot has left the *Eye* to go on to higher things (and I don't mean the Daily Mirror). And the *Eye* has got a lot less funny and its investigative journalism a lot less powerful. Because, you see, Roger Protz was right: *Private Eye*'s politics are petty bourgeois and reactionary. There, I've said it, and if I'm unlucky you can probably expect to find me playing for Neasden next season.

Perhaps, we can have a pint of real ale together after the match, Roger?

Andrew Milner

---

**Marxism into the 80's**

For the fourth year running the Socialist Worker Student Organisation is organising seven days of revolutionary ideas and discussion. Last year a thousand people from a dozen different countries were there. This year more are expected—students and teachers, of course, but also engineers, workers, dockers, miners, printworkers, civil servants, housewives, school students. All taking part in a greater than ever series of discussions virtually every facet of Marxist ideas.

**Debates and Discussions**

- Hilary Wainwright and Pete Goodwin on Beyond the Fragments.
- Monty Johnstone and Duncan Hallas on Permanent Revolution.
- Tariq Ali and Chris Harman on Afghanistan.
- San Asa and Paul Holbrook on the Bread Democratic Alliance.
- Robin Blackburn and Mike Gonzales on Cuba.
- Peter Hain and Duncan Hallas on Reform or Revolution.

**Introduction to Marxism**

An elementary course dealing with:

- Historical materialism
- The economics of capitalism
- Imperialism and the state
- The revolutionary party and the working class.

**Great Revolutions**

An elementary course, taking you from the English Civil War, through the French revolution and Petrashevich in 19th Century Russia, to the Spanish Civil War, the Chinese revolution and events in Portugal in 1975.

**British Labour History**

Includes: Chartism, the growth of trade unionism, the origins of Marxism in Britain, the first shop stewards movement, the unemployed workers movement of the 1930s, the Cold War and the Labour Party, the growth of the revolutionary left in Britain.

**The Rise and Fall of the Comintern**

A course discussing how the attempt was made to build a world party of revolution after 1917 and what went wrong with it.

**Womens Oppression and Capitalism**

The origins of the Family
- Theories of patriarchy
- The changing capitalist family
- The Suffragettes
- Women and the crisis
- Women's consciousness at work.
- Ten years of women's liberation

**Literature and politics**


**Imperialism**

Three lectures on the theory of imperialism.

**Plus workshops on China, Cuba, Southern Africa, and South East Asia**

**Marxism Old and New Lectures on**

- Luxemburg,
- Gramsci,
- Lukacs,
- Pikhmanov
- and Bakharin,
- Albright,
- Colletti,
- Timpanaro,

**The Crisis in Economic Theory**

An advanced course, with discussions on: The Labour theory of value, the declining rate of profit, and the stability of the system, theorising the cuts, the re-emergence of crisis.

**Plus courses on: 'Reform or Revolution', Problems of Contemporary working class politics**

- The Crisis of the European revolutionary left
- American labour history
- Sexual politics
- The mass media and culture today.

**Plus**

- Films, music, a bar, a creche, etc.

4-11 July Polytechnic of North London, Prince of Wales Road, London NW8 (Kennington Tube) £9 in advance (from PC Box 82, London E2), £10 at door. Ring 01-986 3855 for further details.
From Montgomery to Miami

The rioting in Miami last week is nothing new. There have been race riots in America since the seventeenth century, and the New York riots of 1863 or the Chicago riots of 1943 were far bigger than Miami. But not all riots are the same. I used to live in Knoxville, a small industrial city in Tennessee. In 1919 they had a riot there when the whites attacked the blacks. A friend’s grandmother boasted that they “killed so many niggers they had to stack them up in piles on Gay Street, and the Tennessee River ran red.” Yet in 1970 it was possible for white kids to join blacks in rioting in the Knoxville ghetto.

For by 1970 the whole nation had been shaken by a massive black movement. The movement started in the South, still dominated by a full apartheid structure right down to segregated drinking fountains, lunch mobs, night riders and the Ku Klux Klan.

It started in the fifties with a middle-aged seamstress named Rosa Parks. She got on a bus in the city of Montgomery one day, and she sat down in the front of the bus. The driver told her to get to the back of the bus where the blacks sat. She wouldn’t move. The bus driver threw her off the bus, and she walked all the way home. She was tired, sure, but she was even more tired of having to go to the back of the bus.

Pretty soon all the other black people in Montgomery were walking to work and back too. For 381 days. And since nobody much else rode the buses the bus company gave in in the end, and even hired black bus drivers.

From Montgomery the movement spread to attempts to integrate the schools in the South. Then in 1960 in Greensboro, North Carolina four black students sat down at the white-only lunch counter of a Woolworth’s. Woolworths was a multi-national, and they didn’t dare throw the students out. But they didn’t dare serve them either. They closed the store. And the sit-ins began. All over the South: on buses, in restaurants, on beaches, everywhere. And the voter registration drives began.

It was a mass movement. Whole cities, whole rural counties, solid. Grandmothers led the marches, singing. It was a nonviolent movement that staged protests and bravely faced the troops and dogs and the noose, hoping to impress the federal government and the Southern white by the sheer force of moral example. In concrete terms progress was slow, the price in blood and effort and evictions heavy. But in moral and political terms, a whole people began to stand up. And they were no longer content with a piecemeal struggle for integration; they yelled “What do we want? Freedom. When do we want it? Now.” Not just civil rights like other people had, but freedom, which in capitalist America nobody had.

The North

It was in the black ghettos of the Northern and Western cities that the mood was most opposed to non-violence. These ghettos were prisons, full of high unemployment, violence, frustration, alcoholism, drugs, dangerous cops, and misery. They were also fortresses. So many black people together, far from the white eye of the sheriff and the planter, out from under the stifling rural world and the terror of the night riders.

In 1967 the heart of the black working class, in Motor Town, Henry Ford’s Detroit, came out. Though this was a black-led riot, the assembly line had integrated Detroit far more than any schools or restaurants ever had. So black and white together, in an orgy of free whisky and free television sets, that lasted two weeks. The police and national guard had to kill 40 people to control things.

And finally, in April 1968 a hired gun killed the Reverend Martin Luther King. We will never know who hired him, as the country’s rulers don’t want us to know. He was the great leader of the Southern civil rights movement, the man who organised the Montgomery bus boycott, tireless, brave, a principled Gandhian believer in non-violence. His whole life stood for the strengths of the Southern civil rights movement. And his death was a symbol of the weakness of that movement. For The Man has a Gun, and before he gives you power he is going to kill you.

When Dr King was killed, the urban blacks built him a memorial. It wasn’t the memorial he would have wished. But it was the memorial they had learned to build, and it was the right one. The weekend after his death they set fire to over a hundred ghettos.

Those were the last of the big riots. For people got killed in riots, hurt and arrested. The riots made the statement registered the protest, got people together, and changed people’s minds and hearts. But you can’t just stay in the streets. People had to move beyond that.

Black Power

Where they moved, largely, was into ‘black power’. It was Stokely Carmichael who coined this phrase, on a civil rights march in Mississippi in 1966. He stuck up his fist in the air and said ‘Black Power’ and the media latched on it.

Black power meant different things to different people. But for most blacks the core of the idea was that the fight against racism was primarily the task of the blacks themselves, and that what they needed was not the rights of the individual American but power for themselves as a group.

No revolutionary movement was built in America at the time. This was not through lack of potential revolutionaries. Not only in the Black Power movement, but in the student and anti-war movements, in the women’s movement the gay and hygiene movements.

But revolutionaries were never able to build in the one place where capitalism, sexism, racism, class rule, bodily and mental terror all come together—that is where you work. And so the separate movements went their separate ways. When the anti-war movement died the activists went off to the hills or back to college.

With the collapse of the left generally the
black revolutionary left collapsed. Many were assassinated by the government but far more decided that the time for revolution was not now, and turned to orthodox politics. Bobby Seale, the lion of the Panthers, for instance, ran for mayor of Oakland as a Democrat.

The cultural nationalists also lost influence. Nobody disagreed with black pride or taking an interest in Africa. But there was a depression on and the cultural nationalists had little to say about the continuing reality of life in capitalist America.

In politics, the field was left open to the black politicians. They were members of the Democratic Party, operators, careerists. They became mayors of decayed urban wastelands, representatives powerless in Congress. They were caught up in the cynical and vicious world of American party politics. Charles Evers was elected the first black mayor of Fayette, Louisiana because of the memory of his brother Medgar, a martyr to the civil rights cause. Charles endorsed the

The Political Legacy

It might seem that back down in the ghettos the riots had made no real difference. But they had. The riots made the white ruling class sit up and take notice. They decided to try and buy off the militancy as best they could. There were job programmes, training programmes, great gobs of money for community projects, and a big effort to get young street blacks into the colleges and then into professional jobs.

Even more importantly, they conceded the demands of the civil rights movement. The whole apparatus of Southern apartheid was smashed. A hundred years of grim struggle had advanced only inch by inch. The cities went up in flames, and the old demands were granted. For those who grew up in the South, white and black, what it is today seems almost unrecognizable.

The most important effect of the riots was intangible. You could see it clearly enough, though, in the way that people walked. Blacks walked a lot straighter and taller than they had. A people had stood up. That was the biggest difference the riots made.

But all those riots and all those black power groups, they didn't touch capitalism. When the world depression hit, the battle was on for survival. America was still racist, blacks still found it a lot harder to get jobs. And the depression produced demoralisation and a drift to the right in the working class. Ten years ago Nixon and his ilk wrapped the American flag around an awful lot of the coffins of our dead in Vietnam. It took a long time for patriotism and war-mongering to become respectable again. But that is one of the things happening with the sinisteria over Iran. The women's movement is on the defensive, the steel plants are closing, the Ku Klux Klan is coming back.

Two stories point up what has been lost. In 1971 the largely black inmates of Attica penitentiary in New York rebelled. They said they were all political prisoners of a racist and capitalist system, and demanded passage to Canada. They held the warders hostage. Governor Rockefeller sent the National Guard in to shoot them down. The prisoners were holding the warders with knives at their throats. When the Guard was through, there were a lot of prisoners and a lot of warders dead. The warders all died of bullet wounds, not knife wounds. Because each of those prisoners, in his last seconds, decided it wasn't worth taking another man with him.

That was the sort of prison rebellion, the sort of personal politics that was possible for a movement on the upsurge. But a few months back there was a riot in a New Mexico prison. The same degradation and the same anger that produced Attica and hundreds of other prison riots over the years produced this rebellion. But this time there was no organisation, no politics. And the white psychopaths got at the drugs and went after the informers and the blacks, mutilating them, burning them alive with welding gear. Within a day the riot was over as dead survivors crawled to the prison perimeter.

That's the sort of personal politics you get when racism is on the ascendant and the left is on the defensive.

The Miami riots echo Attica in the black rebellion and New Mexico in the white reaction. The blacks rebelled because twelve traffic cops beat a black man to death for jumping a red light and an all-white jury let them off. That's not the militancy of revolution, that's simply self-defence and common sense.

For the first time since 1943 the white rank-and-file right felt strong enough to go out in vigilante gangs killing blacks. For the black are now protesting, with their backs to the wall. That they can still protest they owe to the legacy of the sixties. That their backs are to the wall, that is a consequence of the failure of the whole of the American left.
The politics of the Ripper

The brutal murders by the ‘Yorkshire Ripper’ have provided good copy for the mass media. The Sun, the Star, and the Express all give them big coverage. But the police have taken place and are much more critical of the police. But none of the media coverage looks at the problems. We are not experts but we feel that there are serious issues which have to be dealt with. And, because we are SWP members active in one of the areas affected, we also suggest some of the things which we can do.

The first question to answer is why has the police, despite spending more than one million pounds, been quite unable to catch the murderer? Despite the fact that they have virtually saturated areas like Manningham, set up instant roadblocks, and have got nowhere.

The reason is quite simple: most people in the area fear the police more than they fear the Ripper. The police squad is drawn from the West Yorkshire Task Force, which is the local equivalent of the SPG. These are the same police who forced a path for the National Front through the black areas of Bradford in 1976. These are the very areas where they are now claiming to protect. The same is true in Leeds, where the local police are notorious for attacking and harassing young blacks.

But if the local population have got good reason to fear the police in general, surely the murder enquiry is something different and it would be in everybody’s interest to co-operate at least on this? Unfortunately that is not the case. This judgement is not based on political theory but on direct and bitter experience.

Apart from the Ripper murders the most sensational murder in recent years in Bradford was of a young boy scout who was involved with a gay man. The local gay community responded by co-operating with the police. They gave information in confidence for this specific murder enquiry.

The police responded to this assistance by launching an antigay witchhunt. Many of those who helped in the enquiry were arrested. At least one committed suicide. Many people draw a simple lesson from this: the Ripper is a shit but, in the long run, the police are worse.

Police behaviour in this case has confirmed that suspicion. After the first two or three murders the police began to arrest as many prostitutes as they could. All women were told to get off the streets and stay at home. The police ran an organised campaign against clubs in the area. One was raided every three days because the owner refused to co-operate. The manager who supported the ANL was driven out of business and is still blacklisted.

The response of local socialists has been a women’s self-defence campaign. Many women feel that the only way to be safe is to carry a weapon of some kind. Most prostitutes carry weapons — usually a screwdriver or a hefty pair of scissors — but in the last eight or nine months this has spread to many other women. A Women’s Police survey in the town centre discovered that thirty percent of the women questioned carried a weapon and that the vast majority thought that women’s self-defence was justified.

The response of the police has been interesting. They have privately advised several women that if they did carry a weapon to defend themselves ‘the police wouldn’t take any action over that sort of thing.’ Nevertheless one woman, Sara Dixon, was prosecuted for carrying a knife. What made the difference as far as the police were concerned was that Sara had the knife in her pocket when she was arrested on a demonstration against the National Front.

As far as the police are concerned, that seems to put you from the sort of protection to which ‘law-abiding’ women are entitled.

Last September, after the murder of Barbara Leech, a demonstration of 400 women marched through the town. This demonstrated the growing strength of feeling. Most of those on the march were ordinary working class women who were frightened and angry about the murders and the inability of the police to protect them. The march would have been much larger but for the unfortunate attitude of some of the women organisers, who demanded a curfew on women.

This demand is understandable as a reaction to the situation facing women in Bradford but it misses the point. It is the system which is responsible for the Ripper and it is the system which is the reason why the Ripper has not yet been caught. It is the system which harasses women when they try to arm themselves for defence. In practice, this refusal to draw the link between women and other oppressed groups has alienated many non-political women from a campaign and an issue on which they are keen to act.

At a more general level, it is worth looking at the comparison between the current Ripper and the original one. The first Ripper hit the headlines in 1881 after a string of murders. The murders were opposed and condemned by workers and the police, but the women who are now the object of police harassment were the object of women’s support and women’s authority.

Again, if we look at theories of the identity of the Ripper there are some similarities. Apart from the theory that the first Ripper was a Polish seaman or a Jew (or an immigrant worker), most pointed to establishment figures — doctors, lawyers or even a member of the Royal Family.

Today what is known about the Ripper makes it impossible to use the racist theory of blaming it on immigrants but large numbers of people suspect the lower end of the establishment. One theory argues that the Ripper is a policeman because of the ease with which he manages to avoid capture.

But whatever the truth of these speculations, and if they do have a certain symbolic value as expressions of ordinary people’s unconscious attitudes to the powers of the state, we should not be allowed to distort the central points about the Ripper.

The Ripper is not an individual psychopath who happens to be a criminal genius. At the very least it must take desperate social, sexual and economic circumstances to produce such a personality. The arguments for women’s self-defence are the same arguments as those we use for blacks and trade unions. We must resist the temptation to call for more action for the forces of ‘law and order’ even when we are in weak positions. There is no room for us in a society which is interested in defending ordinary working class men and women. We must rely on our own strength.

Trish Calvert and Geoff Robinson
NGA leave their mark

The major confrontation between the employers in the provincial newspaper and general printing industries and the biggest craft print union, the National Graphical Association, ended in a substantial victory for the workers. The NGAs claim for a minimum earning level of £80.00 a week was conceded and the employers offer of a 37½ hour week by July 1982 has been brought forward to November 1981. Of major significance, the drastic changes to working practices sought by the employers have been blunted, with very little left of the productivity proposals they were desperate to achieve.

The two general unions in the printing industry, SOGAT and NATSOPA, which earlier had accepted a lower offer and the productivity proposals which would have allowed employers complete flexibility to move workers between jobs will probably now attempt to negotiate the terms won by the NGA.

Employers United
The two employers federations covering this sector are the British Printing Industries Federation (with 3,250 firms in general printing) and the Newspaper Society (with some 250 firms producing provincial and local newspapers). Huge companies dominate the industry. Lord Gibson is chairman of Pearson Longman which owns the Financial Times, Penguin Books and the Westminster Press Group, producer of 60 per cent of the provincial newspapers in England and Wales. Sir Alex Jarrett is chairman and chief executive of Reed International, a major paper production and general printing company in its own right, which owns the Daily Mirror and the vast IPC publishing empire—where it just so happens that 1,500 journalists are currently locked out. It also 'just so happens' that Sir Alex Jarrett is chairman of the CBI's sub-committee on 'the balance of power', which is giving employers a lead on how to repress the 'balance of industrial power'.

Employers Confident
When this year's annual negotiations began the employers were confident that they could get their own way. When the leaderships of both SOGAT and NATSOPA agreed their terms they were delighted. Never mind the major changes to working practices, thought the union bureaucrats in SOGAT and NATSOPA, because the changes were principally aimed at the craft unions, the NGAs. The employers wanted complete flexibility between jobs and unions and all changes necessary for the introduction of new technology effects the two sectors in sharply different ways. While the new printing techniques available can be used by newspaper proprietors to deskil craft work and allow journalists or dilligents to do typesetting—as was shown in the dispute when the management at the Wolverhampton Express and Star produced slab editions—in general printing there are no journalists and few clerical staff who could take on NGA work.

Employers Collapse
The solidarity of the NGA members pushed the BPIF promises into disarray, which left the Newspaper Society and the BPIF hardly on speaking terms. With a remarkably high degree of solidarity being shown by NUJ journalists towards the NGA on provincial newspapers, the Newspaper Society bosses decided to cut their losses and settle (most of the BPIF members already had). The way the dispute has ended means that the Newspaper Society bosses have lost an extremely important fight in their long term battle over control in the publishing industry.

Consequences for the Unions.
The National Graphical Association is both pleased and relieved that the dispute has ended as it has. It could easily have gone the other way, but for the employers' disunity and the degree of inter-union solidarity shown by the NUJ and SLADE leaderships and the rank and file of SOGAT and NATSOPA. But this is nothing compared to the solid response to the bosses by the NGA members. The first half of the 1980s will be a make or break period for the union as employers throughout the printing industry attempt to introduce more and more new technology.

Resistance to the offensive will be aided by moves towards print union mergers with the possibility of one union for the industry. Current top level talks on merger between SOGAT and the NGA are possibly to be joined by the NUJ and SLADE but these will end up talking more about the location of a new hall office and who gets to be general secretary than the real issues to be faced, unless the rank and file of all the unions have their say and wrest control from the bureaucrats.

Stuart Axe
Hospital Steward

As revolutionary socialists we fight to build a rank and file movement in the trade unions—
to win workers towards class-conscious self-
reliance and away from dependence on the
class-collaborating trade union bureaucracy.
We work to build the organisation to make
this possible. It is often assumed by socialists
that the best way to do this is to become
a shop steward. You may well find yourself
elected steward anyway, just by being a bit
militant and having a go at management. So
you become a steward, then what happens?

The shop steward stands in the middle of
the political stage in Britain today. S/he is
elected, depose, negotiated with, mobbed
with grievances, attacked, courted, victimised,
bought off, interviewed, sent on courses,
preached at, listened to with reverence.
In other words, pulled in all directions by
different people who have one thing in
common—that the way they figure things the
shop steward is the key to their problems.
This goes for members, management,
government, union officials, convenors and
a large chunk of the Left.

To be effective a steward walks a
tightrope—or rather does a juggling act with
the members who elected him/her, with the
union which supplies the credentials, with
the management who the steward negotiates
with, and with whom s/he inevitably builds
up a "working relationship". To survive a
steward has to keep most of these three balls
in the air most of the time.

OK, we know because of our good rank
and file politics that the steward stands
shoulder to shoulder with the members—
that s/he works alongside them, knows them
individually and is accountable to them.
We know the perils of the steward becoming
separated from the members and becoming a
union bureaucrat or management lackey, or
both. But the trouble is that reality can be
a little more complicated, as I found out a few
years back when I was a steward in a large
North London teaching hospital.

The Hounslow Saga

It was September 1977 and the work-in at
Hounslow Hospital in West London had just
been smashed by police and management in a
very brutal manner. Twenty-two elderly patients
were "kidnapped" and the wards left wrecked when
the picket was taken by surprise in a military
style raid. Shock horror. John Pliger splashed
it across the front of the Mirror and everyone was outraged.
The left in West London hospitals (some SWP members with
a smattering of IMG and WSL) met over the weekend and decided that it was this—
this was where we made our stand and stopped
the cuts. I was an SWP sympathiser at the
time and used to go along to Hospital Worker
meetings. I was contacted on Sunday night by
some people who had attended the
meeting and told there was to be a strike on
Wednesday and I should do the most to get
my hospital out. To help me do this there
were 500 leaflets for me to collect at 6:30am. I
hesitated. Was it possible? I decided it was. I
arrived at work on Monday morning with
the leaflets under my arm and a funny feeling
in my gut.

First I found the other steward who I
worked with politically. He had a hangover
and didn't think we could get a strike. He
finally decided it was worth a crack and so we
went flat out and pulled out all the stops. We
balded the NUPE branch secretary, who was
clearly against taking any action,
into letting us call a mass meeting. We booked
the hall, wrote a leaflet, photocopied and
spread it around. We arranged for speakers
from Hounslow for the mass meeting and a
cough to take people to the lobby on the
Wednesday. We chatted up the Communist
Party members in the hospital, saying that
there was going to be action over what had
happened at Hounslow and that we should
do something. They agreed that we should.
The mass meeting came and went. It was
pretty miserable even by our standards
and poorly attended, but we won the vote for a
half-day stoppage the next day. Another leaf-
let written and duplicated. Another early
morning at the clocks to hand them out to the
workers as they arrived. What happened at
Hounslow is history. About 15 London hos-
pitals were on strike on the Wednesday and
1,000 people lobbied the meeting of the Area
Health Authority, but we couldn't sustain it
for more than a day. One hospital, the West
London, was out on indefinite strike. They
went back after two days.

The action had been unofficial and called
and coordinated by the revolutionary left in
the form of Hospital Worker (SWP-led) and
CLASH (an attempt by some IMG and WSL
members to set up London health stewards
organisation).

Hounslow Hospital was occupied for over
a year after the "raid" by what had been the
hospital defense committee. It became a
centre for the labour movement in the area,
being used by firemen during their strike and
acting as the central office for Fightback, an
organisation initiated by the Hounslow
Occupation Committee to spread and coordi-
nate the fight against health cuts. But
Hounslow was a defeat for London hospital
workers, a defeat in the fight against the cuts,
and particularly a defeat for the left. It was
also a personal defeat for me.

My Little Drama

By Wednesday morning things seemed to be
growing fairly well in my little patch. I was
exhausted and very tense, but fairly satisfied.
Then I found out that my members, the "pool" or
"core" group, were having a meeting. They were
calling in to the office. That was not good.
Management played it very cool and said it
wasn't a disciplinary case else I would have
had the right to a full-time union officer
present (I agreed) but that complaints had
been made by the porters and I should apolo-
gise. I said I had. The branch secretary, who
initially had tried to sabotage the strike,
backed me up in a feeble kind of way.

It was a different kettle of fish with my
members, though. A number of them
wouldn't talk to me all the time and they wanted
to throw me out as steward. I thought about
resigning, but then thought 'no, it was right',
so I stuck it out, got a note to the
management that I had been named on the
nomination sheet, and by the time the elections
were held in a couple of months it had blown over and I was
re-elected. It was a very sobering experience.

What Had Gone Wrong?

Reflecting on this little episode I thought,

SPECIAL OFFER

Free with each new subscription on this form a copy
of Colin Sparks' new book on fascism: Never Again!

Send me 12 issues of Socialist Review starting with
the issue for which I
enclose £

Name ...........................................
Address ...........................................

(Make cheques payable to SW Distributors)

22
The grip of the right wing in the AUEW has been further strengthened after the National Committee deliberations over the last few weeks. Although the details have not yet been reported, we can assume that the right-wing majority nor only blunted any meaningful policy over wages and the Employment Bill but also, because this years National Committee is also the rules revision conference, that the attacks on the democracy of the AUEW have been carried through.

The right-wing Executive Committee had proposed the establishment of full-time branch secretaries and the amalgamation of branches into super-branches consisting of thousands of members. The secretaries were not to be elected but appointed by the EC. There is also a rule change extending the period of office before a full-time official retires, charging that he or she need not stand for election. This virtually means that most officials, one elected, are elected for life. The whole union structure, many militants suspect, is being fashioned to 'fit' into a merger with the electricity union with the minimum of conflict and no possible resistance.

Never have the right-wing had such a hold over the AUEW and never has their confidence been higher. Not just their boldness over the rules and policies of the union but the treatment of the membership, clearly shown over Derek Robinson and the events that followed at Leyland with acceptance of the slaves charter.

The one real strength that the right-wing has is that there is no real opposition to them. The Broad Left has just about energy to call a few meetings in the areas where it has a past, but has no clear idea of what to do or where it can go. Fatalism and despair are beginning to show themselves inside its ranks, with examples like the recent election for divisional organiser in Southern England where a Broad Left candidate held the post for years was beaten by an unknown member who didn't even bother to write an election address—such defeats as this parlays the Broad Left will.

You can overcome demoralisation if you face up to your past, and put right mistakes and make every effort to avoid repeating them. Unfortunately the Broad Left can't even do this.

Its present leaders have inherited the Broad Left organisation. They still cling to the belief that the need is to have the right lad in the right election. The Communist Party, which hasn't developed any real industrial strategy, cannot give any lead either to the Broad Left or to militants in the AUEW generally. Their philosophy comes down to 'The right-wing is going to be so bad that the rank and file will revolt against them, so we need to do nothing but wait.' So there is never any debate about why the left is being smashed everywhere in the union. This failure to face up to the truth leads to demoralisation. Demoralisation leads to suicide while we wait for the rank and file to follow us.

Fortunately things aren't that black. The SWP has always kept—sometimes desperately—a toehold in the AUEW and tried to develop an independent rank and file body which could push the Broad Left into activity beyond electioneering and, where the Broad Left didn't exist, become the main left current. Around the Engineers' Charter a small collection of engineers has organised, and over the last years local and national campaigns have been launched that clearly show that resistance to the right wing is there to be built on.

The increase of Charter's influence has brought us up against the Broad Left, who view us with a mixture of love and hate. They love our active (mainly young) members but hate our constant demand for activity and debate. While the Broad Left tolerates us more than in the past, clearly they hope to accommodate us by pulling us to the right. We have to resist this and pull the better of our supporters with us.

Over the next few weeks our supporters will be organising for a national conference...
A right carve up?

The right wing, who laughingly call themselves the 'Moderates', now control the national executive of the largest civil service union, the Civil and Public Services Association. Their election victory, announced at the recent CPSA conference, was a bitter pill for activists to swallow coming at the end of a year which had witnessed thousands of posts axed and job security threatened.

The election results must have gladdened the hearts of the civil service bosses, who are now pushing ahead with proposals to chop 75,000 jobs over the next three years. It can have been no coincidence that further cuts were announced the day after the right wing victory became known.

The election results and the threat of redundancies influenced every discussion at the CPSA conference, and despite many a spirited speech from the rostrum, delegates were only too well aware of the difficulties the future would bring.

Ironically, the 'Moderates' election victory made the mainly left wing, conference delegates determined to assert their authority over policy issues. The debate on pay reflected the growing disillusionment with the PRU system (a comparability study) of determining pay.

Further discussion on plans for the future of the CPSA was cut short by the need to discuss action to stop the further redundancies. In the conference hall, delegates were only too well aware of the difficulties the future would bring.

The conclusion of all the attacks on the full-time officers was the passing of a motion which instructed the incoming NEC to prepare, for next year's conference, proposals for the election of full-timers. This motion, which received the overwhelming support of conference delegates, once again dodged the issue. Instead of 'going straight for the election of full-timers, the Broad Left preferred to support the existing system, a la Johnsonian tactics.

The right wing hold cannot be seriously challenged until a viable rank-and-file engineering movement is built again which can independently defend wages and conditions and promote workplace organisation. It is a hard slog but even a modest victory this way will see the right wing try to stop union members fighting for union policy.

The lack of leadership effectively destroyed all but the propaganda element in the 'Cuts' campaign. Given this history, conference delegates opted for fiery speeches rather than discussing concrete action to stop the destruction of jobs in the civil service.

Phil Cordell

The elections

The CPSA elections this year were held, for the first time, under a new procedure allowing individual voting at workplace meetings. The procedure was designed to replace the block-voting method whereby a relatively small number of members were able to control thousands of votes. It was to be expected that the right wing would gain under this procedure. However, since support for the 'Moderates' remains mainly passive, we expect the left to gain over the next few years.

The main worry revealed by the election results was the very low turnout. Every member should have been given the election addresses, and one hour's facility time was allowed for workplace meetings to be held. Despite these circumstances only 80,000 votes out of a possible 230,000 were cast in the presidential election. The results of which were Losinska (Moderate) 36,961, Lever (independent) 20,245, Colman (Broad Left) 13,773, Williams (independent) 6,357, Healy (Redder Tape) 3,403. Losinska was therefore elected by only 16 per cent of the CPSA membership.

The future for civil service trade unionists may look grim. As well as cuts and declining real wage levels, civil service bosses are already beginning to victimise activists. As the acting head of Richard Cleverley and Phil Cordell in South London suggests. However, there also exists a growing sense of realism among rank-and-file activists. The election of the 'Moderate' NEC has revealed the soft underbelly of CPSA organisation, and many are beginning to question the strategy and tactics of the Broad Left. Over 80 people attended a Redder Tape meeting held in the city of London last night to discuss future campaigns. Of course, only a magical formula exists to solve the problems, but unless the left in the union can unite in action against the Tories and maintain a constant internal debate about the issues that matter, we will leave the right wing to gain strength.

Mike Healy

It didn't move left, it didn't move right

A standing ovation for striking workers from Chis, the calling of a mass picket of workers at the Isle of Grain power station site and a hard anti-Tory speech from general secretary, David Bannett, might suggest that the General and Municipal Workers Union has now emerged from its own fatal romance with the Callaghan government and the old days of iron discipline over the union's membership.

This year's conference, held in London on 28 June to discuss organising the fightback around the slogans of 'Stop the Rent, Kick Out the Right', hoped to bring together the best militants in the union. At the same time a simple direct-to-earth pamphlet has been produced explaining what's happening to the union and how we can fight back, aimed at the shopfloor. The pamphlet is the argument of the militant to his own rank and file; aimed to win back support on the shop floor for more aggressive policies and to weaken the right wing hold in terms of ideas.

The campaign to elect full-time officials.

Roger Cox
Isle of the scabs

Behind the Laggers’ dispute at the multimillion-pound Isle of Grain power station site lies a very dirty story. The laggers — thermal insulation engineers — are being made scapegoats by the Central Electricity Generating Board and the giant contracting firms like Babcock and GEC who, at the same time, are trying to break workplace organisation in readiness for the new generation of nuclear power stations. What is tragic is that the leaders of the AUEW construction and engineering sections, the EEPTU and the Sheetmetal workers are falling for the employers’ trap and giving backing to the privately trained scab force of strikebreakers.

The CEGB do not need the station. The construction programme of the Isle of Grain power station, planned to be the largest oil-fired station in Europe, started in 1979. The station was intended as a base load station which when completed would supply 3,500 megawatts to the electricity grid. Construction began in a period when the price of oil dropped favourably with that of coal. This is no longer the case. The price of coal is now in the region of £235 per tonne while the price of heavy crude oil is now £85 per tonne.

The CEGB is fully aware of this as it is reflected in their fuel purchase policy. In 1972, prior to the take-off in oil prices, the amount of oil consumed in power stations was 26,634 Mttce (million tonnes of coal equivalent); in 1978 this figure had been reduced to 17,650 Mttce, a decline in oil consumption in excess of 33 per cent.

It is believed that the CEGB in the coming year intend to reduce oil consumption further to approximately 50 per cent of last year’s figures. To bring “on stream” the full generating capacity of the Grain under circumstances of falling demand and increasing oil prices is not what the CEGB wants.

New Generation Coming

A new generation of power stations is to be built. The Tory government, together with the CEGB and the big contracting companies, have adopted a nuclear power strategy. Oil is too expensive and coal has to be dug by miners. But before they build the new generation of stations they want to smash the strength of large site union organisation which they claim is costing them too much money. Laggers have had to fight their way to the top of the earnings league in large site work, insisting on top level safety conditions and compensation for working with highly dangerous substances in their everyday work. Life expectancy among laggers has always been short. The contracting employers are trying to end wage drift on sites and use a national wage agreement to set maximum pay levels for all their workers. The laggers, organised in the GMWU in England and Wales and the TGWU in Scotland, are fighting a major struggle to defend their organisation, their skills and their safety for the next ten or twenty years.

Stuart Axe
THE MOVEMENT

Challenge or talking shop?

The near hysteria of the press in the treatment of trade union affairs is at last getting through to union leaders. The cut-throat journalism which marked the TUC Day of Action on May 14 and the vicious campaign against British Leyland Shop Steward Derek Robinson provided an appropriate backdrop for the first annual meeting of the Campaign for Press Freedom in Conway Hall, Holborn, on May 24. More than 200 people turned up, most of them delegates from trade union branches and Labour Party groups.

When the campaign was first launched last year it had wide-ranging support among union leaders (Geoffrey Dean, NALGO; Bill Keys, SOGAT; Owen O'Brien, NATSOPA; Moss Evans, TGWU); elected Labour leaders like MPs John Grant and Roy Hattersley, as well as Tony Benn and Dame Judith Hart. It was organised in the wake of the hatchet-job reporting of the low paid workers strike 18 months ago, and was set up around a set of seven aims, all of them vague and unenforceable, and won the support of 16 national unions within a few months. It can rely upon this support as long as it remains a forum for discussion; its value will be really tested if it ever gets around to doing anything. Saturday's meeting was the first step towards the division of that loosely knit federation. During the day the discussion rambled to and fro, but it was only when it broke down into smaller, informal groups that the real problems emerged. Throughout there were two strands of thought: the idea that the press can be organised to give a accurate reflection of all points of view while remaining independent of economic and political forces, and the belief that the only answer is to take control from employers and put the press in the hands of the working people.

The day's meeting can be controlled led some people to support the creation of an "alternative" Press Council—now that the National Union of Journalists has pulled out of the existing employer-dominated body—which will impose its will on a reluctant press.

This shows that there is a long way to go in winning major arguments within the membership of the Campaign itself: that the election of committees, no matter how well founded, never guarantees anything: that the ruthless nature of newspaper management does not allow for self-discipline; that action against newspapers by the people who work within the press—supported by those outside—is the only argument that pierces the defences of Victor Matthews, Rupert Murdoch, Lord Thomson and the other press moguls.

Nevertheless, the meeting did develop some important ideas which, if take up, could see a genuine campaign for press freedom developing which might provide a basis for challenging news bosses.

Speaker after speaker emphasised the need for direct action to get rid of editorial bias. The Campaign was called on to raise the issue of automatic right of reply for those who suffer from the effects of a bad press, a right which should be ensured through action by printworkers and journalists.

The most breathtaking experience of all during the day, which inevitably became a wide-ranging discussion rather than an analysis of specific work that needed to be undertaken, was the election of the new 20-strong committee. Following an appeal for more women's representation—there was not a single female on the previous committee less than half the women elected, three rank and file activists within the NUJ; one from ACCT the broadcasting union; another from broadcasting and one from the Labour party. Also elected were several rank and file campaigners in a poll which changed the whole complexion of the Campaign executive.

The new committee would do well to reflect on the contribution from Bill Freeman of NATSOPA who introduced one of the few revolutionary notes during the day's discussions.

He criticised the essentially middle-classness of the Campaign's aims and domination by editorial elements and its failure to confront the real political battle: to wrest control of the media from employers and install control in the hands of working people.

The East End News

Get a group of socialists together and ask them what should be done about the media and they will say as anything come up the idea of setting up an alternative press and, in particular, a national daily paper for the labour movement.

This theme was taken up at the Campaign for Press Freedom annual meeting, although there was a cautious approach to the dream of setting up a national daily. The nervousness is understandable. The failure of the Daily Herald—even though it had a strong circulation—is still an open wound which pains any discussion, and the more recent and bitter experience of the Scottish Daily News co-operative soon brings people down to earth. The simple truth is that while it is a nice idea to have our own paper there is neither the financial nor political will to get one launched.

That is not to say that there is not a strong case for an alternative press. In fact, there is one already in existence which takes two forms: the papers of the political groups of the left and the hundreds of community papers which are scattered throughout the country. In the last year there has been a movement towards building an alternative press which combines both elements, serving a local community while representing a broad political movement. One such paper aiming to forge this alliance is the East End News, a co-operative paper due to be launched in September.

The Campaign for Press Freedom adopted the East End as a pilot project late last year. The paper has been set up as a workers/readers/labour movement co-operative. Since the idea was first taken up by a group of East End journalists more than 350 individuals and organisations have joined, contributing more than £10,000 towards the launch target fund of £25,000.

The aim is to launch a weekly paper which will sell as a socialist, but politically-independent local newspaper with a number of significant differences:

a) it will be a paper with policies agreed in advance. These include demands for the paper to campaign against Tory cuts; to campaign for the development of the East End according to the demands of the local population; to campaign against racism and to provide coverage in minority languages for ethnic groups;

b) it will provide a communications resource centre for the area, giving assistance to groups in producing leaflets, posters, pamphlets, and will set up a training course in basic writing and production techniques;

c) it will link up all of the progressive forces within the area around the common aim of defeating the Tories and will develop links with other, similar projects in Rochdale, Newcastle, Merseyside, South Wales and the West Midlands.

Given the frustration of people in an area like East London, it is no surprise that the meetings of the East End News co-operative have been 50 strong, providing a forum for debate among diverse campaigners—church leaders, anti-racists, union militants, women's groups, homosexual campaigns and tenants associations among them.

The next few years will see things getting a lot worse for people who live in inner city areas. The need to organise support, to provide sympathetic propaganda and to build people's confidence is of paramount importance. It is also a continuous task. The East End News will be a start in trying to get the ball rolling in East London.

This trend has overtaken the arguments for a national daily paper and more unions are seeing local initiatives as the way forward. Indeed, SOGAT and NATSOPA have officially backed these plans by chipping in almost £1,000 each to the East End News fund.

There is no doubt that a network of such local papers all over the country could be a major step in breaking down the strangle-hold which papers like The Sun have in working-class areas. It is only when that process begins to take effect that plans for a national broadly-based labour daily can sensibly go-ahead.

For more information: East End News, c/o 102 Western Road, London E13.

Aidan White
A writer of our time

Some people have said that the novel is no longer a living art form, no one writes good novels these days. They should try Marge Piercy.

Marge Piercy has been politically active on the American Left for about twenty years. She was involved in the civil rights movement in the early sixties and was a member of Students for a Democratic Society. She has since then been active in the women's movement and over various other issues.

This milieu, a largely unorganised, diverse movement, provides most of the subject matter of her books. You will look in vain for cut and dried answers, there are no slogans, no calls to build the revolutionary party. Yet it is easy to recognise ourselves in the people she writes about, even though the settings are very specifically American. She is able to portray personal relationships very vividly and writes honestly without idealisation and without preaching.

I found it difficult at times to remember that the people I was reading about were only 'made up' and had no existence outside of my head and hers. This illusion is aided by the fact that her plots do not come to an end. On the last page some things have finished, others are starting.

My favourite of the four books I have read is Small Changes. It deals with the women's movement in Boston in the sixties. Its two central characters, Beth and Miriam, struggle to make a space for themselves in the world, to find a way to 'live right'. Beth is shy and small, always full of self doubt. She flees from a constraining, conservative family into marriage, only to find herself used. With a determination that amazes her she sets off once again, running from the marriage to Boston. Self-effacing and unconfident on the surface Beth has an amazing tenacity in refusing to be told what to think, refusing to be pushed into a role others see fit for her. Step by step we see her carving out her own role in life, growing and expanding. The struggles she encounters are not large, the changes are indeed small, yet they matter.

This is generally true of Piercy's stories. Her people are active agents and their actions, for good or ill, do make meaningful changes in their lives.

Miriam is the kind of woman you'd expect to survive easily in a male-dominated world. Extroverted, sexually liberated, a graduate with lots of mathematical talent and middle class confidence. Yet it is Miriam who loses and Beth who wins. Struggling against a wall of male professional prejudice in the way of her mathematical ideas and tired out by the difficulties of forming a satisfactory relationship with either of her lovers, she opts for a comfortable marriage in which she can be cherished. We can see how she is as much used in her soft, moneyed, middle class marriage as Beth was in her savage conservative one, but Miriam chooses to construct a maze of rationalisations and submerges herself, clinging to the 'love' she needs, even after it has long gone.

However, Marge Piercy does not present us with villainous, flat, male characters whose only function seems to be the oppression of the women in the story, as is the case in the much inferior 'The Women's Room' by Marilyn French with which Small Changes has been compared. Piercy's men are interesting in their own right, although perhaps she doesn't quite manage to get inside them as completely as she does with her women. They too, are capable of change, sometimes exploitative, sometimes not, making decisions and living the consequences. Thus it is Phil, Miriam's lover, who understands most clearly the tragedy of Miriam's marriage, and it is for her that he mourns—more than for his own lost chances.

Jim, Beth's husband, can only see her in the role of 'wife'. For him it's dominate or be hempecked. He never talks to her, but always at her. Yet when she finally wins her independence from him he is at last free to accept her as an equal. In their final conversation together we can see his struggle too, his usage of chauvinism, cracked a little perhaps by his experience with Beth.

Small Changes is a book I would particularly like male comrades to read. It communicates well many things which are too subtle and complex to be easily explained. Perhaps that's what novels are for.

If there is a serious criticism to be made of Marge Piercy's novels it's the absence of the working class in her world. In this she reflects the isolation of the American Left from the working class. In Small Changes the only working class character (Beth's family) appears as incurably conservative. The world of Connie in Woman on the Edge of Time is the world of basters and hard living, there is no hepe here presented there. The world of the future which Connie visits, although still blessed with the products of mines and factories, somehow does not contain them. They are off stage, invisible and unexplored. In Vida her book about political activism, there are no working class characters except those plucked from their environment and rendered classless.

Maybe it was because I was already conscious of this that I approached Vida with misgivings. How was I going to react to a sympathetic account of left terrorism? Vida is a one time cadre of the anti-Vietnam War movement of the late sixties. Partly through the machinations of an undercover police agent in their midst, partly through their own lack of clarity about the politics, her group gets involved in a bomb attack on the draft board at Rockefeller Center. Vida is pitched onto a road without a turning, a life on the run, unable to do anything except to continue bombing and to write endless position papers which no one reads. At a stroke she becomes totally isolated, gagged and rendered harmless. The book describes her life with sympathy, honesty and understanding. I grew to love Vida. Yet though the message is not spelled out it is none the less clear, the sterility of terrorism is horrifyingly vivid.

Woman on the Edge of Time is perhaps the best known here in England. In it Marge Piercy juxtaposes a realistic and critical account of New York mental institutions with a vision of a future Utopia. The grime yet convincing image of the hospital draws a lot from Piercy's association with organisations which included the Mental Patients Liberation Front and the Somerville Women's Health Centre.

The Utopian she projects, a village in Mattapoissett (Massachusetts) of 2137, is not everyone's cup of tea, yet it makes a valid contribution to our vision of future socialist society. Some of its ideas are of a very way-out, sci-fi type, such as the end of biological childbearing and the treatment of male parents with hormones so all can taste the joys of breast feeding equally. Other ideas are borrowed from non-European cultures, such as the native American custom of marking the beginning of 'personhood' (ie adulthood) by a week of solitude in the wilderness. All this is woven into a credible whole by the deep exploration of personal relationships and their interaction with the social organisation.

The contrast between Connie's madhouse and the freedom of the future world works to highlight each of them. Yet people's actions matter and the rosy future is not guaranteed. Connie briefly blunders into a fascist alternative future and is forced by her own experiences in the hospital to a realisation that the actions of people force the link between present and future. She comes to think of herself as part of that link and makes her act of war against the enemies of Mattapoissett, who are her enemies too.

The building of Socialism has to be a rich canvas of many strands. The thread of Marge Piercy's work can give depth to our understanding of what it's all about.

Lew Barker

Marge Piercy's books are published by The Women's Press, 124 Shoreditch High Street, London, E1 6DE. Titles in print are The High Cost of Living (£2.25), Woman on the Edge of Time (£4.95), and Vida (£4.95).

Order by post from Bookmarks or the publisher (prepay orders only) and enclose 30p per title for post and packaging.
Letters

Torture, death, and... 

Simon Turner (SR 1980:4) is quite right to suggest that current SWP policy on trades councils is haphazard; such work is largely left to the initiative of individuals with even district committees, let alone the national organisation, offering minimal guidance. Unfortunately Simon is wrong about just about everything else.

I think few of us who have worked regularly on trades councils think in terms of the 1926 experience; our concerns are much more pragmatic. An area with an effective trades council which can at least provide communication between various sectors, and on occasion take initiatives, is better off than an area which has no such organisation. It is SWP policy to 'defend our unions', to develop and strengthen all meaningful forms of trade union organisation. Trades council work must be put in this context.

Simon is correct to say that the level of trades council activity varies enormously; that some councils are important, others irrelevant. But to put it like this is fallacious. The experience—confirmed by all the reports of the Third Annual Review—that what makes the difference will be a small group of activists prepared to carry the burden. In an ideal world, of course, trades councils would be manned by honest, dynamic and efficient left reformists, who would lick the stamps and duplicate the minutes; SWP comrades would conserve their valuable energies in order to inject the politics and fight for the correct line. (But then in an ideal world we wouldn't need trades councils anyway.)

My own experience is of becoming a delegate to an almost totally moribund trades council. When I first started to attend, the average attendance was seven, with at least half of questionable age, and the sole activity was listening to the secretary reading word by word through the correspondence received from the TUC. During the nurses' dispute in 1974 I made the modest proposal that we write to branches inviting them to take whatever action they saw fit in support of the nurses. I was told that such interference in disputes was not permitted.

The first breakthrough came when we merged with the other trades council in the borough. (This could have happened at the time of the local government reorganisation in 1964, but we only got round to it in 1975.) The merger was opposed by one of the more long-standing members on the grounds that, 'We were due to meet them twelve years ago to discuss that, but it was snowing, and none of them turned up.'

What the merger meant was that a small group of people—C.P., L.P., SWP—came together who were committed to trying to make the trades council a more relevant and interventionist body. An SWP member became president and an active and efficient CPER secretary.

The achievement was limited and modest: we raised money for local disputes and sent delegations to pickets; we held two public meetings on the cuts and for a time circulated a cuts bulletin; we circulated to all branches for discussion a statement on the need for total opposition to the NF; we adopted a Chilean political prisoner and welcomed him to Britain when he was released (this got full-page spreads in the local press). No more was not done can be attributed partly to the general level of struggle, partly to the small number of activists. But at least a start was made; there is a potential for development as the situation changes.

The present is that nothing could have been done if we hadn't been involved in the procedural and bureaucratic aspects. It is necessary to restructure the meetings, to farm out the boring routine correspondence to the executive so that trades council meetings could concentrate on major reports, speakers, local disputes and campaigns. To begin with we couldn't even move that the Trades Council banner be sent on demonstration because there was no banner to send; an SWP member (not me) had to do the sewing. To me the lesson of Bob Lloyd's letter (SR 1980:4) on the bureaucratic enlargement of Oxford trades council is that the world-weary abstentionism he evokes, but rather the importance of fighting to win the chairpersonship.

The problem, then, is not one of seeking positions, but of doing jobs. It is futile our proposing that trades councils take on certain tasks unless we are prepared to make the effort to implement the decisions. If this means being elected secretary, minute secretary, or auditor, so be it.

Obviously there is a question of priorities. If a comrades has the choice between taking a meaningful position in the workplace, and doing bureaucratic work which becomes obvious as the former comes first. But many comrades, either because of their particular workplace situation, or because they are in a field of employment where the potential for militancy is limited, are available to do trades council work. The danger with Simon's article is that it will discourage such comrades from seeking the possibilities, and allow them to take refuge in ultra-left justifications for the boredom and idleness that is natural to all of us.

After all, when comrades become revolutionary socialists they accept, at least hypothetically, the possibilities of jail, torture, exile and death. Is a couple of hours boredom once a month too much to ask?

Ian Birchall
North London

Middle class muddle

'The finest-meshed sociological net cannot give us a pure specimen of class. And class happens when some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared) feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs.'

(F.P. Thompson The Making of the English Working Class)

It is a pity that Thompson left women out of his explanation of class because he was making an important point that applies to women as well as men. Classes are not something that exists as a category in the minds of Marxists. They are the result of activities in the real world. People come to an understanding, or consciousness, of class through a variety of experiences. No two people do it the same way, and few understand it all at once.

As Marx explained in The German Ideology:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch, the ruling ideas; the ruling class, which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force.

Workers are continually caught in a conflict between the class conscious ideas they have as a result of everyday struggle, and the ideas about the world given them by schools, newspapers, television and experts of every variety. Thus their understanding of class is usually partial and contradictory.

That is why Henry Blaxland (letter in SR 1980:4) is missing the point when he objects to the characterisation of feminists as 'middle class' and states that 'college lecturers are, of course, workers'. Yes, college lecturers fit into the general category 'workers'. But that doesn't mean that they behave like class conscious workers all the time. Their very role as teachers rather than producers of cars and washing machines develops interests and loyalties that pull in different directions at the same time.

So the same woman can behave as a class conscious militant at her trade union branch meeting and display little class understanding at a subsequent feminist meeting. The existence of such contradictions is precisely why we are in the business of calling to battle a revolutionary socialist party. We know that working class struggle increases class consciousness. We also know that on its own this is not enough. We see the need to generalise all the experiences of the working class, to extend class consciousness.

We also understand that the same circumstances can affect different people in different ways. That is why Henry is wrong when he says, 'The ideas of women's liberation have been a crucial factor behind the militant action of many women manual workers.' It is not true.

The ideas of women's liberation and militant actions by women workers were both reactions to the same thing—massive changes in capitalism. Those changes affected women of different classes in different ways. They produced a women's liberation movement centred on the fight against oppression among middle class women at the same time as they forced working class women into militant action as workers.
It is because we see the need both for economic struggle at the workplace and a fight against women's oppression that we started Women's Voice. With it we attempted to bring together the various elements of women's struggle into a class conscious analysis. We are still developing our ideas. But one thing we have learned is not to deny the middle class nature of the women's liberation movement, nor to underestimate its importance. It was middle class women that led to a more critical component of feminism back into the socialist movement. It was the struggles of women in the workplace which forced many men to take us seriously.

We are not ashamed of coming from the middle class. And we do not try to hide it. We're class conscious feminists. That is why we are not just in the women's movement, but active members of the SWP as well.

Anna Paezuska
North London

Kollontai caricatured

Bitchiness is no substitute for politics, and I cannot see the point of Socialist Review publishing a book review like Claire Hirschfeld's (Cathy Porter, Alexandra Kollontai) in the last issue.

Hirschfeld offers us the term 'ultra-left' to describe both Kollontai's position on the First World War (in which she supported Lenin) and her adherence to the Workers' Opposition in 1921. True, Lenin used the word of Kollontai, but he must be turning in his grave to find it turned into such a half-baked cover-all.

We are told, too, the 'The Bolsheviks' attitude to women was scandalous'. Which attitudes? Whose and when? The Bolshevik Party was from time to time deeply divided on this issue, but managed to come up with some creditable policies. That this was due to the struggle of certain women in the party, including Kollontai, is to their credit — instead, we are offered a picture of Kollontai as a 'tone agitator' among working women. This is not only a shameful betrayal of her comrades, but obscures the point that for Kollontai the party mattered however unpalatable this may be for present-day socialist feminists.

Indeed, Hirschfeld's review does not at any point mention what Kollontai's position on the relationship between feminism and the struggle for socialism actually was. Kollontai matters for us because she regarded the two as inseparable: though this has always displeased some Marxists and some feminists, it is surely the cardinal political point to be made about her work and life.

Finally, we are offered some of the worst of the truly scandalous smears perpetrated against Kollontai by sexist Bolsheviks and later Stalinists the private income (which was not enough to live on after 1901), the expropriated dresses (which I cannot find any real evidence for), and her marriage to Dybenko. Anyone who can say in the same column that Kollontai 'made one of these few serious attempts to tackle the problem of love and socialism' and that she was 'infatuated' with Dybenko is either a blatant hypocrite or simply does not know anything about Kollontai's actual writings on the subject.

Catherine Hirschfeld's review is incapable of providing a real antidote to Cathy Porter's uncritical enthusiasm for Kollontai — it simply plays for an equally uncriticalhostility, in the most unpolitical way.

Norah Carlin
North London

Import errors

It is a pity that Nigel Harris feels bound to resort to the mischievous practice of suggesting guilt by association in his unsuccessful attempt to demolish the case for import controls. In his opinion, the association with demands for import controls in the interwar period is supposed to be a sufficient summary of the rationale underlying the present agitation for controls. This is simply not satisfactory. The justifiability for import controls is today quite different.

One of the reasons for the Thatcher (and from 1975 to 1979 the Healey) policy of deflation is that domestic expansion — for various reasons to do with the structure of British capital — would lead to pressure on the trade balance and would soon have to accommodate the trade deficit. Another reason is that by encouraging a slump British industry should be forced to rationalize, to promote productivity growth and restore international competitiveness. Perhaps inflation would be moderated though that is not the main aim of current government policy.

The Alternative Economic Strategy argument for import controls runs in the very opposite direction. It urges that there should be (a) expansion of the economy, (b) controlled growth of imports, so that balance of payments problems do not emerge as a constraint on further expansion, and (c) these measures should be combined with an active industrial strategy, managed by the state, to ensure that there is investment of the appropriate type. These devices may help to soften inflation growth though that is not their main aim. Their main purpose is to stimulate growth in employment and output to reduce hardship.

The case for import controls is not about self-sufficiency or withdrawing from the world market and it has to be viewed alongside the other elements of the Alternative Economic Strategy, especially domestic expansion and extension of public ownership to profitable sectors of manufacturing. A case for general import controls is what is being advocated. The Alternative Economic Strategy can offer no justification for selective controls which would be about exporting unemployment. Provided balances of payments surplus countries do not retaliate (and to do so be against their interest), domestic expansion can lead to a faster growth of trade providing greater growth abroad.

The Alternative Economic Strategy has weaknesses especially in its perception of the Labour Party. It is a more fundamental challenge (taken as a whole programme for economic policy) to UK capital than commonly believed. Likely problems in the implementation of such a strategy are overlooked in most discussion though the experience of the last government's industrial strategy shows that they ought to be. Other things could be wrong as well. For example there might still be retaliation by other countries even though such action would be against theirs and others interests.

Through import controls and the other elements of the Alternative Economic Strategy package there may be the possibility of improvement in the conditions of workers in this country and others. More honest discussion of the proposals is needed. Less emotive sloganeering would be helpful ('class collaboration' is certainly not visible in the demand for general import controls) and all would benefit by a decline in attempts to tarnish reputations by association.

George Blazyczyn
Urrich

Self-centred

You pretended in your last issue (1980-5) to have interviewed me and Hilary Wainwright. Why? In a separate article you refer to the 'Debate of the Decade' as a debate between Paul Foot and Tony Benn. Why? Is it really necessary for you to rewrite history for the sake of your own self-aggrandisement?

Lyne Segal
North London

See Cockerill who wrote the article in question is on holiday as we go to press and cannot reply to Lyne's first question herself. But if readers look at the last issue of SR you will see it was mainly a subtle 'speech' with Lyne and Hilary. Instead, it says quite clearly, 'See Cockerill talked to two of the authors of the book, Hilary Wainwright and Lyne Segal, and also to other socialists about what the methods of Beyond the Fragments base meant in practice', which is what she did. For as the 'Deb of the Decade' was only presented by the organizers of the debate as the main speakers, being allotted — whether rightly or wrongly — more time than the other platform speakers. As for the charge of 'self-aggrandisement', we can only regret the use of such terms by someone who contributed to a book which dwelt so much on the way in which sections of the left close off debate with each other through the use of insult-words, i.e.
In defence of H.P. Muggins

Britain's oldest left wing theatre group, CAST, are currently putting on their one-man play Full Confessions of a Socialist at Theatre Space in London. The play has enjoyed remarkable success, being well received by audiences all over this country, doing successful tours in the States, winning a Village Voice Off-Broadway Award, appearing in print. But when it was shown at the end of Edinburgh's May Day Rally recently, the performance was stopped by a group of women who shouted down Roland Muldoon because they objected to the character he was playing, Harry Percival Muggins. The interruption disappointed the 350 people who had already heard Mrs Desai, Paul Foot and Czech dissidents. The arguments over the play seem likely to continue with its London showing.

Muggins, as a character in the play, could not reply to the critics in Edinburgh. But Roland could explain to Sandra Shepherd for Socialist Review what he feels about the issue and what CAST are trying to do.

At the moment the play began some women attacked it—put up a verbal barrage and made the play impossible to put on. I think they'd intended to barrage it all the way through and a play can't stand up to that so I had to abandon it. In fact, if the hecklers had waited, a few sentences later in the play they would have gotten what they were looking for.

Which is where he says he hates his wife and feels that she wears her varicose veins like she's got rank in the army over him. Her veins, in other words, her agony or whatever, represent more hardship than his reality. They 'really do object to a play in' which this guy says he hates his wife.

Some people think he is taking a sexist attitude. I don't think he is. In fact we (CAST) feel that we've modified it so much that it can't be. We never wanted it to be sexist. We wanted it to be a comment on family life, the trap of monogamy.

Five years ago when there were four of us in the play we originally wrote it to be called Confessions of a Socialist Worker Salesman. Its message was that it's this terrible twit, this arsehole, that will be the socialist revolution. It was supposed to portray how bad it will be. In other words, not portraying the perfect human being but the imperfect human being.

In my opinion those who attack the play suggest that a character like him could never be a revolutionary socialist or a comrade of theirs.

If the play means anything it means that the people we're all supposed to be talking to at this May Day Rally are all something, somewhat, somehow, maybe a little like Harry Percival Muggins. He's supposed to be an archetype of a man in this modern society.

But they must think that he cannot become a revolutionary alongside them or they can't share anything with him because they actually attack him. They show their ignorance of art and socialism. They really are mistaken because they're not trying to create a debate, they're censoring. They also associate Roland Muldoon with Harry Percival Muggins. Of course I'm not. I'm acting someone.

People come up to us and ask where the women are. They don't see them. We don't have women in our plays. We did a very famous play back in 1973 called Come In Hilda Muggins. And we've always had the Hilda Muggins character ever since. She's like Harry Percival Muggins, they're both Charlie Chaplin type people. Archetypes. It's in the traditions of theatre to have these people. Only, our influences are influenced by the socialist struggle.

Only we don't hold the party line on truth because that isn't the role of art. It's very hard to defend a play or a character in a play because you're not trying to create a view of a perfect world—you're using a character to comment on the existing world. Art can't be the party line.

Harry doesn't come over with the SWP line. He dreams up some syndicalist-type answer. On the whole working class audiences like CAST. People come back because they think CAST is a useful, meaningful and funny.

But artists aren't good, are they? They're just people who paint pictures or who put on plays. What we do is hold up a dialectical mirror to society and the answer of these women was in smash that mirror, which is socialists you can't do.

CAST is a way of presenting people with socialist ideas without hammering it home. But it's not the answer. It's not a party publication, it's a theatre group that enjoys playing to socialist audiences. And it responds to criticism. It's not infallible. It's art, and the people who are objecting to it are objecting to the party because they think they've caught the SWP with their pants down because they're allowing on a sexist guy. They're too stupid to notice that it's called Confessions in the first place.

CAST has grown in fifteen years, not shrunk. Our audiences have picked up and they're certainly not made up of estate agents and bank clerks. They are made up of the people that the SWP is trying to reach. The trouble is I'd hate CAST to have to stand up to the same bickering as the party. Because a play can't stand the same intense criticism. It can't change just because of such and such a criticism because it isn't arguing that way. Your characters are weak and strong. They're different people, imperfect. Our plays go up and down with class fortunes and misfortunes. It's socialist theatre and only people who are interested in socialism will come and see it.

But I think CAST is going to change again completely now. It'll have to respond to a whole new situation and wake up to the fact that Harry Percival Muggins isn't really satisfactory.

Through rehearsals last week I found it difficult because I was trying to change it to respond to the criticisms of these people. All last week we were thinking the party's not standing up like it once did because they attacked it. What I regret is that it happened. They should have objected at the end when everyone could have agreed with them or not. It's just sad. You can do without it.

All the criticism is so difficult to counter by the character itself because he wasn't set up in the first place to put forward an argument about women's oppression. He was set up to be a right twit, not a male chauvinist.

And because of his character he is not capable of answering. Roland Muldoon, as a real person, is, but I can't stop the play and answer as me. It's not a series of jokes where you can just stop. It's delivered like that, adopting the style of a guy talking into a microphone a la Lenny Bruce—it's called a stream of consciousness, this style, which CAST invented. It's an archetypal three-dimensional character that seems to be like life. It's a form of theatre which can lead to some misunderstandings.

Muggins has no voice. He never wanted any defence. He's not guilty or innocent. And he's become the symbol of that argument which only shows the ignorance of the people who object.

If people criticise him for being an imperfect example of what the socialist revolution will require he cannot answer that criticism. Nor can the play.

Sandra Shepherd
Ever-decreasing circles

Arguments within English Marxism
Perry Anderson
NLB/Verso £3.95 (paperback)

Perry Anderson, long-time editor of New Left Review has written a most peculiar book. Whole chapters read like nothing so much as an over-extended internal bulletin packed between glossy covers, with accusation and counter-accusation as to what happened at editorial meetings of NLR way back in 1962. Other sections are lengthy footnotes on the history of the 18th century, interspersed with abstruse discussions on historical methodology. Not the book to present bitter arguments to the works canteen or even the student union bar.

Yet within a certain milieu the book is being greeted as the most significant Marxist work of the year (see, for instance, Tariq Ali in the New Statesman of four weeks ago and Phil Hearne in Socialist Challenge of 22 May). This is more a comment on the milieu than on the qualities of the book.

Members of the middle class intelligentsia who incline to the left face a problem when it comes to turning their beliefs into action. They themselves lack any real power to change the world. In nine cases out of ten they are unwilling to make the break with their established life style which would be necessary if they were to get seriously involved in working class political and trade union activity. And so they tend to oscillate between two different sorts of activity: on the one hand throwing themselves enthusiastically into various one issue campaigns — in the last two years NLD, the anti-Vietnam war movement, the women's and gay movements, the anti-nuclear movement — which are characterised by a populist (all 'people' uniting against a particular evil) rather than a class approach, so enabling the middle class activists to feel as important as the occasional worker who gets involved; on the other, particularly as these movements decline, retreating into a stance which justifies as political activity their own intellectual pursuits — from seeing the latest Brazilian film to giving a college seminar in semiotics.

For fourteen years or more, Perry Anderson has been involved in a somewhat tawdry debate with the Marxist historian, Edward Thompson, of which this is the latest blockbusting episode. In their own ways, Thompson and Anderson symbolise the two poles between which the intellectual left move.

Thompson has been the intermittent activist in populist movements. After leaving the CP over Stalinism and Hungary in 1956, he founded a dissident Communist journal, the New Reasoner and merged it into the first version of New Left Review in 1960. NLR was seen as a vehicle for carrying socialist discussion into the growing antibourgeois movement and for building a new network of socialist organisation based on local left clubs. By 1962 NLD was in decline, the left clubs had disintegrated, the circulation of NLR was falling, the editorial board was wrecked by disagreements and Thompson had retreated to 'sulk in his tent' (to write his marvellous Making of the English Working Class and re-emerging for a few months in 1967 with the attempt to launch the May Day Manifesto as a movement, and again more recently with the attempt to build a movement against increased powers for the 'state within the state' and the deployment of cruise missiles.

By contrast, Anderson has emphasised the tendency of the intellectual left to proclaim their own academic and leisure pursuits as exemplary political activity. He took over the faltering 'activist' NLR in 1962 and reorientated it increasingly towards discussion within the closed circles of left academia. The message of his article Origins of the present Crisis (1964) was that the lack of success of Marxist ideas in influencing the British working class movement was because of the 'failure of any significant body of intellectuals to join the proletariat until the end of the last century'. NLR's self-proclaimed task was to win over these intellectuals now.

Tom Nairn, then Anderson's almost inseparable intellectual twin declared: 'The problem of any "new" socialist left assumes a more precise form. What likelihood is there of constituting a stratum of intellectuals more effectively divorced from traditions?'

So NLR's aim was to build this stratum, which in turn would suggest new ways of acting to the Labour Party and trade union leaderships. A division of labour was necessary in which Anderson, Nairn et al would develop 'theory' while the existing left leaders would continue to be responsible for 'practice'. Hence in the two 'popular' NLR books of the mid-sixties, Towards Socialism and The Incomparables, beside the 'theoretical' articles of Anderson and Nairn, there were 'practical' articles by Richard Crossman (Labour cabinet minister), Thomas Balogh (economic advisor to the Wilson government), Jack Jones (of the TGWU), Clive Jenkins (of ASTMS).

There was disillusionment with the Labour Left in later years. But apart from a very brief involvement in the Revolutionary Socialist Student Federation (RSSSF) of 1968-9, no attempt was made by NLR to throw itself into the active development of a political current independent of the old forces in the Labour movement. And even within RSSSF the NLR elements saw the task as building 'red bases' within the universities to act as 'strategic minorities' in the overthrow of capitalism, not as developing revolutionary organisation within the working class. With the decline of RSSSF, NLR became still more divorced from the practical problems of the British working class movement.

The different practical choices made by Thompson and Anderson have found expression in contrasting theoretical frameworks. Thomson's theory, like his practice, has contained a powerful activist component, but one which shies away from the traditional Marxist stress on the role of material life in determining the contours of class action. Typically, Thomson has berated reformist complicity — but gone on to condemn any 'insurrectionary', apocalyptic vision of revolution. In his most recent 'theoretical' work, The Poverty of Theory he has delivered a devastating critique of the passive, sociological view of human action contained in the Althusserian and post-Althusserian schools — but then has gone on to describe as a waste of time the attempt by Marx to see why men and women sometimes intervene in historical events and sometimes do not, through an examination of the economic dynamic of capitalism.

The whole trend within Anderson's thought has been to see theory as a self-subsisting entity. The first formulations of his positions in the mid-sixties were within the terminology of the 'existent-
"Theory without practice is sterile." Nowhere has the sterile been more marked than in the work of NLR over the years. Its aim has been to clarify the ideas of the intelligentsia. But over every issue where the intelligentsia has suffered the deepest confusion, NLR has repeated those confusions: over the question of the Labour Party; over the whole idea that you could have socialist revolution out of the working class self-activity (Anderson’s Problems of Socialist Strategy of 1965 insisted that Stalin’s crimes were ‘socialist crimes’ because they were ‘planned’, and Arguments still speaks of ‘socialist’ revolutions in China, Yugoslavia, etc.); over the role of the trade union bureaucracy; over the question of income policy (in 1965 Anderson insisted that it would be ‘utopian’ to reject incomes policy out of hand and that the left had to raise the ‘transitional’ formulation of ‘no incomes policy without workers’ control’, over the question of reform or revolution (Problems reads in many places like a word by word premonition of the words of the West). Above all over the crucial question of whether it is necessary to relate revolutionary policies to the current struggles of workers.

These considerations enable us to see what the debate between Thompson and Anderson has really been about: on the one hand there has been a ‘Marxism’ that sees the need for political intervention but refuses to conceive of this in terms of economically defined classes (despite the use of the terminology of class in Thompson’s theoretical and historical writings); on the other side a ‘Marxism’ which keeps close to the letter of at least some of the classics, but which runs away from any real notion of the unity of theory and practice, the real heart of Marxism.

The argument can go on in an everlasting circle, as each proponent makes devastating criticisms of the other, only to leave himself open to a just as devastating rebuke. But the fundamental barrenness of Anderson’s position is shown by the way in which he himself has admitted its own intrinsic limitations — and then backed away from taking them seriously.

Four years ago he produced Considerations of Western Marxism. In this work he saw the classical writings of Marxism, produced by men and women up to the eyeballs of Trotsky and the left opposition, as superior to ‘Western Marxism’, the mainly philosophical writings of theorists ensconced in academic posts and cut off from the living movement. He suggested that the future of Marxism lay with that minority tradition that had developed out of Leninism, Trotskyism and the left opposition and which maintained a concern with practice.

Considerations should have been an epitaph to the futility of what NLR had been doing for the previous decade and a half. That was too much for Anderson. In an ‘afterword’ he half-retracted his own criticism of theory divorced from practice. The half-retraction is continued in the present volume. There are token phrases about the need to unite theory with practice; there is a mention of certain theoretical problems of practical importance that have to be solved; there is even the (dishonest) claim that NLR were among the first people to criticize Althusser. But then there is also a half-hearted defence of Althusser’s ‘contribution to Marxism’ (complete with the claim that Althusser’s system could possibly have developed, as a belated apology for Stalinist notions because Althusser implicitly supported Mao against Khurshchev and even went as far as to criticise the French CP’s actions in May 1968, 12 months after the event) and an attempted justification for NLR’s role within the British intelligentsia over the last decade and a half.

Anderson today claims to be a revolutionary, laying stress on the need for an insurrectionary seizure of state power as opposed to Thompson’s half-way house approach. Anderson also affects the stance of the ‘orthodox Trotskyist’. And his absence of a truly mass and truly revolutionary movement in England as elsewhere in the West, has fixed the perimeter of all possible thought in this period. He even makes a number of bows in the direction of ‘orthodox Trotskyism’ and the Fourth International. But despite (or perhaps because of) these he does not begin to broach the question of the building within the working class of a revolutionary organisation. Instead he merely calls for a further dialogue of intellectuals, in which reformists and revolutionaries will fraternally discuss ‘new problems’. An apparently conciliatory ending to the book suggests that he would like NLR to continue along its old, barren, path but perhaps with a little help from Thompson and his friends.

One of Anderson’s complaints against Thompson is that Thompson has always ignored the Trotskyist tradition in his own criticism of Stalinism. In this Anderson is quite right: the criticism can be turned against Anderson himself. Although he makes very friendly gestures towards the variety of Trotskyism that shares many of his own prejudices (for the ‘socialist’ countries, on the possibility of non-working class forces forging a socialist future, on the need for ‘transitional’ demands), he ignores today and yesterday a hundred odd issues of NLR those who do not share those prejudices. Among them is a little group who have made a modest attempt to take revolutionary Marxism out of the intellectual ghetto and who have created a small but real presence in the workplaces. Could it be that the ‘silent majority’ in the argument between Anderson and Thompson, the alternative that resolves the contradiction each can find in the other, the way out of a milieu and a debate that is otherwise a ‘decadent totality’, compelled to revolve in ever smaller circles?

Chris Harman

---

**JOBS UNDER ATTACK**

THE EMPLOYERS’ OFFENSIVE AND THE LESSONS OF THE TIMES

Propped by Fleet Street Socialist Workers Party

Individual copy: Price 50p. Postage free (£2.50 for Companies or Institutions). Ten copies price £4.00, postage free (£20.00 for Companies or Institutions)

Available from: Box S, 265 Seven Sisters Road, London, N4.

Cheques or postal orders payable to ‘Bookmark’.

---
Embraced by the Bear

Decline of an Empire: The Soviet Socialist Republics in Revolt
Helene Carrere d'Encausse
Newsweek, NY, 1979

This is a clear, comprehensive and as far as possible up-to-date book on a subject on which there is virtually no book - the Soviet nationalities question. And since it's a hardback, you get a lot of information for your £5.50.

Official Soviet policy on the nationalities is that with modernisation, urbanisation and the spread of socialist principles, national differences have faded into the background and all the Soviet nations have fused into one people. Brezhnev's new constitution declares 'the USSR is a socialist state of all the people'. Helene Carrere d'Encausse shows us that this is nonsense.

The nationalities of the Soviet Union can be divided roughly into two groups - those of the western and those of the eastern USSR. The western ones: the Russians, the Ukrainians, the Belorussians, the Balts, the Jews and to a lesser extent the Georgians and Armenians, are nationalities in decline. They are the nationalities who bore the brunt of the revolution, the civil war, the purges and World War Two, and all of them have a falling birth rate. With the exception of the Balts, they are also the nationalities who are the most incorporated into the state.

The Russians of course dominate the state and party, but there is also a large percentage of Ukrainians (20%) of the Supreme Soviet and a slightly smaller percentage of Belorussians (because they are a smaller nationality). Georgians and Armenians occupy lower important posts, but are still heavily overrepresented in the party, largely because of their importance role played in social democracy before the revolution. In spite of persecution there is a greater percentage of the Jews (11.3% in the party than any other nation. Most of these nationalities speak Russian as well and some, the Jews and increasingly the Ukrainians, speak it instead of their national language.

In spite of their comparatively high degree of assimilation national protest is on the increase among these peoples. The three million Jews are reasserting their national culture and demanding the right to emigrate (100,000 have left since 1971). Georgia, an old historical state, grants any encouragement by the Soviet government on its territory with terrorism and mass demonstrations, the most famous being those of Tbilisi in 1978 against plans to grade the Georgian language. The Baltic states, especially the Lithuanian and Latvian, are in the throes of a religious revival. In spite of its privileged position in the federation, the Ukraine has produced both intellectuals and political ones, the notorious example being Petr Chudov, dismissed from the position of head of the Ukrainian CP in 1972.

So far, the eastern nationalities of the USSR - the Uzbekians, Turkmenians, Tajiks, Kirghiz, Kazakhians and Azerbaijanis - have made few protests against Soviet rule. There is only the isolated example of the Crimean Tatars, an outcast nation, brutally deported from their republic by Stalin, who have agitated with furious determination ever since to be allowed to return home. The eastern nationalities are on the whole better treated than the western though they have borne a share of the common disasters (especially collectivisation) and in many ways living conditions are better. The census of 1970 revealed, however, to the horror of the Soviet authorities, that the Moslems had replaced the Russians as the dynamic people of the USSR. They are the only people in the Soviet Union with a growing birth rate and their numbers will have tripled by the year 2000.

The Moslems are also the peoples of the Soviet Union most alienated from the regime. They were only incorporated into it after a bitter ten year war fought by the Red Army against Moslem guerrillas in the Caspian. Their mosques have multiplied, Soviet ideology by treating it as a byproduct of Islam. The Soviet government has closed all but a handful of mosques, but the Islamic religion has adapted itself to this and is still very much alive. But the chief power of Islam derives from the fact that unlike other religions it encompasses both the spiritual and the social world.

Not all Soviet Central Asians believe in god, but all regard themselves as Moslems, members of a particular culture and community. Soviet Moslems only marry Soviet Moslems. Few of them speak Russian. They observe the traditional rituals to do with birth, marriage and death even when these are forbidden by law. They have retained the traditional Moslem attitude to women and the traditional respect for the Elders. They have a Moslem Communism which bears no resemblance to the Communism of Moscow. So far this has not presented a danger to the Soviet regime, but it may do in the near future.

The declining western population has already caused severe shortages of labour in the heavy industry of Central Russia and Siberia. Soviet industry can only survive if the Moslems will migrate to these areas. But the Central Asians are the most static population of the Soviet Union, deeply attached to their own society. It is quite possible that if the government tries to force them to move, they may rise en masse. Afghanistan may be only the beginning.

Claire Herschfeld

Cashy tunes

One for the Money: Politics and Popular Song
Dave Harker
Hutchinson, £3.95
A Bookman Club choice

The title above was culled from the April 19 edition of Music Week, the self-styled 'leading European music business paper'.

How come 2½ million Spaniards went out and bought Abba's well known lament to Franco's life support machine, 'Ficoqualita'? For that matter how come 'White Christmas' is the world's largest selling single ever? By the end of 1975 it had sold 135 million units (business jargon for records).

Well you'll find one explanation of this second question in Dave Harker's book. And you should also glean some insight into the power, magic and frenzied corruption of the medium (the popular song) and industry that grind you. Everything that Terry Wogan through Tony Blackburn to EMI deliver to your cathode.

The post-war expansion of the music industry took shape in the beat boom of the swinging sixties. The era of
the teenager, tramps, pirate radios, CND and Vietnam took shape. So did the opportunity for Bob Dylan to express the discontent of a generation.

Dylan provides Dave Harker with an idol, model and a ray of hope. Hanging out in Greenwich Village, flitting with the Students for Democratic Society, Dylan straddled the commercial and political demands on his talent. His position was reflected beyond the range of the lyrics of his songs. Dylan had a grasp on the realities of the pawns in their game and the Movements around the popular issues of his early days. However, the rapid decline of his politics and final collapse into religion says as much about the failure of the political movements around him as it does about Dylan.

The final chapter of this book is entitled Commitment and finishes with the suggestion that a detailed reconstruction of working class history and culture is essential for a clear historical memory of the past. My only dissent is that what has been started in this book – an investigation of a number of facets of popular song from a revolutionary socialist angle has so little company on my book shelf that it keeps falling over.

Dave Harker brings it all down to the personal commitment of the author/artist/star to the cause, ideal or whatever. Several weeks back in SW, Ed Rest pointed out in a review of Rude Boy that the Clash feel their way about the world. They felt like doing the Carnival in ’78. They felt like supporting the victims of the police thrash in Southall. But, and this is a big, big but, they felt that RAR provided a framework for expressing those feelings. Now where this book falls short is the absence of a look at contemporary socialist cultural institutions: Rough Trade and RAR; Bell and Brace or Cast in theatre; Louch and Garnet in film. The list isn’t endless but there is something going on. We are talking about outfits that begin to create frameworks in which individual commitment is supported by socialist organisations that deliver cultural product.

We are not talking about blue prints for or islands of socialism. We are talking about evolving a character that has more nous than the ‘punk paper’ that went bananas over ‘the feeling that we wanted a red revolution’ and got whipped back into line by a bunch of philistines who found the bent stick on the work-shop floor.

Dave’s next book gets even closer to home.

John Dennis

FILM REVIEWS

The blockbuster business

Steven Spielberg’s 1941 was released in Britain last month. An extravaganza of destruction, a comedy that isn’t funny, 1941 is the ultimate example of how to squander 30 million dollars. It is so elaborately wasteful that I found myself wondering if it was a complete two-storey Cape-Cod mansion tumbled into the sea, just how many people in America, let alone elsewhere, are homeless. In short, the film constantly draws attention to how much money was spent in making it.

But the fact that a group of American bankers is prepared to let the ‘little brat’ Spielberg and his mates play around with 30 million dollars raises other questions. Questions about the kind of financial shape Hollywood is in during these years of deepening economic crisis.

The fact that a group of American bankers is prepared to let the ‘little brat’ Spielberg and his mates play around with 30 million dollars raises other questions. Questions about the kind of financial shape Hollywood is in during these years of deepening economic crisis.

The blockbuster business

Steven Spielberg’s 1941 was released in Britain last month. An extravaganza of destruction, a comedy that isn’t funny, 1941 is the ultimate example of how to squander 30 million dollars. It is so elaborately wasteful that I found myself wondering if it was a complete two-storey Cape-Cod mansion tumbled into the sea, just how many people in America, let alone elsewhere, are homeless. In short, the film constantly draws attention to how much money was spent in making it.

Steven Spielberg’s 1941 was released in Britain last month. An extravaganza of destruction, a comedy that isn’t funny, 1941 is the ultimate example of how to squander 30 million dollars. It is so elaborately wasteful that I found myself wondering if it was a complete two-storey Cape-Cod mansion tumbled into the sea, just how many people in America, let alone elsewhere, are homeless. In short, the film constantly draws attention to how much money was spent in making it.

Steven Spielberg’s 1941 was released in Britain last month. An extravaganza of destruction, a comedy that isn’t funny, 1941 is the ultimate example of how to squander 30 million dollars. It is so elaborately wasteful that I found myself wondering if it was a complete two-storey Cape-Cod mansion tumbled into the sea, just how many people in America, let alone elsewhere, are homeless. In short, the film constantly draws attention to how much money was spent in making it.

Steven Spielberg’s 1941 was released in Britain last month. An extravaganza of destruction, a comedy that isn’t funny, 1941 is the ultimate example of how to squander 30 million dollars. It is so elaborately wasteful that I found myself wondering if it was a complete two-storey Cape-Cod mansion tumbled into the sea, just how many people in America, let alone elsewhere, are homeless. In short, the film constantly draws attention to how much money was spent in making it.

Steven Spielberg’s 1941 was released in Britain last month. An extravaganza of destruction, a comedy that isn’t funny, 1941 is the ultimate example of how to squander 30 million dollars. It is so elaborately wasteful that I found myself wondering if it was a complete two-storey Cape-Cod mansion tumbled into the sea, just how many people in America, let alone elsewhere, are homeless. In short, the film constantly draws attention to how much money was spent in making it.
These six men have directed the blockbusters of the late seventies, films which have taken movie profits to new dizzy heights, and allowed the new breed who administer Hollywood from afar to sit back and relax, confident in the knowledge that the major companies are still major. Jaws (directed by Spielberg), became the most profitable film of all time until it was eclipsed by Star Wars (directed by Lucas), which by the end of 1977 had grossed $275 million dollars in the US alone. By that stage Spielberg had been given another $20 million dollars to make Close Encounters.

Currently the seven major film companies are in a strong financial position. The blockbusters of the seventies put them back on the map. They can maintain this position because they are now wealthy enough to carry a large number of films in their risk portfolio at any one time. With so many projects in the pipeline they are bound to hit the jackpot once in a while. Except for MGM they distribute their own films - and the biggest profits appear to lie in distribution. Their marketing and financial strength derives from their domestic cinema and television markets, which in turn gives them the strength to permeate the markets of other countries.

In short, the American film industry has staggered along in a fairly precarious fashion for the greater part of the post-war era. At times it has looked like collapsing entirely. But like the capitalist system as a whole it has somehow managed to survive. The major companies at present appear to enjoy a kind of irrational strength. It seems that they can easily afford the financial disaster I would confidently predict 1991 to be. But for how long?

Jane Ure Smith

Drumming Out the Politics

The Tin Drum
Directed by Volker Schlondorff

The Tin Drum traces the history of the town of Danzig (now the Polish city of Gdansk, but between the wars a German speaking enclave independent of both Poland and Germany until annexed by the Nazis) over two decades as observed by a small boy. Essentially it is a faithful and uncut adaptation of Gunther Grass's novel of the same name. The film won an award at the Cannes Festival and the book, shocked audiences in Germany.

The child, Oskar, is no ordinary child, but a creature of the fantastic, determined not to grow up. At his third birthday party Oskar watches and listens as the adults indulge in romantic and shallow intrigue and, in between bouts of glibbontry, try to affect a sophisticated understanding of the political undertones of pre-war Europe. He is also plagued for the rest of his life with dreams of the tin drum, at which he wishes to turn his back on the adult world. And engineering an accident that will stunt his growth, Oskar is guaranteed eternal childhood. Armed with a tin drum and a piercing, glass-shattering scream, he parades through sequences of death, sexuality and the rise of the Third Reich. All as grotesquely theatrical as sideshows at a circus.

Schlondorff is more concerned with maintaining a respectful reproduction of Grass's novel and its greatly stylised cinematic cinema than with political comment. This is particularly so in a lengthy scene dealing with Oskar's disruption of a Nazi rally. It is not political indignation that makes Oskar reject Nazism but childish perverseness.

For Schlondorff Oskar is the child that exists in all of us, the child that we would all like to remain. Oskar deliberately turns his back on the realities and consequences of the rise of Nazism and the occupation of Danzig. His self-induced innocence is supposed to parallel the assumed child-like ignorance of the German people during the inter-war years. Like Oskar they tried to shrug from the realities until events finally overtook them. But surely the parallel is a bit too simple.

At length, finding himself an orphan, Oskar decides to grow up. No longer can he shirk his responsibilities. Grass was saying that Germany has also to face the responsibility of the past, for like little Oskar, its political, cultural and spiritual growth has been stunted for too long. However Schlondorff consistently refrains from taking up such themes.

Despite heavy censorship The Tin Drum is disturbing, stirring and beautifully filmed. But Schlondorff shies away from any kind of political commitment or even comment with irritating frequency. The tragedies of Germany's past are reduced to little more than vivid theatrical childhood memories, and the present is never confronted at all.

Martis Wohle

R2 D2 Part 2

The Empire Strikes Back
Director: Irwin Kershner

In case you didn't know it, Star Wars Part Two.

A number of comrades with a good grounding in Leninist theory and a considerable record of service to the party thought that Star Wars was magnificent. They acted as if it was the best thing that had happened to the movies since A Fistful of Dollars.

As it turned out wasn't so entirely true. For a start Star Wars hero looked and acted like a refugee from the Osmonds. And for another thing it was a bit all a bit showy. Nevertheless it was good. Five out of ten for ripping yarns (a possible score). Nine out of ten for light show.

Now granted that Star Wars wasn't quite A Fistful of Dollars. Is The Empire Strikes Back even a pale reflection of For a Few Dollars More? Pushing on to even greater triumphs in its chosen genre? (oops! shouldn't have used that word)

If you believe some of the critics, no. They obviously wanted a more subtle and profound development of the struggle for 'the force'. They were heart-broken at the end of their predictions, but

The film ended with a laser sword fight. (Which, by the way, is a blander half truth.)

They obviously thought that Star Wars Part Two should follow along the lines of all the recent supposedly great Part Twos like The Godfather and The French Connection: increase the length by fifty per cent and treble the profundity.

Thank god the team that made The Empire Strikes Back thought otherwise.

They have obviously seen a couple of episodes of Flash Gordon, the original galactic ripping yarn, which, with a fraction of the budget and having to thrall its audience every twenty minutes, had to have a lot of action and use its setting to introduce every kind of goody, badly and ripping situation you could imagine.

Which means that The Empire Strikes Back maintains its nine out of ten light show rating but goes up to seven on the ripping yarns scale. There is less phoney epic quality, more action and more ringing of the changes in terms of stunts and location.

We are still stuck with the horrid old 'force', and even worse, the Osmonds, but, all in all, it's a better movie than Star Wars.

Let them run through the whole of Flash Gordon and Flash Gordon Goes to Mars a few times and perhaps they'll come up with the galactic The Godfather, the Bad and the Ugly.

Will there be Star Wars under socialism? (That's another, I mean, not the real thing). Yes. A bit of adventure and spectacle is all to the good.

It's just that we won't have the sexism, the vague cold war gloss and the hero worship. It will be the comrades from the Inter Planetary Federation of Workers States zapping the last bastions of reaction in the universe.
THE SOCIALIST A B C

N is for Nationalisation

"Without it we'll stumble and fall". Maybe. But with it many groups of workers have stumbled and fallen as well. Senior stewards at places like Heathrow or British Leyland have often slipped into the belief that being owned by the capitalist state somehow makes you into an enclave of socialism.

Strangely enough, there was more awareness of the real issues among socialists in the early days of this century before the advent of large scale nationalisation.

Here we reprint part of a chapter from Robert Tressell's classic socialist novel, The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists. In it he describes the reactions of "the Brigands", the owners of the Muggborough power station and the key group on the local council, when they finally decide they cannot operate it at a profit because of competition from gas.

The scene was Mr. Sweater's office. Mr. Sweater was seated at his desk, but with his chair swung round to enable him to face his guests—Messrs. Rushton, Didulum, and Grinder, who were also seated.

"Something will 'ave to be done, and that very soon", Grinder was saying. "We can't go on much longer as we're doing at present. For my part, I think the best thing to do is to chuck up the sponge at once; the company is practically bankrupt now, and the longer we wait the worse it will be."

"That's just my opinion," said Didulum dejectedly. "If we could supply the electric light at the same price as gas, or a little cheaper, we might have some chance; but we can't do it. The fact is that the machinery we've got is no good; it's too small and it's worn out, consequently the light we supply is inferior to gas and costs more."

"Yes, I think we're fairly beaten this time," said Rushton. "Why, even if the Gas Coy. hadn't moved their works beyond the borough boundary, still we wouldn't have been able to compete with them."

"Of course not," said Grinder. "The truth of the matter is just what Didulum says. Our machinery is too small, it's worn out, and good for nothing but to be thrown on the scrap-heap. So there's only one thing left to do and that is—go into liquidation."

"I don't see it" remarked Sweater.

"Well, what do you propose, then?" demanded Grinder. "Reconstruct the company? Ask the shareholders for more money? Pull down the works and build fresh, and buy some new machinery? And then most likely not make a do of it after all? Not for me, old chap! I've 'ad enough. You won't catch me, chuckin' good money after bad in that way."

"Nor me neither," said Rushton.

Sweater laughed quietly. "I'm not such a fool as to suggest anything of that sort," he said. "You seem to forget that I am one of the largest shareholders myself. No, what I want is—" and Sweater continued in a low voice. ""Out."

"Sell out!" replied Grinder with a contemptuous laugh in which the others joined. "Who's going to buy the shares of a concern that's practically bankrupt and never paid a dividend?"

"I've tried to sell my little lot several times already," said Didulum with a sickly smile, "but nobody wants 'em."

"Who's to buy?" repeated Sweater, replying to Grinder. "The municipality of course! The ratepayers. Why shouldn't Muggborough go in for Socialism as well as other towns?"

Rushton, Didulum and Grinder fairly gasped for breath: the audacity of the chief's proposal nearly paralysed them.

"I'm afraid we should never get away with it," ejaculated Didulum, as soon as he could speak. "When the people tumbled to it, there'd be no need of a row."

"People! Row!" replied Sweater, scornfully. "The majority of the people will never know anything about it! Listen to me—"

"Are you quite sure as we can't be overheard? interrupted Rushton, glaring nervously at the door and round the office.

"It's all right," answered Sweater, who nevertheless lowered his voice almost to a whisper, and the others drew their chairs closer and bent forward to listen.

"You know we still have a little money in hand: well, what I propose is this. At the annual meeting, which, as you know, comes off next week, we'll arrange for the Secretary to read a highly satisfactory report, and we'll declare a dividend of 15 per cent—we can arrange it somehow between us. Of course, we'll have to cook the accounts a little, but I'll see that it's done properly. The other shareholders are not going to ask any awkward questions, and we all understand each other."

Sweater paused, and regarded the other three brigands intently. "Do you follow me? he asked.

"Yes, yes," said Didulum eagerly. "Go on with it." And Rushton and Grinder nodded assent.

"Afterwards," resumed Sweater, "I'll arrange for a good report of the meeting to appear in the Weekly Anannuals. I'll instruct the Editor to write it himself, and I'll tell him just what to say. I'll also get him to write a leading article about it, saying that electricity is sure to supersede gas for lighting purposes in the very near future. Then the article will go on to refer to the huge profits made by the Gas Coy. and to say how much better it would have been if the town had brought the gasworks years ago, so that those profits might have been used to reduce the rates, the same as has been done in other towns. Finally, the article will declare that it's a great pity that the Electric Light Supply should be in the hands of a private company, and to suggest that an effort be made to acquire it for the town.

"In the meantime we can all go about—in a very quiet and judicious way, of course—bragging about what a good thing we've got, and saying we don't mean to sell. We shall say that we've overcome all the initial expenses and difficulties connected with the installation of the works—that we are only just beginning to reap the reward of our industry and enterprise, and so on.

"Then," continued the Chief, "we can arrange for it to be proposed in the Council that the Town should purchase the Electric Light Works."

"But not by one of us four, you know," said Grinder with a cunning leer.

"Certainly not; that would give the show away at once. There are, as you know—several members of the Board who are not shareholders in the company; we'll get some of them to do most of the talking. We, being the directors of the company, must pretend to be against selling, and stick out for our own price; and when we do finally consent we must make out that we are sacrificing our private interests for the good of the Town. We'll get a committee appointed—we'll have an expert engineer down from London—I know a man that will suit our purpose admirably—and we'll rush the whole business through before you can say 'Jack Robinson', and before the ratepayers have time to realize what's being done. Not that we need worry ourselves much about them. Most of them take no interest in public affairs, but even if there is something said, it won't matter much to us once we've got the money. It'll be a nine days' wonder and then we'll hear no more of it."

As the Chief ceased speaking, the other brigands also remained silent, speechless with admiration of his cleverness.

"Well, what do you think of it?" he asked.

"Think of it! cried Grinder, enthusiastically. "I think it's splendid! Nothing could be better. If we can honestly get away with it, I reckon it'll be one of the smartest things we've ever done."

"Smart ain't the word for it," observed Rushton.

"There's no doubt it's a grand idea!" exclaimed Didulum.

"Wot! I likes about this 'ere business is that we're not only doin' ourselves a bit of good," continued Grinder with a laugh, "but we're likewise doin' the Socialists a lot of 'arm. When the ratepayers 'ave bought the Works, and they begins to kick up a row because they 'e lose 'em money over it—we can tell 'em that it's Socialism! And then they'll say that if that's Socialism they don't want no more of it outside.