

*socialist*  
**REVIEW**

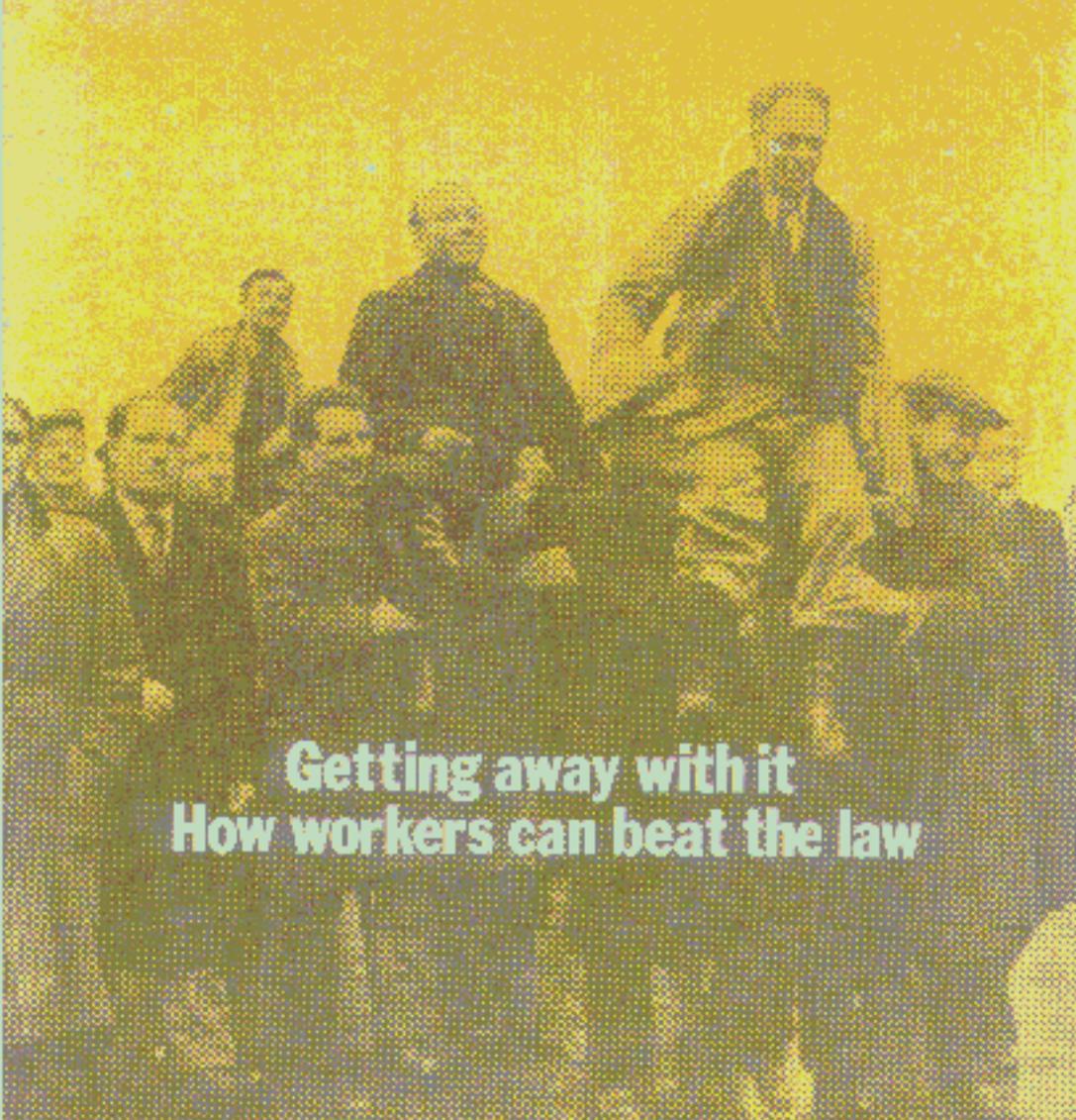
**Background to  
Miami**

**Dave Spart  
strikes back**

**The Yorkshire  
Ripper**

Monthly Magazine of the Socialist Workers Party

15 June-12 July 1999 £ 49p



**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 'irresponsibility' of 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 section of workers and try to beat them into the ground. So now is the time to begin rehearsing 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 incomes 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 this 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 banking 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

ment-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 (if you are to believe the media) that Thatcher is 'making a stand over', the Common Market. Yet the row in the Common Market is *not* about its prices.

This was shown quite clearly a few weeks back when the British government used the Common Market's 'Green Money' system to keep prices of food 2.1 per cent higher than they would have been otherwise. According to *The Financial Times* 'Other EEC governments were astounded by Britain's sudden switch from protecting consumers to looking after exporters and farmers. For the first time since the Corn Laws there will be a tax on imported foodstuffs.' (3 April 1980) The government had in fact been demanding an even higher figure than the EEC would allow — 3.6 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' (at 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 £340m 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.

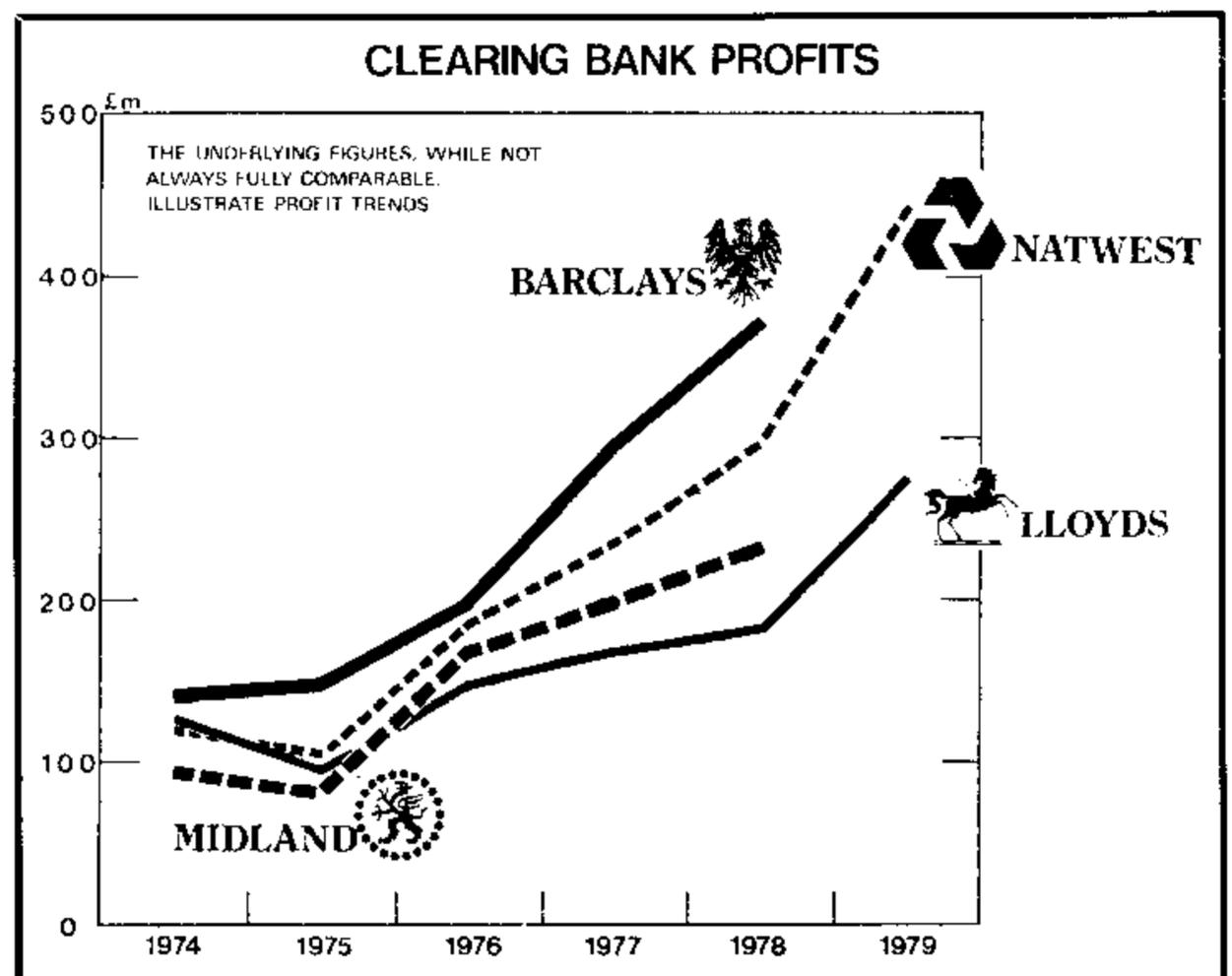


the government and the oil companies choose to continue to put it up. As *The Financial Times* reported on 11 January: 'The British government has shown that it is not adverse to raising its fundamental North Sea oil policies on those of OPEC... Hence we see UK oil being sold at the latest world market prices...'

Only a couple of weeks back (23 May) the Kuwaiti oil minister complained: 'I wonder why some denounce increases in our oil prices when Britain is selling its North Sea oil at much higher prices.'

The rising price of North Sea oil increased the profits of the oil companies by a thousand million pounds a quarter last year.

All in all, the succession of govern-



## 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 a protest at government policy. It was the first time the government and the press had employed the scare 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 nice ready answer to any rank and filer 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 sounded credible 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'. Our reply was to argue that the left's victories would still leave decisive power with entrenched, elected-for-life bureaucrats who control the great union block votes at the party conferences. While a section of these same 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 AUEW 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.

## socialist REVIEW

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

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Correspondance 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 14 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 minority which was 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 down-played 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 when 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 no 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 defied 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 14 and who will 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 being shown in the engineering union where the rank and file group, 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 revolutionary 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 certain 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 smaller plants.

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 *socialist Worker* over the past nine months. Real problems with stewards 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 Fords 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 met before. From one factory after another come reports of those in favour of the stoppage being called '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 national 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 regular 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-factory vote. Where this approach was adopted, the indications are that activists had more than an even chance of pulling action on the 14th.

Even in a place where the call for action sparked a considerable backlash, Gardners in Manchester, the fact that a series of leaflets, from the stewards, the SWP, the CP, subsequently went in 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 fairly good response on the shop floor. A few significant plants stopped or had large numbers on strike—GEC Openshaw, Francis Shaws, Gardners, GEC Transmissions; but other traditional 'left' factories were working pretty normally. A lot of 'unknown' places, with a few hundred workers or so, had

sizeable stoppages, or what the engineering employers delicately described as large-scale absenteeism.

This was also very apparent in the London area, where factory support for stoppages might have been expected to be very poor indeed. Both in Walthamstow and in North West London there were quite significant numbers of *medium-sized* plants out for the day.

It is worth remembering that the characteristic of the most recent Leyland strikes (see our last issue) was that the most militancy and the best organisation occurred in the relatively small plants, where stewards were in touch and involved the membership consistently.

What about the Midlands, the heart of the AUEW right-wing? Again—if you look at the really large plants and the motor industry, the picture is pretty black. At Longbridge there was not even a call by the leading stewards for a stoppage. Nothing much happened in the Lucas plants either, with the exception of minority stoppages at Lucas Chester Street and Formans Road. But some places did come out. GKN Hardy-Spicer was one major factory which stopped. Rubery Owen had one factory shut, some of Birmid closed and two of the private steelworks owned by Duports stopped, as did Ansell's Brewery.

Several other areas—South Yorkshire, Tyneside, Merseyside—show up something of the same pattern, with a few well-known firms shutting, and a lot more small stoppages which went almost unnoticed. The really exceptional place, however, was Scotland where in Glasgow the plants that worked were the exceptions and where there was overwhelming support on the railways. If the figure for the whole of Britain comes to about one million on strike, something like a quarter of this action was in Scotland.

But unfortunately the action did not spread from the strong to the weak areas. This was especially noticeable on the railways. The strike in Scotland was near total, there were a lot out in the Midlands and in parts of London—but very little coordination.

Things were very similar on the London buses. London Transport admitted to nine garages completely closed—among them most of the strong usually militant—but there was hardly any attempt to get the others out—even though the Central Bus Conference had voted 60 to 4 for a strike—an almost unique decision!

#### An Overall View

Taken overall the Day of Action in industry shows up some horrible weaknesses—together with some reasonably good responses in the mines, print, docks and shipbuilding.

Finally, the public sector services. It is impossible to give any sort of accurate total for those who came out for the whole, or half, day. Roughly 40–50,000 teachers seem to have been on strike. This excludes Scotland, where the EIS has been in dispute anyway. There were a large number of

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 sup-

port 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, NATSOPA, 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 NATSOPA, alone of the four unions involved, that defied 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). NATSOPA 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 NATSOPA Executive Council rebelled over the injunction because they felt that NATSOPA had been shown up badly by the NGA's achievements in its dispute, and needed to repair its cre-

dentials as a fighting union.

But, whatever the reasons, the NATSOPA 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 Chile 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 reintegrate 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 multinational companies.

Today the picture is very different.

The Nicaraguan revolution overthrew 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 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 just 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 niceties 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 clearly 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 a common front 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 reached 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 *Intercontinental Press* (5 May). It carried the headline 'Sandinistas announce worker-peasant majority in 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 the working classes. Yet *Intercontinental Press* fails to tell its readers that the 47-person Council of State 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. US economic aid of 75 million dollars was finally 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* (2 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 higher wages as irresponsible, jailing members of the Stalinist 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 in that 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 called Federico Belaunde, or 'Fred Blundy' as his friends call him (reported 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 demagoguery, to head off a growing discontent through-

out 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 Peru's dependence on a 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.

The Velasco 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), expropriating 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 guidance Peru again became the servant of the industrialised 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 whole 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 organisations of the revolutionary left. Together, they received nearly 30 per cent of the total vote. This huge vote exposed 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 organisations 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 organised 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 organisations 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 organisations into two united fronts looked promising (they were ARI, drawing in Maoist groups and Trotskyist organisations, with Hugo Blanco as their candidate; and FUI, including the CP and the party representing the original 'spirit of 1968', with Ledesma as its man).

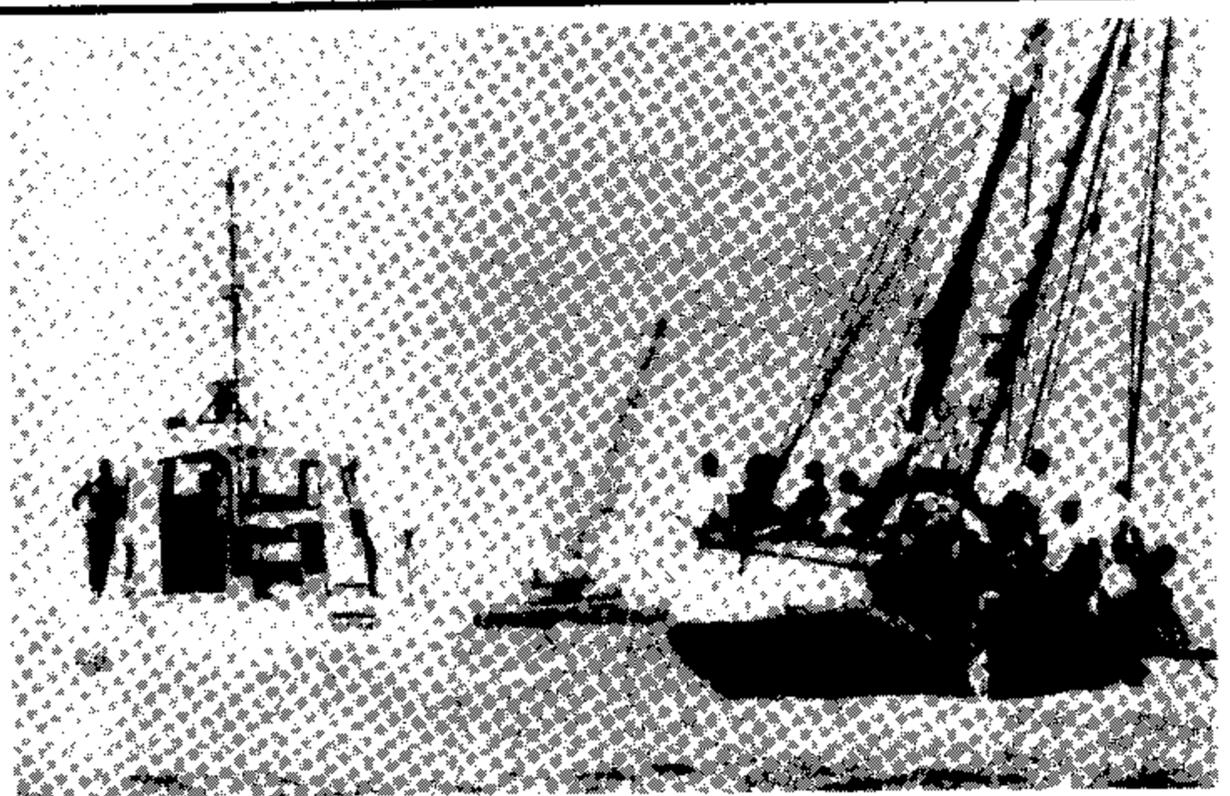
The objective conditions of the working class were (and are) appalling; wages were (in 1979) at 62 per cent of their 1973 level; around one million inhabitants of Lima were suffering from malnutrition, and real unemployment was estimated at 29.8 per cent. The mass movement had shown its willingness to take the government on.

By April, the coalitions had fragmen-

ted, and there were over 20 Presidential candidates. It appears that the left vote as a whole 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.



## Cuban refugees

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 attempt 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 marshalling on the border between Honduras and El Salvador.

That is why Carter seized 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 satis-

fy their vices here (in Cuba)'. The ironic thing is that Castro too is using the refugee issue to mobilise 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 right) 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 rationalisation plan was announced. This 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—bayonets in that war has proved to be just 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.

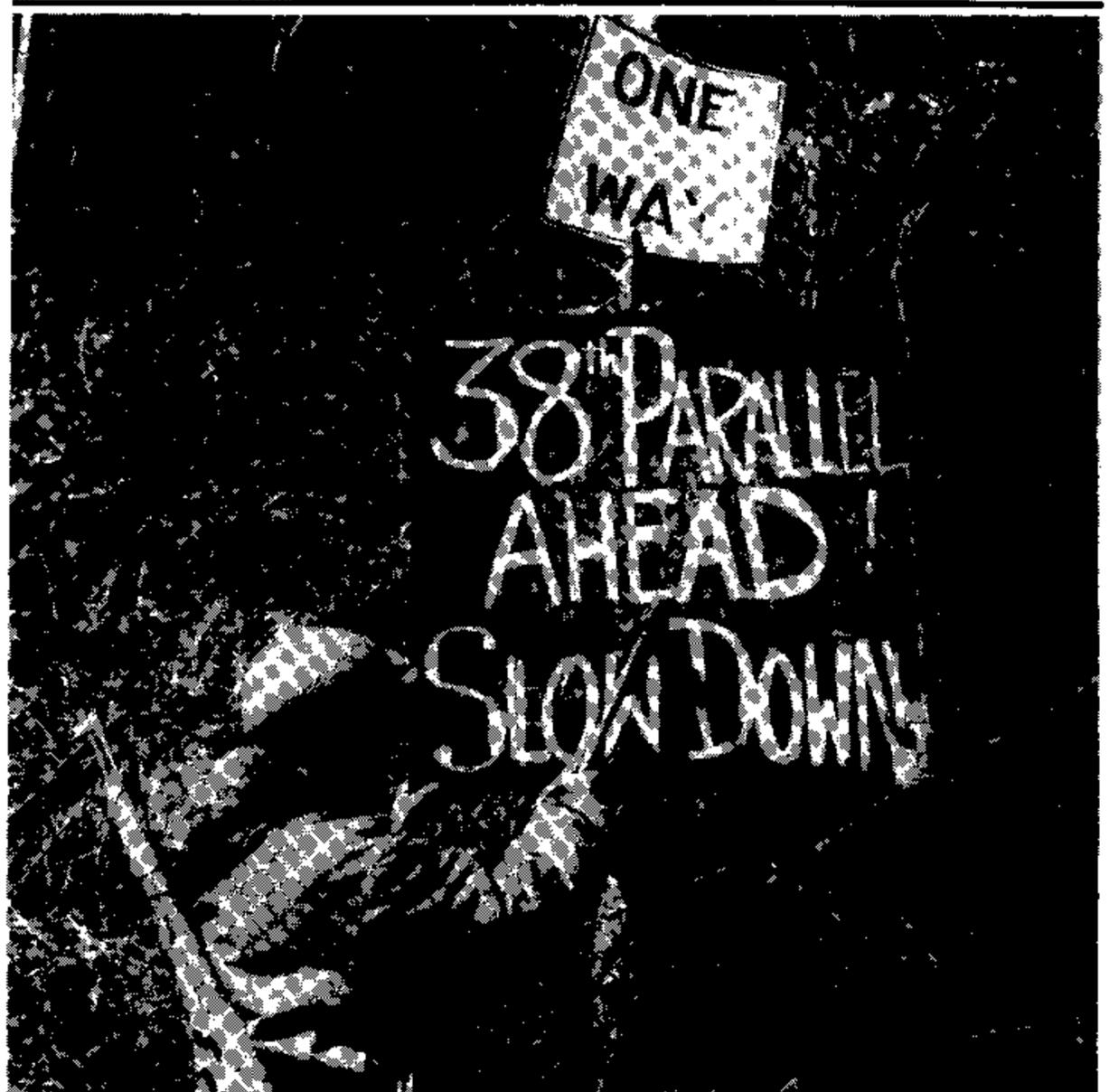
South Korea's rulers will be looking at the future with trepidation. Kwangju has occurred just as the world economic crisis is beginning to affect them and as they face intensified competition from other Asian economies such as Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan.

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 did 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 quite 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, generally by youthful cadres who were not born until some years after the cease-fire).<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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 by the following year it 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 so unsure that its delegates received only guest tickets. The party was again revived in the



The 38th Parallel: separating 'socialism' from capitalism... drawn by Dean Rusk!

1930s, and Kim Il-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 no clear alternative had been cobbled up. So, on August 14th, 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 JV Stalin, for information. Stalin in fact seems to have been quite happy with the carve-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 Il-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 bright 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 régime was based on land-lords 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 jailed, 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 1948, 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 régime 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 initialled 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 'spheres of influence', but both sides were ready to nibble around the edges, and 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 by 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 régimes at war, and the way in which the major powers took up the issue.



**President Truman urged on America 'the will to fight'...**

The pro-Russian interpretation of the war has always been that, if Rhee did start 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 set-back for the US in the Far East. But Chiang Kai-shek's pre-revolutionary régime had been so corrupt and indefensible, and the terrain so vast, that no intervention had been possible. In both social and geographical 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 régime 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 unambiguous political and military backing to the North Korean régime.

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 can scarcely be accused 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 beforehand 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 eye 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 daring a 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 dic-

tatorship, South Korean morale collapsed disastrously; many soldiers and civilians went over to the North Korean forces. Two months after the outbreak of war, by the end of August, North Korean forces controlled virtually the entire peninsula. Then the United States staged the bold landing at Inchon, behind the North Korean lines. With vastly superior forces they swept northwards, and by the end of October the remnants of the North Korean army were pushed back to the Chinese border. Indeed, the North Korean army was virtually destroyed; perhaps only one tenth of the original 325,000-strong army escaped back to the North.

The massive US thrust into North Korea was clearly a direct threat to China, and the Chinese response was to send large forces of 'volunteers' into Korea. (The disguise of the Chinese as 'volunteers' was as fictitious as the American disguise as 'UN forces'. The involvement in Korea had a massive effect on Chinese development, leading to much greater state centralisation of the economy).

The whole character of the war was now transformed. The armed forces of both South and North Korea had been largely smashed; the war was now a conflict between the United States and China being fought on Korean soil. Originally the war had been—*partially*—a national liberation struggle. When North Korean forces came into the South workers and students rose in their support. But this aspect of the war had always been secondary; after the first few months it became non-existent. The use of guerrilla warfare was always subordinated to more conventional tactics; as the importance of Russian military aid to China and North Korea increased, pressure was more and more put on Russia's allies to drop the use of guerrilla warfare. This is in striking contrast to the Vietnam war, where in almost all phases guerrilla warfare dominated, showing that here the dominant aspect was that of a genuine mass-based popular struggle.

By the end of 1950 the fighting was again bogged down around the 38th Parallel. Both sides had tested the situation; it was time to cut their losses. For neither side has anything to gain from further escalation. Even the bellicose US commander, MacArthur, admitted that nuclear war was a 'form of mutual suicide.'<sup>6</sup> Hence the US propagated the concept of 'limited war', conflict within coexistence.

The concept of limited war was all the more real for the United States in that it provoked a severe faction fight within the American ruling class. Throughout the war, and especially after the Chinese intervention, there was deep conflict between the political leadership of the United States and General Douglas MacArthur, the US commander in Korea. This came to a head when

was for a limited conflict within a continued acceptance of the Yalta carve-up.



... 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 liquidate 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 labelled soft on Communism.

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 barbarous 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 fraudulent 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 Il-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 symmetrical 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.

Ian Birchall

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 sources for this article are: T Higgins, *Korea and the Fall of MacArthur* (OUP, 1960); AB Ulam, *The Rivals* (Allen Lane, 1971); G Kolko, *The Politics of War* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1968); D Horowitz, *From Yalta to Vietnam* (Penguin, 1967); I Deutscher, *Stalin* (Penguin, 1966); DN Pritt, *Brasshats and Bureaucrats* (Lawrence & Wishart, 1966); E O'Ballance, *Korea: 1950-1953* (Faber & Faber 1969); P Naville, *La Guerre et la Révolution I*, (EDI Paris, 1967); M Truman, *Harry S Truman* (Hamish 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 speechifying. "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 indignities occurring to Petroff's wife. She was made to share a cell in Aylesbury prison with a prostitute suffering from syphilis. They both had to use the same eating and washing utensils.

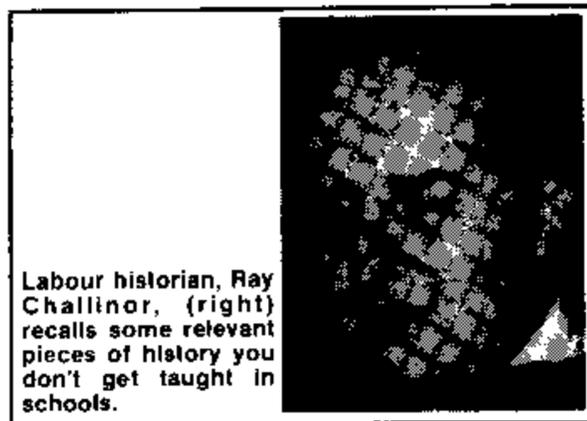
The main reason why Britain took such actions was because its leaders were gripped by an anti-socialist frenzy. They desperately wanted to overthrow the newly-created workers' state in Russia. By the summer of 1918, British troops had already joined counter-revolutionary forces. This military intervention 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 police fell into Bolshevik hands. At one strike 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 as true of Iran as it was of Russian.

Undoubtedly, revolutionaries in Teheran will have discovered some interesting papers. These 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.



Labour historian, Ray Challinor, (right) recalls some relevant pieces of history you don't get taught in schools.

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 hatched a plot which led to his employer, Interior Minister Plehve, 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 1910, 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 eighth man.

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 Special Branch and its general secretary, Anitchkine, 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 convulsions, 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 strife-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 defector 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 shambling wreck, the former Shah of Iran, it is obvious that even the most elaborate police system is not sufficient to protect a social order that is fundamentally rotten.

## Ray Challinor

*One of the individuals employed to sift through the 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, £1), 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 not be over-awed 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.

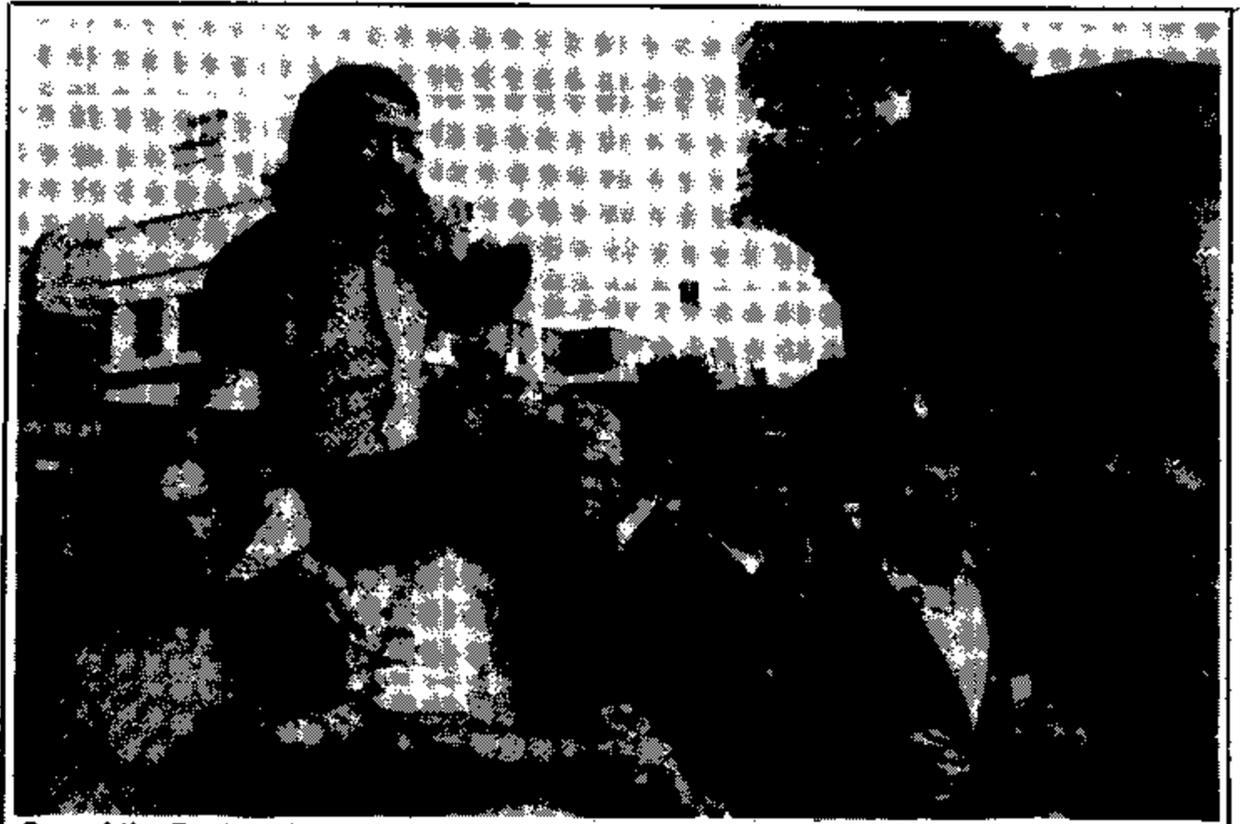
The new Tory law attacking trade union rights means that, sooner or later, militant workers are going to break the law. There is nothing new in that. Even TUC leaders will remind audiences that the history of the trade unions is a history of law-breaking. Every year, Len Murray makes a speech in the little Dorset village of Tolpuddle where, in 1834, six farm labourers were sentenced to seven years transportation for 'administering an illegal oath', i.e. recruiting for the union. The Tolpuddle 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. As 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 180 new and sweeping 'combination Acts' were passed. Pushed through by the anti-slavery 'philanthropist' 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 solicited 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 compositors of *The Times* were prosecuted for the crime of combination and sentenced to between nine months 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 orga-



One of the Pentonville 5, chaired from custody, freed by industrial action.

nisation. 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 Tolpuddle. They planned 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 subs 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 do 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 Strife* 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 snatched 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.

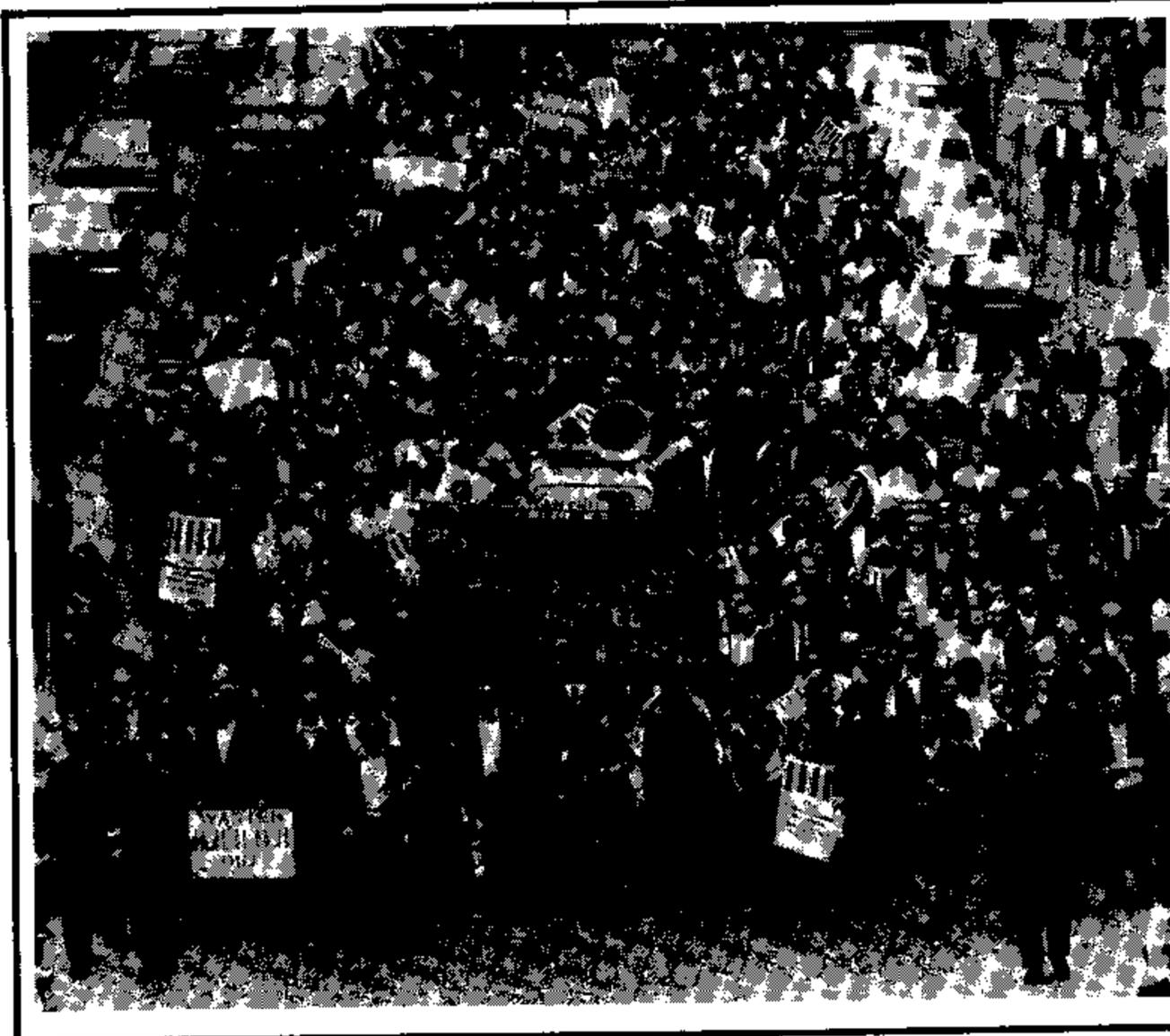
However, if we look at two examples of successful defiance, we can see what are the general conditions which bring victory.

#### 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 profitable skilled workers they didn't mind some going.

They wanted to replace as many skilled workers as possible with unskilled 'dilutees' 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 sum-



mer 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 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-



Two demonstrations for imprisoned comrades: the Pentonville dockers (left) and the Shrewsbury building workers (above). Why was the first a success, and the second, tragically, a failure?

neers had forced a massive war bureaucracy to break down.

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 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 and 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 bide its time, isolate groups of workers in

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

the newly founded Communist Party. But even with those limitations they were able to take on and defeat a government which did not blanch at the murder of millions in the trenches or the destruction of the centre of Dublin.

#### Betteshanger

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 Betteshanger 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 nation 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 the strike started again. The government paid the fines. Out of nearly 1000, only nine had been paid. The government, the company and the courts came to an agreement: they let the

matter drop.

The Betteshanger 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 this time seemed to be a struggle against fascism in 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 independent 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 is designed to punish. 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-unionism, 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 harps 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 liberated 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 neanderthal 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, Grovel's gossip column, Colonel Mad's 'Sporting Life', Bookworm's 'World of Books', 'In the Courts' by Justinian Forthemoney, 'Street of Shame', and the rest, are probably fascinating to those whose work or play attracts them to such inside gossip. But for the outsider it can be very dull.

The 'humour' is often a tiresome mix of 'in-jokes' (Alec Douglas Home is Baillie Vass, Heath is the Grocer, and so on), jokes on jokes (OK, so '60-70-80-Phew what a scorcher!' was 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 machine grinds on tight-lipped Ron Knee, Luchtime O'Booze, even my old friend and comrade 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 Toadthrush). 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 bang 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 warriors, in traditional wardress, 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, back in 1966, that their new Director, the late unlamented 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 fuhrer-ship 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 doesn't like you, the *Eye* will get you for any reason it can. Thus its criticisms are surprisingly double-edged, at once both 'progressive' and 'reactionary'. 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 digger?

Ever since Kenneth Tynan (of all people!) first demanded 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 rotters, 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 ones, good Liberals and bad Liberals. There are even good revolutionary socialists, like 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 FC 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 (ie. its rather unsubtle 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 Rushton, 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 rightly selects as targets, the ones that often come easiest to hand are 'poove' or 'pseud', '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, after 15 years of Labour betrayal and Tory reaction, a lot of water has passed under all our bridges. 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 engineering workers, dockers, miners, printworkers, civil servants, housewives, school students. All taking part in a greater than ever series of courses on virtually every facet of Marxist ideas.

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# 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, lynch 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 Woolworths. 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 braved cattle-prods and dogs and the noose, hoping to impress the federal government and the Northern whites 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, for the first time, out from under the watchful eye of the sheriff and the planter, out from under the stifling rural world and the terror of the night riders.



Miami May 1980

But they were still up against a ruthless capitalism, without social security, without a national health service, with armed cops ready to shoot down small boys. They were last hired and first fired, day labourers, cleaners and dishwashers, and maids. When there was work at all. And in the recessions there were no jobs.

They had a problem with racism, all right. But integration and civil rights weren't going to give them a job. Yet the civil rights movement meant that black people were standing up. And in the Northern ghettos they took it one step further.

In the Harlem ghetto of New York on 16 July 1964 a white cop shot and killed a black kid. A protest demonstration two days later turned into a riot. One man was killed by police, five hundred arrested, and millions of dollars worth of property had been burned down.

The nation had changed. Every previous riot had been started by whites attacking blacks, with the support of the police. This one was blacks attacking the cops and burning down the white businesses in the ghetto. That riot set the pattern. That year Rochester and Philadelphia went up. The next year the great Los Angeles ghetto of Watts went up in flames as the rioters shouted, "Burn, baby, burn", and when the flames were out 34 were dead, mostly killed by policemen.

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 would. 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 leapt 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 hispanic 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



Martin Luther King (top) on the balcony where he was shot. Bobby Seale (bottom left) from Black Panther to mayoral candidate. Stokely Carmichael (bottom right) with the phrase he coined.



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

arch-racist George Wallace for Governor of Alabama. Andy Young, one of the Rev King's men, rose to the heights of being the white man's fixer in Southern Africa.

#### The Political Legacy

So 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 smateria 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 dazed 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.

Jonathan Neale

# 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 between pages 3, 5 and 7. Two books of hack journalism have been published. One, *I'm Jack* is racist, sexist and full of inaccuracies. The other, *The Yorkshire Ripper*, is better quality hack work. It does take some account of the conditions in the areas the murders have taken place and is much more critical of the police. But none of the media coverage really looks at the problems at source. 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 have 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 road blocks and 24-hour patrols, they have got nowhere.

The reason is quite simple: most people in the area fear the police more than they fear the Ripper. The Ripper squad is drawn from the West Yorkshire Tact 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 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 anti-gay 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

For the past four years a vicious Ripper has been at large in the North of England. There have been at least 17 horrific murders and four brutal attacks. The evidence is compelling that the same man may be responsible for all of them. If you have seen a 5.11 (male) in West Yorkshire, Luton, in Shropshire and once in Lancashire. Large teams of police officers, including Regional Crime Squad, are working full time in West Yorkshire, Sunderland, Manchester and Lancashire to catch him. The original reports were produced but innocent girls have also died. You can help and help today.

## HELP US CATCH THE RIPPER

● HAVE YOU SEEN THE HANDWRITING? IF YOU HEARD IT ON THE BLACK PAGE

● HAVE YOU HEARD THE TAPE? YOU HEARD IT FROM THE MOUTH OF THE POLICE. YOU HEARD IT FROM THE MOUTH OF THE POLICE. YOU HEARD IT FROM THE MOUTH OF THE POLICE. YOU HEARD IT FROM THE MOUTH OF THE POLICE.

DO ANY OF THESE QUESTIONS DESCRIBE SOMEONE YOU KNOW?

IF YOU ARE AN EMPLOYER

LEEDS: 0113 271111 MANCHESTER: 0161 26 0000  
 BRADFORD: 01454 3333 NEWCASTLE: 0432 3072

But people were reluctant to come forward, with good reason.

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 Voice* survey in the town centre discovered that thirty per cent 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 exclude 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 harrasses women when they try to arm themselves for defence. In practice, this refusal to draw the links 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 one suspect nearly got lynched in the Whitechapel area. But the enquiries of the police they treated with contempt. Like the situation today, the police force which attacked Irish demonstrators and spent most of its time harassing the poor and unemployed found it impossible to get the information they needed from a population which refused to trust them.

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 (ie 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 they do have a certain symbolic value as expressions of ordinary peoples' unconscious attitudes to the powers that be, they should not be allowed to distract from 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 way that they are interested in defending ordinary working class men and women. We must rely on our own strength.

Irish 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 NGA's claim for a minimum earnings level of £80.00 a week was conceded and the employer's 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 Jarratt 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 Jarratt is chairman of the CBI's sub-committee on 'the balance of power', which is giving employers a lead on how to redress the 'balance of industrial power' away from workers in favour of the employers.

### 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 tiers 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 union, the NGA. The employers wanted complete flexibility between jobs and unions and all changes necessary for the introduction of new technology. No wonder then, that the employers were confident when the two general unions put the annual wage deal to their members without mentioning the

conditional productivity package. But when the NGA rejected the deal how long would their confidence last?

### Employers Nerve

The NGA went into dispute at the beginning of April with a ban on overtime and the calling of mandatory chapel meetings which stopped production. The action taken by the NGA was disrupting so much work that by the end of April the employers' federations decided to impose a lock-out of all NGA members in their industry. Now at the time we thought that the lock-out was principally aimed at the NGA, and we were right to think so. But as the struggle developed we became aware of the fact that the lock-out was imposed by the leaderships of the employers' federations, because they were frightened by the number of their own ranks that were prepared to settle quietly, and concede the whole of the NGA claim. But the leadership of the NGA were also worried because, if the whole of their membership in the affected area was to be locked out, it would involve them in paying out around one million pounds in dispute benefit a week.

### Employers Disunited

The Newspaper Society and the British Printing Industries Federation expected the lockout to be total. It wasn't. Slowly, but steadily, the call was disobeyed by employers. A series of deals were signed on the NGA's terms by individual employers, particularly in the general printing sector of the BPIF. Under the threat of losing work to competing companies more and more employers signed interim deals on the NGA's terms. In the provincial newspaper sector this happened much less and a gap widened between the two employers' federations.

Underlying the emergence of the disunity is the way in which the introduction of new

technology affects the two sectors in sharply different ways. While the new printing techniques available can be used by newspaper proprietors to deskill craft work and allow journalists or dilutees to do typesetting—as was shown in the dispute when the management at the Wolverhampton Express and Star produced scab 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 members firms 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 head 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

# socialist REVIEW

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# 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-colaborating 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, deposed, negotiated with, nobbled 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 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 Pilger 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 this was it—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 utmost 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 bludgeoned 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 it and spread it around. We arranged for speakers from Hounslow for the mass meeting and a coach 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 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 leaflet 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 hospitals 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 a 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 coordinate 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 going fairly well in my little patch. I was exhausted and very tense, but fairly satisfied. Then I found out that my members, the ‘pool’ porters, weren't coming out. The tension and exhaustion in me snapped. I lost my temper and called a group of them fucking scabs. They didn't look pleased.

Next day, having thought about it a bit, I apologised for losing my temper and swearing at them. They still didn't look pleased. I then discovered that they had been very angry and three of them were going to beat me up. But the head porter had said they shouldn't do it on hospital property, so they (my own members that is) reported me to management instead. Two days later I was called in to the office. That was no sweat. 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 apologise. 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 a while and they wanted to throw me out as steward. I thought about resigning, but then thought ‘sod it, I was right’, so I stuck it out, got a mate of mine to stick my name on the nomination sheet, and by the time the elections came around 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,

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'what a joke'. Here was I, a good rank and file trade unionist, reported to management by my own members, and using my position in the union structure and my 'special relationship' with management to defend myself against my members and ride out the storm. What had gone wrong?

For a start the membership were not well enough informed about the strike. The mass meeting had been poorly attended and there had been no departmental meetings where the issues could have been fully put and argued out in detail. We hadn't even had a stewards meeting first. But there hadn't been time. We had three days to organise the whole thing.

Secondly, I was obviously a little out of touch with the feeling of my members, over-estimating the extent to which they saw Hounslow Hospital as having anything to do with them. And it wasn't just me. The left in the London hospitals which called the action had got it wrong, for although we mobilised a lot of people, it was nowhere near what we needed to win.

### Lessons

Were we right to try it at all? It was certainly risky, both for the union organisation in the hospitals which came out (you're usually vulnerable after a strike, but especially when you lose), and for the left in London hospitals which suffered a lot from the subsequent demoralisation. Looking back I think we were right. First because there was a chance of pulling it off, but also because it was experience. It was experience for those of us on the left (in fact it is permanently imprinted on my brain), and for the workers involved in the action. And it was the kind of experience we need, because it is this kind of solidarity action that is at the root of building a rank and file movement and spreading socialist politics. It may be a setback at the time with some people and workplace organisations taking some hard knocks having misjudged the situation. But in the longer term it takes us forward because it provides what the class and the left have often lacked, namely direct experience of class struggle other than set-piece battles called by the officials, or small sectional struggles over such things as discipline and working conditions.

Where does the shop steward fit in to all this? The main point to understand is that if you're a steward and a revolutionary socialist then you don't fit in it at all! You're stuck instead with straddling the contradiction built into the trade unions—that of being the organisations set up to defend wage labour within the confines of the system, by the class which has the possibility of abolishing that system. As a steward you represent your members. You have to go with them most of the time and you can only ever afford to be very slightly ahead of them. But as a revolutionary socialist you go for the possibilities that might push the class struggle forward. These two lines of action may be in conflict with each other.

A final anecdote. I left the hospital in 1978. In the 'Low Pay Dispute' of the winter of

1979 the porters where I had worked had been on strike and were working to rule. The head porter, who was in the union, had crossed the picket line during the strike giving some feeble excuse which had added insult to injury. The porters were very angry and apparently one of them had said afterwards:

'I suppose Robin was right when he called us scabs that time'. This was told to me afterwards by the steward who took over from me. Maybe things aren't as bad as they sometimes seem.

Robin White

## Stopping the rot

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 not 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.

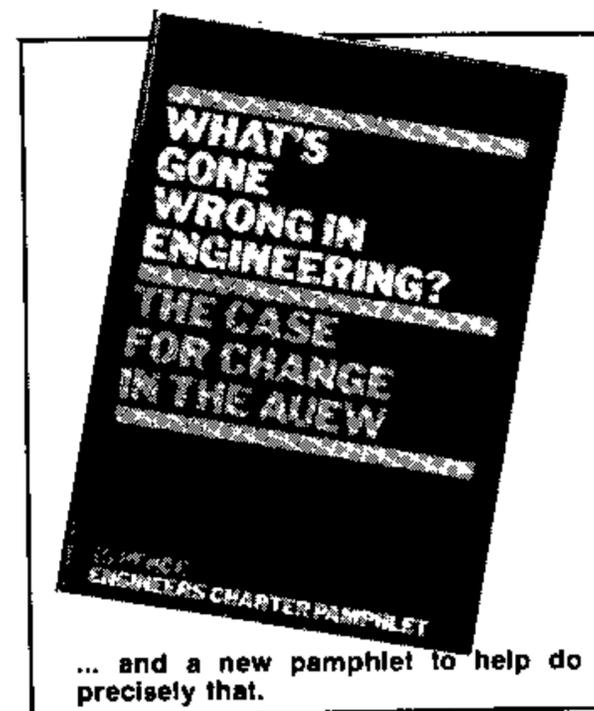
The right wing Executive Committee had proposed the establishment of full-time branch secretaries and the amalgamation of branches into super-branches consisting of thousands of members. The secretaries were not to be elected but appointed by the EC. There is also a rule change extending the period of office before a full-time official retires, during which 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 electricians 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 seen 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 Leftist who 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 paralyse 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 you wait for the rank and file to follow you.

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 have 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 their supporters with us.

Over the next few weeks our supporters will be organising for a national conference

in London on 28 June to discuss organising the fightback around the slogans of 'Stop the Rot; Kick Out the Right.' We hope to bring together the best militants in the union. At the same time a simple down-to-earth pamphlet has been produced explaining what's happening to the union and how we can fight back, aimed at the shopfloor workers. The pamphlet therefore 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 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 tremble.

*15p a copy, 10 copies for £1.50 including postage, from 265a Seven Sisters Road, London*

**Roger Cox**

## 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.

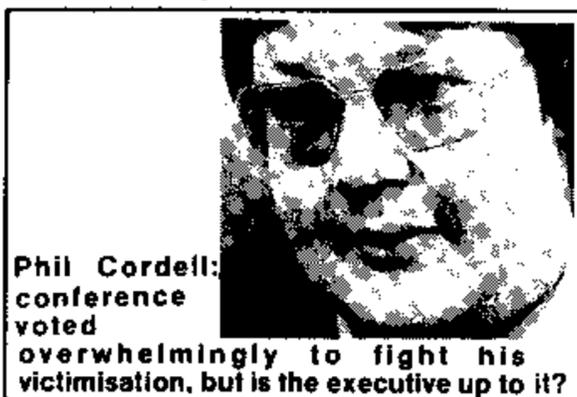
The election results and the threat of redundancies influenced every discussion at the CPSA conference, and despite many a spirited speech from the rostrum, delegates were only too well aware of the difficulties the future would bring.

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.

However, instead of going for a complete rejection of pay comparison, the Broad Left supported a *Militant* inspired motion calling for a special delegate conference to analyse the difficulties of pay research and to consider alternative options. This motion was carried with the overwhelming support of conference on a card vote; now we wait to see whether the 'Moderate' NEC, all of whom are committed to PRU, will organise such a conference in time for next year's pay negotiations. Had the Broad Left had more courage and gone for outright rejection of PRU, pay comparison in the civil service would have been dead and buried by now.

The debate on cuts was overshadowed by the dismal failure of the so-called Cuts Campaign launched this time last year. This campaign, which included bans on temporary promotion, substitution and overtime, was enthusiastically supported by CPSA activists, but the out-going Broad-Left dominated NEC bottled out everytime the civil service management threatened to suspend

union members fighting for union policy. This 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: conference voted overwhelmingly to fight his victimisation, but is the executive up to it?**

Not all the lessons learnt in the battles of last year have been forgotten, however, and many of the resolutions passed sought to curb the power of the full time officials. One such resolution embodied the principle that elected representatives from disputes have to the right to be present at all negotiations, no matter what level, concerning local disputes. The consequences will be far reaching, in that it will now prove increasingly difficult for full-timers or senior elected lay officers to concoct shoddy deals with management. The decision once again highlights the healthy trend in the CPSA to bring industrial action under control of the rank-and-file membership.

The culmination 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 further discussion.

Given the complexion of the current NEC you will not need a crystal ball to predict the what sort of proposals will be presented. The 'Moderates' have always been opposed to the election of full-timers and it is they who will be able to dictate the debate at next year's conference. By refusing to face the issue head on, the Broad Left have given the right wing the opportunity to effectively halt

the campaign to elect full-time officials.

### The elections

The CPSA elections this year were held, for the first time, under a new procedure allowing individual voting at work place 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 favourable conditions, only 80,000 votes out of a possible 230,000 were cast in the presidential elections, 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 militants, as the sacking of Richard Cleverly 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 on the last night of the conference to discuss future campaigns. Of course, no 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 fraternal debate about the issues that matter, we will leave the right wing to grow in strength.

**Mike Healy**

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

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

This year's conference, held in

Bournemouth in the third week of May, showed neither a shift to the left, nor any perceptible shift to the right. By this conference the union had fully expected to announce the achievement of one million members (in fact a poster behind the platform declared this target achieved), but it has fallen short by a few thousand and is now worried that the growth of unemployment, particularly in the public sector, is going to deny them their target for some years to come.

Last year's conference was held in the direct aftermath of Labour's general election debacle and little was really said about how Labour dug its own grave. This year almost every speaker made statutory references to 'Attila the Hen', but nothing much more than abuse was thrown from the speaker's rostrum. Over the year the Clegg awards to the local authority workers and the NHS ancillaries have come and gone, but no solid criticism emerged at conference of

what a con the whole Clegg exercise has been.

An atmosphere of suffocating chauvinism descended on conference on the first day and didn't lift all week. Not one voice was raised against a rising tide of demands for import controls, of demands that other countries stop exporting and arguments that Britain could be great again if... And this all took place in a union that doesn't even have a broad left. Even an appallingly chauvinist speech by a *Militant* supporter calling for the GMWU to set up an alternative trading block outside of the common market, whatever that means, was passed against executive advice.

Conference delegates gave a standing ovation to some Chix strikers on The Wednesday, and then cheered wildly on the Thursday morning when the chairmen announced that the union had signed a recognition agreement with Chix the previous night. No-one raised the question of what the terms of the

agreement were.

Over the last four years the GMWU has changed a lot from the days of slavish obedience to the executive. The emergence of sectoral industrial conferences to decide on issues has meant that negotiators have been overturned (as in water supply) and that national industrial officers have to tread much more warily on the membership.

The image of the GMWU as a right wing public sector union should be discarded. Its members in the private sector are coming to the fore in industries like chemicals, rubber, engineering, construction, food and hotels and catering. A major problem for the left, which is simultaneously an advantage to the right, is that the GMWU has members in such disparate areas of both the private and public sector that organising across the sectional consciousness of the differing groups is extremely difficult... but not impossible.

John Watson

## Isle of the scabs

Behind the Lagers' dispute at the multi-million pound Isle of Grain power station site lies a very dirty story. The lagers — thermal insulation engineers — are being made scapegoats by the Cental Electricity Generating Board and the giant contracting firms like Babcocks 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 1971. The station was intended as a base load station which when completed would supply 3,300 megawatts to the electricity grid. Construction began in a period when the price of oil compared favourably with that of coal. This is no longer the case. The price of coal is now in the region of £35 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 policies. In 1972, prior to the take off in oil prices, the amount of oil consumed in power stations was 26.63 mtce (million tonnes of coal equivalent); in 1978 this figure had been reduced to 17.6 mtce, a decline in oil consumption in excess of 33 per cent.



... and some of the lagers who are defending basic trade unionism.

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. Lagers 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 cancerous substances in their everyday work. Life expectancy among lagers 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 lagers, 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

# 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 delegated 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 Drain, NALGO; Bill Keys, SOGAT; Owen O'Brien, NATSOPA; Moss Evans, TGWU, etc) and some 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 unobjectionable, 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 began to expose some of the divisions within this 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 an 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 idea that the press 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 taken 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—no less than six women were elected, three rank and file activists within the NUJ; one from ACTT 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, its 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.

## East End News

Get a group of socialists together and ask them what should be done about the media and they will surely 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 might be 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 resources 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 an enormous 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 stranglehold 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.

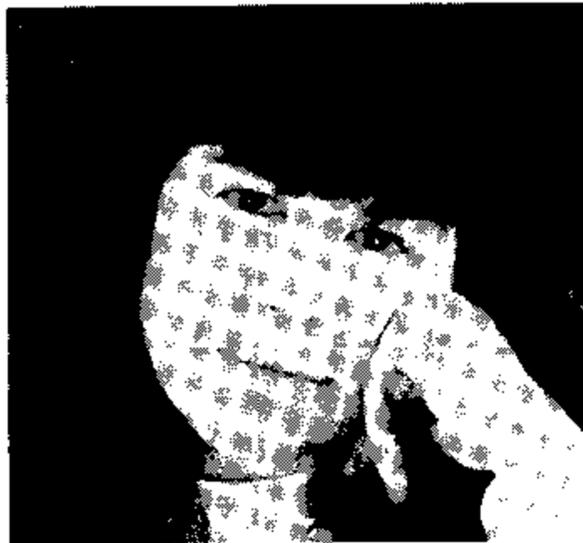
My favourite of the four books I have read is *Small Changes*. It deals with the women's movement in Boston in the sixties. Its two central characters, Beth and Miriam, struggle to make a space for themselves in the world, to find a way to 'live right'. Beth is shy and small, always full of self doubts. She flees from a constricting, 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 will 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 her self, 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 henpecked. 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 cage 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 characters (Beth's family) are presented as incurably conservative. The world of Connie in *Woman on the Edge of Time* is the world of hustlers and hard living, there is no hope 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 cons-

cious 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 grim 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 Project.

The Utopia she projects, a village in Mattapoisett (Massachusetts) of 2137, is not everyone's cup of tea, yet it makes a valid contribution to our vision of future socialist life. Some of its ideas are of a very way-out, sci-fi type, such as the end of biological child bearing 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 have to forge 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 Mattapoisett, who are her enemies too.

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

**Ewa Barker**

*Marge Piercy's books are published by The Women's Press, 124 Shoreditch High Street, London, E1 6JE. Titles in print are The High Cost of Living (£2.25), Woman on the Edge of Time (£1.95), and Vida (£4.95).*

*Order by post from Bookmarks or the publisher (prepaid orders only and enclose 30p per title for post and packing).*

### Torture, death, and...

Simon Turner (*SR 1980:3*) 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 fatalistic. The experience—confirmed by all the reports published in *Socialist Review*—is that what makes the difference will be a small group of activists prepared to carry the burdens. In an ideal world, of course, trades councils would be personed 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 pensionable 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 should 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—CP, LP, 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 CP member the 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). That 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 point is that nothing could have been done without the activists being 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 demonstrations 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 entanglement of Oxford trades council is not 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, minutes secretary or auditor, so be it.

Obviously there is a question of priorities. If a comrade has the choice between taking a meaningful position in the workplace, and doing trades council work, then it is obvious 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.'

(E.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 exist 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 organising to build 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 *Womens 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 a movement which brought the vital 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 Paczuska**  
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 Herschfeld's (Cathy Porter, *Alexandra Kollontai*) in the last issue.

Herschfeld 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 'lone 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, Herschfeld'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 sneers 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 the 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.

Claire Herschfeld's review is incapable of providing a real antidote to Cathy Porter's uncritical enthusiasm for Kollontai - it simply plays for an equally uncritical hostility, 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. Association with demands for import controls in the inter-war period is supposed to be a sufficient summary of the rationale underlying the present agitation for controls. This is simply not satisfactory. The justification 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 end to accommodate the trade deficit. Another reason is that by encouraging a slump British industry should be forced to rationalise, 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 economy 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 balance-of-payments surplus countries do not retaliate (and to do so would be against their interest) domestic expansion can lead to a faster growth of trade providing greater employment at home and abroad.

The Alternative Economic Strategy has weaknesses especially in the eyes of the Labour left, but 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 not to be. Other things could go wrong, for example there might still be retaliation by other countries even though such action would be against theirs and others interest.

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 in others. More honest discussion of the proposals is needed. Less emotive sloganising 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 Blazyca**  
Erith

## 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?

**Lynne Segal**  
North London

*Sue Cockerill who wrote the article in question is on holiday as we go to press and cannot reply to Lynne's first question herself. But if readers look at the last issue of SR you will see it nowhere speaks of an 'interview' with Lynne and Hilary. Instead, it says quite clearly, 'Sue Cockerill talked to two of the authors of the book, Hilary Wainwright and Lynne Segal, and also to other socialists about what the methods of Beyond the Fragments have meant in practice,' which she did. As for the 'Debate of the Decade', Benn and Foot were presented by the organisers of the Debate as the main speakers, being allocated - 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. Ed.*

# 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 tour 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 barrack 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 got 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 ranks 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. Well we do 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, ours 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 abusive, meaningful and funny.

But artists aren't good, are they? We'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 to smash that mirror, which as socialists you cannot 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. But the trouble is I'd hate CAST to hate to stand up to the same batterings 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.

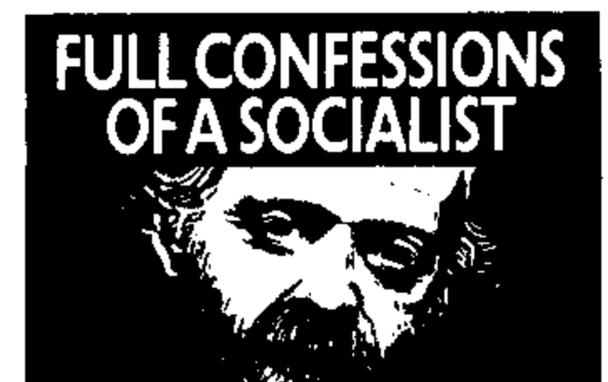
Through rehearsals last week I found it difficult because I was trying to change it to respond to the criticisms of these people. All last week we were thinking the play's not standing up like it once did because they attacked it. What I regret is that it happened. They should have objected at the end 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 life-like. It's a form of theatre which can lead to some misunderstandings.

Muggins has no defence. 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



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## 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 provoke bitter arguments in 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 Hearse 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 20 years CND, 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 activist 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 on semiology.

For fourteen years or more, Perry Anderson has been involved in a somewhat rancorous 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 anti-bomb movement and for building a new network of socialist organisation based on local left clubs. By 1962 CND was in decline, the left clubs had disintegrated, the circulation of *NLR* was falling, the editorial board was wracked by disagreements and Thomson had retreated to 'sulk in his tent' (to write his marvellous *Making of the English Working Class*), 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 epitomised 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 reoriented 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?'

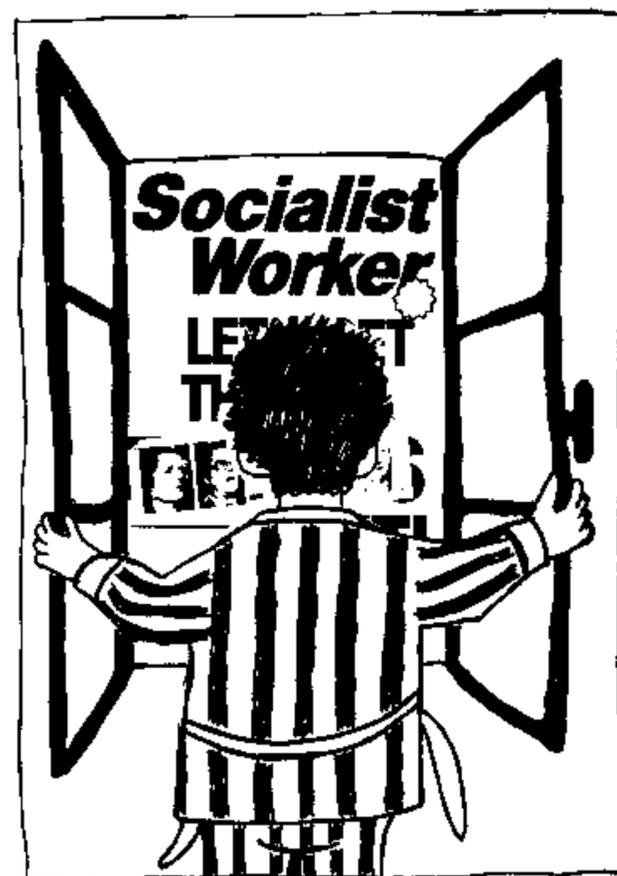
So *NLR*'s aim was to build this stratum, which in turn would suggest new ways of acting to the Labour Party and trade union leaderships. A division of labour was necessary in which Anderson, Nairn et al would develop 'theory' while the existing left leaders would continue to be responsible for 'practice'. Hence in the two 'popular' *NLR* books of the mid-sixties, *Towards Socialism* and *The Incompatibles*, 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 (RSSF) 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 RSSF 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 RSSF, *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, Thompson has berated reformist complacency — 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 'existen-



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tial Marxism' of Sartre and Merleau Ponty. But then in 1965 and 1966 the works of Althusser appeared on the scene. Althusser insisted that to see theory as validated by practice was to commit the grievous sins of 'historicism' and 'humanism'. Science could only develop as a result of the internal development of theory itself, which was the privileged activity of intellectuals, a self-contained 'theoretical practice'.

Anderson, Nairn and the rest felt vindicated 'theoretically'. Their *Review* became an advertising agency for the ideas of Althusser, with his 'theoretical' justification for their own divorce from activity; for his disciple Glucksman who dabbled in a chessboard approach to political analysis before running off to the right; for Nicos Poulantzas who employed esoteric jargon first to glorify China and then reformism; for Regis Debray who flirted with a boy-scout approach to guerrilla warfare that led a generation of Latin American revolutionaries to their deaths before becoming an advisor to the leader of the French socialist party.

Anderson, more than any other person, bears responsibility for the way in which an emasculated, jargonised parody of Marxism could take by storm a whole section of the British academic life, justifying on the one hand the refusal of intellectuals to engage in practical socialist agitation and propaganda, on the other the notion that you could have socialist regimes based on the denial of the most elementary working class rights.

'Theory without practice is sterile.' Nowhere has the sterility been more marked than in the case 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 without 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 incomes 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 most recent *British Road to Socialism*); 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 side has been a 'Marxism' that sees the need for practical 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 rebuff.

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 in the practical working class movement, 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, Trotsky 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 criticise 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 not possibly have developed as a belated apology for Stalinist notions because Althusser implicitly supported Mao against Khrushchev and even went as far as to criticise the French CP's actions of 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 acknowledges, at long last, that 'the 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. But 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 (on the 'socialist' countries, on the possibility of non-working class forces forging a socialist future, on the need for 'transitional' demands), he ignores today, as he has ignored in 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 intellectualist ghetto and who have created a small but real presence in the workplaces. Could it be that the *SWP* is the 'absent presence' 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 'decentred totality', compelled to revolve in ever smaller circles?

Chris Harman

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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 generals appointed 1940-70, 15% of the Supreme Soviet) and a slightly smaller percentage of Belorussians (because they are a smaller nationality). Georgians and Armenians occupy fewer important posts, but are still heavily overrepresented in the party, largely because of the important role they played in social democracy before the revolution. In spite of persecution there is a greater percentage of the Jews (13.7%) 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, greets any encroachment by the Soviet government on its territory with terrorism and mass demonstrations - the most famous being those at Tbilisi in 1978 against plans to erode the Georgian language. The Baltic states, especially Catholic Lithuania, are in the throes of a religious revival. In spite of its privileged position in the federation, the Ukraine has produced both intellectual nationalists like Ivan Dzyuba, and political ones - the notorious example being Petr Chelest, dismissed from the position of head of the Ukrainian CP in 1972.

So far, the eastern Moslem nations of the USSR - Uzbekistan, Turkmenia, Tadzhikistan, Kirghizia, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan - 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 nations are on the whole better preserved 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, 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 guerillas - the Basmachi. Their mullahs have nullified 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. Very 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 Bookmarx 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 2¼ million Spaniards went out and bought Abba's well known lament to Franco's life support machine: 'Chiquitita'? 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 trenchant corruption of the medium (the popular song) and industry that grinds out everything that Terry Wogan through Tony Blackburn to EMI deliver to your earhole.

The post-war expansion of the music industry took shape in the beat boom of the swinging sixties. The era of

the teenager, trannys, 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, flirting 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 testimony 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/ artiste/star to the cause, ideal or what-

## Socialist Workers Party

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ever. 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; Belt and Braces or Cast in theatre; Loach 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 nose 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 workshop floor.

I hope Dave's next book gets even closer to home.  
John Dennis

## FILM REVIEWS

### The blockbuster business

Steven Spielberg's *1941* was rereleased 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, as 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 'movie 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.

Gone certainly is the hey-day of the old studio era. The golden year was 1946 when 4060 million Americans paid 1692m dollars to go to the movies. Television successfully demolished the huge post-war cinema audiences, fitting well with the growth of suburbia and the pervasive American-dream ideology, with its emphasis on home-life, home-leisure and settling down to raise a family.

As the boom years continued and more and more consumer goods became

available, fewer and fewer people spent their money on cinema tickets. Hedda Hopper, a Hollywood columnist, aptly described as 'a shrewd woman beneath the gross hats and the acid manner', sounded a prophetic warning about television in 1951.

'This is a medium that I don't believe Hollywood can give the old run-around; so we might as well take the TV producers by their hot little hands and co-operate.'

And if TV was delivering a series of body-blows to the film industry, Macarthyism was getting in below the belt. The studios connived in the witch-hunt, liberal voices were silenced and 'safety' became the watchword in everything.

From the late forties onwards the studios tried desperately to change gear. Twentieth Century Fox abandoned B-Pictures. In the fifties all the major companies went for expensive movies – and only expensive movies. They tried special effects, epic stories and wide screen. Anything that television could not possibly encompass.

The banks panicked, cinemas shut their doors, film companies went to the wall, but somehow the major studios clung on by their fingernails. They diversified, acquiring TV interests on the way. And this has been the pattern

ever since. They moved into broadcasting, publishing, records and music publishing. In 1974, for example, half of Twentieth Century Fox's earnings came from non-movie activity.

In other words they acquired sufficient collateral to persuade banks to lend them money to plough into film production with all its acknowledged risks, and ever since the fifties the risks have been enormous.

What the film companies were slow to recognise however was the emergence of a new potential cinema audience in the form of the new, relatively affluent teenage generation of the early sixties, who rejected the American-dream lifestyle of home and family, just as surely as they later rejected the Vietnam War. Roger Corman and his friends who formed the production company AIP were not blind to this market.

They made one quick buck after another out of beach movies, men with X-ray eyes, Edgar Allen Poe stories, and unforgettable titles like *I was a Teenage Werewolf*. But Corman did more than that. He gave the breaks to the new generation who call the tune in Hollywood today: Coppola, Lucas, Scorsese, Milius, de Palma and Spielberg. He first employed them, along with other film students, as non-union labour to work on his exploitation pics, paying scandalously low wages. As they emerged to direct their own films he provided financial backing and guaranteed loans, much as they have done for one another in recent years.

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 127m dollars in the US alone. By that stage Spielberg had been given another 19m 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 *1941* to be. But for how long?

Jane Ure Smith

## Drumming out the politics

### The Tin Drum

Directed by Volker Schlöndorff

*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 uncritical adaptation of Gunther Grass's novel of the same name. The film won an award at the Cannes Festival, and like 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 gluttony, try to affect a sophisticated understanding of the political undercurrents of pre-war Europe. Disdainful of their pretensions, he

resolves 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.

Schlöndorff is more concerned with maintaining respectful reproduction of Grass's novel and scrupulously stylish 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 Schlöndorff Oskar is the child that exists in all of us, the child that we should 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

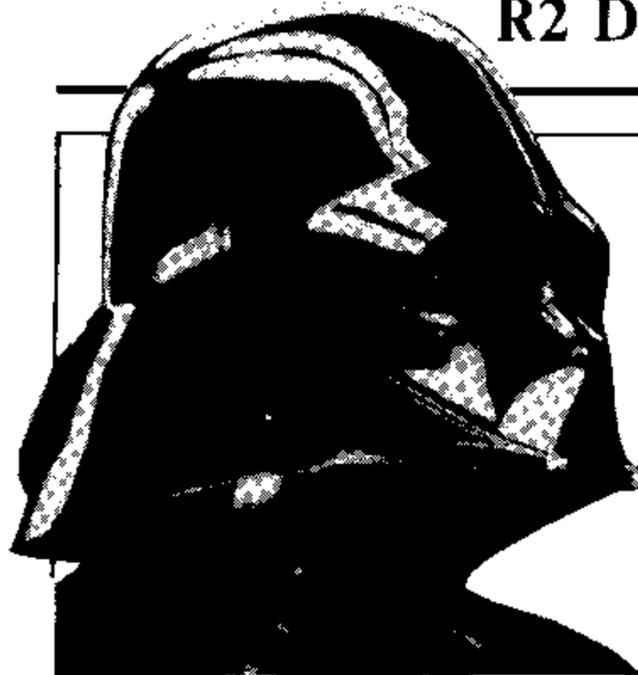
parallel the assumed child-like ignorance of the German people during the inter-war years. Like Oskar they tried to shrink from the realities until events finally overtook them. But surely the parallel is a bit too simple.

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 Schlöndorff consistently refrains from taking up such themes.

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

Marta Wohrle

## R2 D2 Part 2



### The Empire Strikes Back

Director: Irvin Kershner

*The Empire Strikes Back*, in case you didn't know it, is *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 this was not entirely true. For a start *Star Wars*' hero looked and acted like a refugee from the Osmonds. And for another thing it was all a bit slow. Nevertheless it was good. Five out of ten for ripping yarns (a passable 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 scandalised by the fact that once again

the film ended with a laser sword fight. (Which, by the way, is a slanderous 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 thrill its audience every twenty minutes, had to have a lot of action and use its setting to introduce every kind of goody, baddy 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 boring 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 Good, the Bad and the Ugly*.

Will there be *Star Wars* under socialism? (The movies, 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.

Charlie Kay

# 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 Mugsborough 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, Didlum, 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 waits the worsen it will be.'

'That's just my opinion,' said Didlum 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 dam good; it's too small and it's wore 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 shouldn't 'ave been hable to compete with 'em.'

'Of course not,' said Grinder. 'The truth of the matter is just wot Didlum says. Our machinery is too small, it's worn hout, and good for nothing but to be throwed 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. 'Re-construct 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 propose is that we Sell Out.'



Robert Tressell

'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 Didlum with a sickly smile, 'but nobody won't buy 'em.'

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

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

'I'm afraid we should never git away with it,' ejaculated Didlum, as soon as he could speak. 'When the people tumbled to it, there'd be no hend 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 over-'ard?' interrupted Rushton, glancing 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 liisten.

'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 Didlum 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 Ananias*. 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 gas-works 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 Band 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 honly git 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 Didlum.

'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're losin' 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.'