Was God a Tory?

A seasonal look at the origins of Christianity

INSIDE: Should socialists be inside the Labour Party? Tariq Ali debates with Socialist Review / Tebbit's Bill explained / Are the Tories finished?
Norman Tebbit's name was unknown to most people until a couple of months ago. But the Bill he is preparing to push through the House of Commons is rapidly changing that. For it represents a very big challenge indeed to certain basic forms of trade unionism, even if the challenge is dressed up as a mere tidying up of odd aspects of the existing law.

A number of elements in the proposed Bill are especially important.

The press has concentrated its attention on the question of the closed shop. But the real centre of the Tory attack is somewhere else—in its complete banning of all types of 'secondary' industrial action. Lawful trade disputes are to be restricted to 'disputes between an employer and his own employees'. So any attempt to stop one firm functioning normally in order to aid workers in another firm will be open to attack by the courts—innuations and the imposition of damages.

In effect, virtually all forms of solidarity would be illegal. So would attempts by workers in organised establishments to force employers of non-union labour to come to terms with the unions.

So, for example, container drivers from well organised firms have been using blockading of the Liverpool docks to bring to heel firms with weak organisation, whose drivers accept appalling conditions and low wages. This would now be illegal, since neither those calling for the blocking nor those enforcing it are in 'dispute with their own employer'. Again, printers in the NGA and SIADF refuse to work with graphics or typesetting not produced in union shops. This too would be illegal.

This represents an important tightening up of the provisions of the existing Tory Employment Act. When that was drafted there was a lot of pressure from Tory MPs to ban all secondary action. But in the end, it was mainly 'heretical actions' (for example, the banning from some ports of lorry firms that had scabbed at others) which were made unlawful. Tighter restrictions, it was argued by both Prior and important groups of employers, would be counterproductive, by provoking defiance and strikes against the law.

However, in the 18 months since Prior's law came into force, union leaders have sat back and allowed the courts to dictate what can and what cannot be done. And the rank and file has not felt confident to act without official support. Now the Tories feel they can easily get away with a further restriction on workers' rights.

Linked to the attack on basic solidarity is the making unlawful of 'disputes relating solely to matters occurring outside Great Britain'. This would, of course, penalise workers who blockaded products meant for South Africa or Chile. If dockers refused to load coal meant to break a strike of miners in, say, Poland, that too would be illegal.

Most immediately, it would mean an open attack on the campaign the International Transport Federation has been waging for some years now to force 'flag of convenience' ships to pay union rates.

The third thing in the proposed Bill which will be of particular significance is the way it extends who can be sued for 'unlawful' actions. Until now only individuals have been liable, not unions. In this way the Tories sought in the Prior Employment Act to avoid antagonising the trade union bureaucracy and, above all, to avoid what happened with the engineering union over the Con Mech dispute eight years ago—the whole union membership came out on strike when the courts seized its funds.

But again, the failure of unions to respond to legal attacks over the last year has convinced the government it can get away with a lot more now.

Not that the Tories are really intent on extracting large sums of money from the AUEW, the EEPTU or the TGWU. Rather, the cleverer of them recognise that threats to the unions' finances will be a marvellous excuse for officials who want to persuade their members not to engage in certain actions. They believe that Terry Duffy, Frank Chapple and Alex Kitson will instruct their members not to picket for solidarity action rather than risk a loss of union money.

Once unions have denounced their own members, it will be much easier for the courts to get away with imposing punitive damages on individual strikers.

It is here too that the proposal to make explicit a ban on 'political' strikes is important. You can just see union officials arguing that calls for, for example, stoppages against Heinz's attack on local authority services and jobs cannot even be discussed, since they would put the unions funds at risk. Finally, the proposals on the closed shop— which increase the level of compensation for scabs who refuse to join the union—have a sting in their tail. This compensation would no longer be paid just by the employer. 'The government believes the trade union should be liable to pay a share of any compensation.'

At the moment, unions are only liable for such compensation only if the employer raises the question of union pressure on him—something which in practice does not happen, because an employer who wants to placate the union by dismissing a scab is not then going to upset the union by demanding that it pays the compensation.

The new Bill will change this state of affairs. The sacked scab can demand payment from the union.

It is easy to see the bitterness this will cause many factories. Scabs will effectively be able to blackmail the union into giving them some of the dues paid by the union membership. Being a non-unionist will become a very profitable business.

The Bill is not just an example of crude Tory union bashing. It is an integral part of the Tories' plans to increase the competitiveness of British capitalism if and when the economic downturn begins to expand out of the recession—as David Beecham shows later in this issue. It will hamper struggles where secondary picketing is crucial to success (and that is an increasing proportion of struggles). It will provide added excuses for the 'moderates' in the unions to sell out struggles. It will make it much more difficult for unions to control the introduction of new technology by blocking products produced by weakly organised workforces.

The Tories feel confident they can get this law through now, without much bother either from the union leaderships or the rank and file, because of the very widespread defeatism and demoralisation on the factory floor. The TUC, no doubt, will organise the token protests—as it did over Heath's Industrial Relations Bill. But this time there will not be the widespread unofficial action that built up the pressure for defiance of the law in 1972 and 1974.

The Tories could be right. But there are factors in the Bill which could upset their calculations. For the proposals do away with the right for majority employees and greedy scabs to initiate legal actions that, from the point of view of the ruling class as a whole, are tactically mad.

The situation could arise in which a single cowboy lorry firm was to try to bring a powerful group of workers, like the Mercury side container drivers, before the courts in which a non-union scab provoked his workmates beyond endurance by demanding that the union 'compensate' him.

It was such cases that undermined the strategy of the employers and the government in Heath's time. The working class movement feels weaker today. But they could still reduce Tebbit's plans to chaos.
The Labour Left’s day of reckoning

Facts have to be faced, however hard they are to bear. Crosby confirms that the social democrats are much more of a force than any of us expected. It is possible to speculate endlessly about how much of their support they will hold through to the next general election. But one thing is now absolutely clear. The havoc being wreaked by Thatcher does not guarantee a Labour government in 18 months or two years time. Those who believed that the swing of the pendulum plus the packing of a few committees would be enough to bring about a ‘Labour government of a new type’ will have to think again.

Already we can see the social democrat gains pushing Labour to the right. Foot hangs on to every potential defector, giving key jobs to people who have bee suggesting openly they may make the switch. The soft left around Kinneec hangs on to Foot. The ‘hard’ left find themselves isolated, not knowing whether to keep fighting as in the past, or to repair their bridges to the soft left and thecentre.

But no amount of manoeuvring will enable the Labour left to come to terms with its problems. For the source of their is not an ‘accidental’ defeat in conference votes or an ‘occidental’ dump in the vote at Crosby. It is that they are weak and have been pretending they are strong.

The honest elements of the Labour left want to challenge the present system. But the forces they have to challenge them with are still a small minority inside the working class.

That minority can be enough to get the occasional resolution through the committees of the local Labour Party or to get the right sort of constituency delegates to conferences. It can even be enough to get quite large one-off demonstrations. But it is not enough to gain substantial victories in the face of determined opposition from a highly experienced and still powerful ruling class.

Of course, those of us who are revolutionary socialists are an even smaller minority. But we recognise a minority can begin to win if — and only if — it relates to wide sections of less political workers who find themselves in struggle against this ruling class, often on issues which seem ‘trivial’ or ‘economistic’ to the established politicos — wages, conditions of work, resistance to redundancies, opposition to rent and rate increases. This is precisely the kind of agitation that the Labour left have not, in the overwhelming majority of cases, been prepared to carry in the past. It has seemed unimportant compared with their obsession with passing resolutions, electing conference delegates, winning resolution conferences, managing local committees. They simply have not noticed how cut off they themselves have been from the vast bulk of working class people in any locality.

Now they’re paying the price for it. Crosby was one part of the price. The incredibly small demonstration that greeted the Jobs Express in London was another. Even the political minority will not keep agitating and demonstrating indefinitely unless they feel they are getting somewhere.

In the past year the very low level of real class struggle has been accompanied by a ‘political upturn’ — an increased interest in politics among a several hundred thousand strong minority of workers. The danger now is that set-backs suffered by the Labour left and the failure of demonstrations by the minority to achieve anything will lead to renewed demoralisation and depoliticisation.

The job of revolutionaries is to counter this, by going out of our way to involve supporters of the Labour left in joint activity around real struggles. These may be small at the moment, but in them the small victories can be won that sustain morale, rebuild organisation and prepare the ground for the rise in the level of class struggle that is to be expected in the not-too-distant future.
The Labour left and the mood for compromise

The Labour left would not accept most of our analysis of what is happening in the party. But they were having to make some reassessments even before Crosby. To get one of their views, we sent Jonathan Brescian to interview Nigel Stanley, secretary of the Labour Coordinating committee (speaking in a personal capacity).

Nigel began by insisting that Healey's victory at Brighton should not be overstated. First of all, I wouldn't take the defeat of Tony Benn as a loss. It would be very inaccurate. Two years ago nobody would have thought that a candidate identified with the left would come so near to capturing a major position. The fact that he did so well was quite an achievement for the left.

The loss of the left majority on the NEC is a big problem. But it would be wrong to say there had ever been a hard left majority on the NEC.

Nigel went on to talk of the 'soft' or 'inside' left in the parliamentary party and on the NEC who have refused to support Benn in the struggle against the right.

I think they were totally wrong. They may well have had legitimate political criticisms of Tony Benn. However, to express those criticisms by letting in the candidates of the right, and the hard right, seems to me totally wrong.

But I don't think there is now any point in going through a stage of defining the Labour left as very narrow, or going through an orgy of recriminations.

'It would be tactically divisive', he said, to oppose 'soft left' MPs at reselection conferences. He then went on to argue that a rerun of the deputy leadership contest next year might not necessarily be the best way for the hard left to fight back.

The NEC has decided at its AGM, by an overwhelming majority, that there should be a moratorium on discussing whether the deputy leadership should be contested. It seems to me that a whole number of issues will have to be taken into account before that. The likelihood of defeating Denis Healey would clearly be paramount. But there are other factors as well. The party at the base are beginning to think more of the next election, and may not want to have another prolonged inner-party struggle.

Certainly the thing the left should be learning from the deputy leadership election was that those unions which had the most democratic procedures, apart from the NUM, tended to go for the right wing candidates. So the left is beginning to think of developing a strategy which will win support for left policies outside the narrow ranks of inner party struggle. It could well be that winning support among the rank and file of the unions could be more important for the left over the coming period rather than the precise form of inner-party struggle around the deputy leadership question.

Very few people on the Labour left have ever claimed that socialism itself is very popular. It may well be true that some Labour members are against multilateral disarmament and opposition to EEC membership, a return to full employment are popular policies, but that doesn't mean there is mass support for how a socialist society should be organised. Those on the left who think that usually find it is a mistake.

There are no short cuts. One can't wait for the time when 'the people' take control of their destinies. In the meantime, it is up to the socialist minority within the Labour Party to do what it can to organise working people. Many of the points we are making about mobilisation, linking into the peace movement, which is already mobilising many people, is that it is going out and winning support for our policies.

Nigel recognised that one tactic for winning the party to the left which has been made much of by the media - the selection of MPs - had not had any great effect as yet.

It is an error to assume that most constituencies have hard left majorities in them, allowing reselection or deselection at will. There are some people in the Labour Party who think mandatory reselection would have a dramatic effect. But I have never thought that. The left simply hasn't been strong enough.

In one sense I think there is a mood for compromise. The Liberal/SDP Alliance poses a major threat to the Labour Party. There are also genuine fears among Labour activists about Labour winning the next election. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that it is extremely unlikely that Labour will have an overall majority at the next election.

There is some kind of hardening down of the hares in a pre-election period. There is also of course now the local council elections next year. The waiting game is what is worrying about. But that is not the reason why MPs are not being deselected.

There is a very real problem. But to say there is a mood for compromise is not to say there will be a capitulation. Historically compromise has always meant that the left capitulates. We are not going to capitulate. This is not a question of bargaining with the right. It is not a question of continuing with inner-party struggle. It could actually benefit the right, because they could use that to isolate the left from the centre. After the next election there was an alliance between the left and the centre. But that has now broken down. The centre are now more in alliance with the right. To use Gramsci's phrase, we were then in a war of manoeuvre, we are now in a war of position.

I would argue that the left needs to pay much more attention to developing realistic, not in the right wing sense, but more thought our policies. The left needs policy on social policy questions as well as on simple 'yes, no' issues like the Common Market or not, whether you have the Bomb or not. That seems to me the kind of battle one can have with the right, without it being able to isolate the left from the centre of the party.

The discussion moved on to the question of what the Labour left in the local authorities can do.

The situation facing local government is very serious. We are in a left stick - there is no easy obvious way out. Socialists did try to mobilise mass support. On the whole those mass campaigns have not been successful.

To some extent the Tories are winning the local government offensive at the moment. They can have won in Luton. The position is not so far that the extent to which Labour continues in the local authorities will have a bearing on whether or not it is able to force a successful confrontation with the Tories at national level. Should we just opt out of opposition and throw the whole system into total confusion and attempt to build mass campaigns outside the councils chamber? Many councils are beginning to come round to this idea. Some councils have already stated that I think other councils will as they are forced to make cuts or make massive rate increases hitting the domestic rate payer.

Nigel finished by talking about the weakness in Labour's support revealed by the rise of the SDP.

One of the things the NEC pointed out in our analysis of the last election was the crushing ideological victory that Thatcher scored in the first election since 1945 where there had been a swing towards the politics of a party.

Labour's electoral base has been declining steadily since 1951. If you look at the statistics it is the increase in the third party vote which has led to the subsequent Labour victories. The Labour Party is facing quite a big doldrum towards which it has been heading for many years. The Liberal/SDP has actually exposed that.

So how does one rebuild support? I think that will require some kind of fundamental rethink. We can't assume electoral support any more. We now have to go out and win active support. That means an ideological offensive.

Labour certainly has to look at the minority, but there is something to be said about having a much more feminist perspective of the world, or the kind of policies the ethnic minorities need, and only really look towards the Labour Party for. These seem to form some kind of confidence which can be brought in. We have to develop the right kind of practice towards them.

But that of course doesn't substitute for the organised working class. The number of trade unionists that have not voted for Labour but for the Tories has risen dramatically in the last few years. Some of that may well switch to the SDP and Liberals.
The long, sordid tradition that leads to Denning

When we went to press it was still unknown whether the House of Lords would overturn Lord Denning’s judgement on the GLC’s cheap fares policy. But one thing was clear—it was the decisions of judges which mattered, not the outcome of elections. Mark George, a socialist barrister, tells how this is far from the first time judges have made the law.

Denning’s judgement was as clear an example of judges making political decisions as anyone could imagine. It showed how the judges can actually make the law.

For, apart from Acts passed by Parliament, “statute law”, English law is also made up of the “common law” – the collective decisions of the judges going back over hundreds of years. It is true that on occasions the most politically unacceptable decisions of the courts have been overturned by an Act of Parliament but that can take years and in the meantime the judges’ decision represents the law of the land.

Political intervention by the courts is nothing new. Lord Denning may be the current most active exponent of the art but he comes from a long and sordid tradition of ruling class warriors in judges’ robes.

At the beginning of the 20th century the senior judges tried to undermine the right to strike which had been legalised in 1875. In 1901 the House of Lords decided that union blacking of a supplier’s products was illegal and that the union officials could be sued for conspiracy to injure him. Then in the Taft Vale Railway Co. case, also in 1901, the House of Lords held that the trade unions could be sued for losses sustained by employers as the result of strike action.

These decisions were a serious blow to trade unionism, and they caused major political upheaval resulting in 1906 in the Trades Disputes Act which restored protection to the unions.

More recently, in 1964, the Lords delivered a judgement strongly reminiscent of those of the early 1900s. A BOAC employee left the union which had a closed shop agreement with BOAC. Union members threatened strike action if he was not restored which management duly did. He then sued the union members for conspiracy, and the House of Lords declared the action of the union members unlawful. This new attack on the right to strike was only reversed when the new Labour government passed the Trades Disputes Act 1965.

The decision was as clear an example of judges making political decisions as anyone could imagine. It showed how the judges can actually make the law.

Political preference

The following year the police prevented pickets approaching a coach carrying workers out of a site. In the ensuing scuffle a picket was arrested for obstruction and convicted.

The impact of such decisions was greatly to limit the lawfulness of picketing. They made it much easier for the police to prevent effective picketing and indicated the extent to which the judges were prepared to go in backing up tough police tactics.

The judges are in a position to interpret the law in such a way as to favour their own political preferences.

The Tameside Council case of 1976 is an example. The Tories won control of the local council and informed the Labour Secretary of State for Education that they did not intend to implement the plans of the previous Labour Council to re-organise its secondary schools along comprehensive lines. When the Secretary of State ordered them to do so the council went to court and although they lost in the High Court, both the Court of Appeal and the House of Lords ruled in favour of the council. The legal reason for this decision was that the minister had no reasonable grounds for acting as he did. Behind that, however, it is easy to see that the judges were concerned to maintain grammar schools and put a spanner in the comprehensive system.

Undoubtedly, the most blatant example of the involvement of the judges in making political decisions was the National Industrial Relations Court (NIRC) established under the Industrial Relations Act 1971.

More recently, however, it is the ‘ordinary’ judiciary which has conducted the attack on the right to strike and picket which began in the ruling class hysteria surrounding the picketing at Grunwick in 1977. Then followed a series of decisions which anticipated many of the provisions of the Employment Act 1980 relating to picketing and which no doubt encouraged the Tories to move to implement their proposals shortly after the 1979 election. Often the courts have said that it is for Parliament to change the law and not the courts. But the various decisions are a vivid illustration of the power of the judges to make law when they choose in the absence of any legislation by parliament.

By ruling that secondary picketing and other basic solidarity action was not “in furtherance of a trade dispute” Denning prevented SOGAT members at Express Newspapers from blacking extra copies when journalists on the Daily Mirror were on strike in 1977 and he prevented the blacking of the Press Association during the 1978/8 journalists strike.

He had the same concept in mind when he declared the picketing of a private steelworks illegal in the 1980 steel strike. Although in that case the House of Lords quickly reversed Denning’s decision, no doubt aware that the position would be changed again by the Employment Act, Denning was able to destroy the momentum of the strike at a crucial point.

The response of the leadership of the unions to these judicial attitudes has, all too often, been to bow to ‘the rule of law’. But the judges are a powerful arm of the ruling class and, they, as their decisions show, have no doubt at all about where their loyalties lie.

The political cartoons of Phil Evans

By Phil Evans and Steve Ivens, with a foreword by Dave Widgery

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The alternatives to Walesa

At the Solidarity congress in October there were divergent views within the leadership as to the way forward. Three candidates who stood against Lech Walesa for the presidency of the union received, between them, 45 per cent of the vote. But what did they stand for? Karla Weber looks at the arguments that have been taking place.

The Polish union, Solidarnosc, has united very nearly the entire Polish nation. Parent and student organisations proclaim their allegiance to the working class movement by using its name. The intelligentsia, if not actually in the union, hover round its edges as advisors.

There is no doubt that Solidarity is more than a trade union but being so ubiquitous it can hardly fail to contain a very broad spectrum of political ideas. The birth of Solidarity was an example of unparalleled unity. Now, inevitably, the various currents within it have produced not only internal debate, but also quite bitter fights between its various factions.

While opposition to Walesa is quite widespread, it is by no means coherent or organised. Thus he was opposed by no fewer than three candidates for the leadership of the union, although his three opponents had much in common.

First, the general consensus. There is no one who openly advocates the overthrow of the present regime. Thus the ideas of national renewal, ultimate cooperation with the state, the necessity of economic belt tightening, are universal. The aspiration to 'self-management' is also generally accepted. There is little evidence of controversy surrounding the issue, except in the degree of militancy with which real control should be pursued.

The disagreements are over union internal democracy and militancy vis-a-vis the state. Many of the criticisms from Walesa's opponents were very pertinent, yet not one of them seems to have seriously looked to victory in the union elections, to have offered an all round alternative strategy.

One likely reason is an unwillingness to fall into a disruptive faction fight which could damage the union. The conditions are still so harsh, the penalty for failure so great, that arguments against rocking the boat still carry a lot of weight. Disrupting unity is one of the charges against Andrzej Gwiazda, the most serious of Walesa's opponents - a charge which probably lost him a lot of votes. Solidarity members tend to minimise any differences. Even as Karol Modzelewski was resigning as the union's chief spokesman earlier this year over Walesa's cancellation of a general strike without reference to the union's national commission, he insisted: "It is incorrect to speak of divisions in Solidarity... There is no better course for the union than to support Lech Walesa."

Yet the dangers of allowing a charismatic figure to rise so far above the heads of other union leaders must now be apparent to many Solidarity oppositionists.

In addition many Polish workers are suspicious of politics, and, especially, of parties. This too makes it very difficult for any group to organise around an alternative programme. For too long, the words 'faction' and 'party' have been associated with thievish, repression, arbitrary decisions and incompetence. By contrast an apolitical appeal seems dignified and honest.

Marian Jurczyk was the most popular runner up in the election, achieving nearly three times as many votes as his nearest rival. When asked whether he was in favour of a government of national salvation he replied:

"I've never been a politician. I'm a trade union activist. I want to defend the working people. I want them to get decent wages for their work and I want them to live a decent life. That's my aim."

It would be unfair to say that this sadly naive response sums up all of Jurczyk's politics. He wants to insist on rank and file control over the union leadership. He wants a more militant line taken by the union, with fewer compromises and retreats. He wants free elections to the Sejm (Polish parliament) and a government subordinated to it. However, he shares such views with the other candidates. It was his 'honest Joe' image, contrasting with the image of the other candidates as radicals and politicians, which seems to have accounted for his popularity.

Jurczyk's lack of sophistication is disappointing in view of the fact that he is a veteran of the Szczecin shipyards, having been on the strike committee in 1970. Moreover, Szczecin is also the home of a union publication called Jednosc (Unity) which has published some very apt Marxist analyses of the Polish situation:

"Between the apparatus on one side and labour on the other, a deep class conflict exists which causes antagonisms and conflict in the social life of our country. There remains the class struggle of the Polish proletariat whose aim is social control over the nationalised means of production and, through that, strengthening the force of the entire people's labour.

"For now the only effective disposition of the socialist means of production is the politico-state and economic apparatus, acting as a whole with a collective monopoly, as de facto private owners. It influences all spheres of life as well as the most important - control over the use of force, the militia, army, court and prison apparatuses.

"On the left of the power apparatus is the world of labour with its own needs and aspirations which run counter to those of the former. The world of labour's needs and aspirations are automatically represented by the independent, self-governing trade union, Solidarity, organising in unions both party and non-party people."

Jan Ruwiski became nationally well known when he was one of the union activists severely beaten up by the police in Bydgoszcz. He has since gained a reputation as a radical.

His most interesting contribution to the pre-election discussion was an anti-Russian speech which broke a taboo, giving voice to the resentment and hatred of Russia which underpins the Poles' excessive nationalism. It cost him many votes and he came bottom of the poll. It was much more than an anti-Russian speech. He placed the Polish state in the international context and,
although he concentrated on Poland’s relationship with Russian imperialism, what he said could easily be extended to her relationship with her Western imperial creditors.

“The mass media will argue that I have gone beyond the limits of union activity. Ladies and Gentleman, the problems of the union have to be seen in a wider perspective. We have to examine foreign policy and no one can lawfully deny us the right to express opinions on this. As foreign policy is connected to economic matters and arms production, it is easy to prove that our activity, our control and formation of public opinion on foreign policy issues mean the control of state budgets, of how much is spent on armaments, and how much on minimum benefits for the seven million Poles who are starving.”

The faction centred around Andrzej Gwiazda is probably the best defined as a group. Nicknamed the ‘constellation’ (from the Polish meaning of Gwiazda’s name, ‘star’) their relationship with Walesa’s followers is very bitter. Gwiazda himself explained his low vote in the poll by alluding to the number of foul smears and rumours circulating about him.

Andrzej Gwiazda

Like Jurczyk and Rulewski, Gwiazda has attacked the lack of democracy in the union, but his attack has been more central to his politics and much sharper. Speaking of Walesa’s ‘dictatorship’ he said in July

“A dictator who does not have a a police force or an army at his disposal is reduced to maintaining his popularity and his good relationship with the authorities. In order not to risk his position he has to pursue the politics of co-operation and move towards ever greater concessions. until a rebellious reaction and insubordination appears among the workforce. Then, in order not to lose popularity and in order to maintain his dictatorship he has to turn about and lead the rebellion.

“This results in politics catastrophic to both the union and the country. Necessarily it is a chaotic politics.

At the recent CP Congress something like 40 per cent of the delegates clearly liked the idea of the Russians going into Poland to smash Solidarity. When pushed as to why, individuals would say to you that talk of Poland joining the International Monetary Fund showed that ‘Solidarity was counter-revolutionary’. What they forgot to mention was that only a few weeks before one East European country had actually joined the IMF – Hungary. Who rules Hungary? A man called Janos Kadar. How did he get there? He was put in power by Russian troops who ‘crushed the counter-revolution’ there in 1956, killing 200,000 Hungarian workers in the process.

People who wonder why the Russians have not yet moved into Poland may consider the following news items of the last few weeks:

• On November 16 Leonid Brezhnev told the central committee of the ruling party in Russia that ‘our supplies have become the central problem of the present Soviet five year plan’.

It was shortages of food that led to strikes by 18 months ago in Russia’s huge auto-plants at Gorki, Togliatti and Karma River.

On the same day it was reported that ‘food shortages have provoked a wave of strikes and demonstrations in Romania’. The biggest stoppages were on 16 and 19 October in the coal fields at Ju Valley. The strike occurred despite the fact that the miners were met with harsh repression after their last strikes four years ago.

This time the strikers held Emil Bobu, a leading figure in the regime’s hostage until the country’s president, Ceausescu, agreed to meet them. Ceausescu is treated in his country’s media as the country’s greatest ever national hero – but when he arrived in the mining area, ‘he received a hostile reception and young people threw stones at him’.

All Czechoslovakia’s problems were, of course, solved with the Russian invasion of 1968. That is why the country’s ruling Communist Party leadership spoke recently of unprecedented difficulties and warned that the economic situation will worsen in the next year. This year industrial growth which was supposed to be 4 per cent has turned out to be 1.7 per cent only.

A recent statement by one of the Russian imposed leaders, Vasil Bilak, that ‘unpopular measures’ needed to be taken for the sake of increased defence spending, led to ‘massive hoarding of meat, sugar, rice, wine and even detergents’.

Bilak claimed that it was better ‘to live in modesty than die in affluence’. Many of the people who heard him seemed to have felt that a better slogan would have been ‘food not bombs’.

But it is what is happening back in the USSR that must be worrying Brezhnev most. On 23 October there occurred the worst outbreak of ‘civil disorders’ in 25 years, according to the Financial Times correspondent in Moscow. ‘Thousands of Soviet citizens besieged the local Communist Party headquarters and fought pitched battles with the army for three days in Ordzhonikidze, a regional capital in the north Caucasus. Bricks and diamonds were hurled at police and soldiers attempting to disperse the crowd with tanks.’

The demonstration against police brutality and corruption ended only when Solomenzov, the prime minister of the Russian Federation rushed to the city and promised to meet people’s grievances. But then a strike followed which paralysed public transport in the quarter of a million large city.

‘Food not bombs’

Observers noticed that ‘as the demonstrations grew, many of those participating seemed consciously to be imitating scenes from films about the Russian Revolution’.

Could it be that Brezhnev is afraid of getting bogged down in a war in Poland when he might need his army nearer home? Could he be afraid that going into Poland might encourage similar developments in Hungary and Romania, Czechoslovakia and the Caucasus? Could it be that he too has seen the films of 1917? Or are any such suppositions just ‘apologies for counter-revolution’?

The popular press in the West often quotes at the signs of treason in Eastern Europe. Look, they say, that proves that our kind of capitalism is the only way to run things. The alternative for them is food shortages, with people being forced to give up meat, eggs, cheese and green vegetables for bread and potatoes.

Next time you hear that story, think of the latest Ministry of Agriculture National Food Survey for 1981. This reveals that consumption of food per head in Britain this year was 2 per cent less than last. And there was ‘an increase in the sales of cheap, filling foods like bread and potatoes at the expense of milk, cheese, butter, red meat and eggs’. It is not only in Eastern Europe that ‘food not bombs’ seems an increasingly appropriate slogan.
lurching from one extreme to the other. It is much more erratic than the politics conducted by a democratic organisation, a politics which can change with the rhythm of fluctuating influences of factions and differing groups.

"We have everyday examples of this. Wales, who is presently devoting all his efforts towards suppressing strikes and formulating demands, has agreed to support the strike at the ports and the airline (LOT) in the face of their determined stand simply because he knew his popularity among these workforces would suffer."

Gwiazda has also drawn attention to the fact that "a dictatorship in the union is a necessary (and sufficient) condition for the absorption of Solidarity by the system." In this way he has drawn a link well recognised by British trade unionists looking at the TUC, the link between collaborationist policies and the bureaucratisation of the union and its possible future absorption and neutralisation by the ruling class.

Victimised unionists

Gwiazda's account of the ground lost by Solidarity over the past year is honest. In every sphere, the right to publish its own papers, the right of access to the media, the defence of victimised unionists, the right to information about the economy so that workers can form sound judgements in the sphere of self-management, the union has made no progress or has lost ground.

"I think it is a mistake," he says, "to think that it is possible to pacify the authorities by making concessions... We will not avoid conflict by retreating, concessions can only lend us closer to the ultimate conflict." These views are shared, not only by Rulewski and Jurczyk, but also by many of the rank and file.

Although Gwiazda has said that the workers should 'take control', it seems that he is referring to the management of the economy rather than to political control. He is still articulating the reformist consensus: ultimately a compromise with the government is possible, but not a compromise which gives ground already gained, since there is no prospect of stability while the basic needs of people are not fulfilled and secure.

Even though a reformist, Gwiazda seems to be a man whose ideas could carry the movement forward and who would perhaps move to the left in the light of further experience. His chief weakness seems to be an inability to organise within the union.

"I do believe", he has stressed, "that if ten million people decide for some reason not to overthrow the government, then a thousand leaders, however bloodthirsty, will not be able to do anything about it. Conversely, if ten million people want to overthrow the system then even the most collaborationist leaders will be unable to prevent it.

Fine. Reds under the bed do not cause revolutions. But it's poor stuff in a situation where what is desperately needed is an organisation to argue with workers to a specific way of moving forward instead of sliding back. A personal friend of his once commented: "Andrzej is no good at pushing himself forward."

Just how desperate is the need for an alternative leadership in Solidarity can be seen from Walesi's own election speech. Popular though he is, many delegates were appalled. He seemed to be a desperately lost and tired man. Like one mesmerised by a cobra, he seemed capable of talking only of defeat, a theme to which he returned again and again.

"I am worried that we badly underestimate our partner. We have too much self-confidence and at the same time fail to notice problems, troubles and methods by which we can be defeated."

"I mean that we should remember that winter is coming, they can exert pressure on us, and very cunningly so. Simply turn off the taps if we don't show proper respect for them."

"Our problem is that we do not talk often enough amongst ourselves, that we do not look at the partner who is well equipped, who tactically, step by step and in an organised way is attacking our credibility and society's trust in us. This is a deliberate action leading to victory, but not our victory."

Never has the need for a political party been greater. The Polish state understands this. For the first time since the upheavals it has raised a meeting in Korn's private apartment - because, it claimed, it was being held to organise a new political group. Korn's group would not be a revolutionary organisation - yet that is what is required.
How Bourguiba got his ninety-eight per cent

Tunisia had her first 'democratic elections' early last month. This was of considerable importance for Tunisia and the Arab world, even if the elections were the expected farce. Abu Samed, a Tunisian militant, looks at the background.

Ever since the so-called independence given by France to her local chieftain in 1956, Tunisian peasants and workers have been strongly politicised and have rejected the government's policies. Immediately after independence they refused to accept the treaty drawn up by France or to surrender the land they held the military. This led to the massacre of workers. In the 1960s, they rejected the regime's 'collectivisation' of the land which produced the robbery of the peasants for the benefit of the big landowners. There were uprisings in the poorest areas of Tunisia, some of them armed, so the regime and its backers in the White House had to make a concession of the economic minister and put him on trial. Unions were suppressed, leaders imprisoned, and the ruling party split between those favouring out and out repression and those who felt they would last longer by allowing a degree of political liberty.

The revolutionary movement began to show itself and was visibly repressed. Every year saw a series of trials of the 'Mafia' and nationalists: 202 militants of the 'Tunisian Workers' group were tried in 1974, 66 more in 1975. The Student movement also had its share of resistance and consequent repression: the first independent revolutionary group of Trotskyist militants, formed from a split from the banned pro-Soviet CP, were tried and imprisoned in 1968.

Though revolutionaries rejected any association with the regime and its institutions, they realised the need to fight within the unions within the working class' though these unions were often government-run facades. The workers became more and more radicalised throughout the 1970s and their demands became clearer: an independent workers' movement, effective representation, improvements in conditions, pay rises and the right to strike.

In the face of the increasing class consciousness, the regime formed its own militia to intimidate and attack the workers. This proved to be a failure. In 1977 there was an enormous wave of strikes - led by the workers themselves without the support of the pro-regime union leaders, who had signed a social contract agreeing to a five year ban on strikes, increased production and a wage freeze.

Wildcat strikes across the country followed with resounding success. Staggered by the militancy of the rank and file, the union leaders did a quick about face and backed the workers' demands. A new government union organisation was created and rejected by the workers class.

On January 26 1978 the workers replied to the government attacks in the best possible way: a general strike. 400 workers and students died that day, a curfew was imposed, the elected union leaders replaced and imprisoned. The new union organisation (UGTT) was blacked and the opposition went underground to reorganise strikes and other resistance. Those sacked after the general strike were financially supported by their fellow workers and the students stayed on strike for a further month, when the regime closed the colleges and arrested the student leaders.

On the second anniversary of the general strike there was an uprising in the south western town of Gafsa, backed by the local people and carried out by returning exiles. The Tunisian army and French paratroops took a week to put it down. In the face of widespread anti-government feeling, the prime minister was replaced, the political prisoners released on certain conditions and an independent trade union movement allowed to exist. The President, Bourguiba, announced that no opposition party gaining 5% of the popular vote would be legalised. Elections were to take place on 1st November 1981.

The elections were a farce designed to defuse the situation and allow the regime to survive. Some 'opposition' parties took part, the Democratic Socialist Movement run by a former home affairs minister, the Popular Unity Movement Political Bureau run by a former economics minister, another split from the ruling Destourian (Constitutional) Socialist Party, and the Tunisian CP. The union bureau made a coalition with the ruling party.

The election campaign saw more activity from the regime's militia than the opposition: breaking up meetings, threatening assassinations and attacking opposition supporters. In the polling stations the opposition observers were barred.

The results, not surprisingly, showed the regime with 98% of the vote, winning all 156 seats. No party had gained the required 5% to be legalised, and the DSP remains the only legal party. Throughout Tunisia demonstrations condemned the fraud.

The elections provide a valuable lesson to those who believe in the possibility of democracy coming through parliamentary processes. They are a slap in the face for those who expect any change from the regime. The only way forward in Tunisia is through the unity of workers, students and peasants in militant and ultimately armed struggle against the allies of western imperialism and capital.
The first priority for the left in relation to Nicaragua must be to oppose Reagan's threats to the country. But that should not lead to the mistake, made so often in the past (Russia, China, Algeria, Cambodia to name but a few cases) of viewing everything that happens inside the country uncritically. Recent events show that it is by no means moving unambiguously in a socialist direction. Dave Beecham tells what has been happening.

On 21 October, the Nicaraguan authorities arrested 28 people. Four of them were officials of various employers' organisations, all members of COSEP, the Nicaraguan equivalent of the CBI. The other 24 were leading members of the Communist Party and the CP-dominated union CAUS.

All were detained under Nicaragua's public order law and emergency regulations, issued earlier this year. These make it an offence to publish information that might 'incite foreign governments and/or institutions to take action or make decisions that are injurious to the national economy'. It was made clear when this decree was issued that such action would include strikes.

Nicaragua's emergency regulations provide for brisk decisions. You have 48 hours to prepare your defence, and you are sentenced after a further 48 hours. When the cases came to trial three of the business leaders were convicted, one freed. The three received 60 day prison sentences.

Of the union and CP leaders, who included the general secretary and two members of the Council of State, only four came to trial. Three were convicted and one was freed. So far a triumph for even-handedness. The difference was in the sentences. El Fil Almamano, CP general secretary, and two CAUS lay officials got 60 days plus 29 months. It is true that there was a difference in the gravity of the offences. The three businessmen had taken offence at a statement from the leader of the Nicaraguan 'junta for national reconstruction', Daniel Ortega, that businessmen who opposed the Nicaraguan revolution would be strung up from the lamp-posts. They published an open letter in protest, saying that the junta was leading Nicaragua to disaster with a 'Marxist-Leninist adventure'.

Officially at least, the arrests of trade unionists and Communists was for saying the opposite - that the government was diverting the revolutionary process to a capitalist line. They also called for what they quaintly described as a 'worker and peasant government' - an obviously daft idea to act in revolutionary Nicaragua.

Their real offence was not words, however. The junta's paper Bazona finally came clean at the beginning of November. The guilty men had 'incited and participated in the takeover of the Plasticos Modernos factory' in Managua. In other words, they'd organised a factory occupation.

The Chile experience

It is far from clear whether the CAUS members actually did what they're accused of. But the fact was occupied by members of their union.

There does not seem to have been any significant protest inside the country about the arrests and sentences (and precious little outside - after all, Reagan doesn't like Commies, other Communist Parties think the Nicaraguans are ultra-left, and quite a lot of 'revolutionaries' want to cover it up).

Whatever the 'special circumstances' and 'objective factors' that may be advanced to justify three year prison sentences for those organising factory occupations, the simple fact is that the Nicaraguan junta is proceeding along more or less the same class lines as the leaders of the Allende government did in Chile in 1972/73 before the coup - antagonising the business sector but moving harshly against the left.

There the similarities with Chile stop - the Nicaraguan junta has total state power and absolute control of the armed forces. Its repression against the left is therefore more powerful and its concern about a workers' upheaval greater because Nicaragua is much weaker economically than Chile was. It is one of history's many little ironies that in Chile it was the CP that was doing the repressing of workers' struggle - in Nicaragua it's the CP that's being repressed. Be that as it may the logic of both processes is similar: oppose workers' self-activity, some things are just too revolutionary.

P.S. Those readers who think that a government can't be all bad if it jails both businessmen and Communist Party leaders are being disgracefully sectarian!
Leyland: Down but then out

At the beginning of November it looked, briefly, as if the most amazing thing was going to happen. The workers in what the press treat as the biggest lame duck, Leyland, seemed set to lead the whole class in an onslaught on the 4 per cent pay limit being imposed by the government and the CBI. For one day the company was completely strike bound, with pickets that recalled the miners strike of 1972 or the steel strike of 1980 rather than the passivity that normally accompanies car industry disputes.

The strike did not last beyond the second day. To find out why - and to find out why key groups of workers struck again over conditions a week later - Chris Harman talked to three SWP shop stewards in Longbridge.

They began by stressing the preparedness to fight that existed in the factory prior to the strike.

"In the fortnight before we had a continual barrage of letters and propaganda of the management. Yet if anything the determination got stronger as time went on. People's feelings got all aroused, partly due to threats we were getting. I've never known the feeling as good as in those two weeks, and there didn't seem to be anything the company could do right.

"There was the most thorough preparation we've ever seen for a strike there. The stewards put out printed sheets, half of which was information, the other half a list of things people could do to help the strike - picketing, whether on nights or days, supplying tea and sugar, getting their wives involved - for them to tick off and supply their names and addresses. Rotas were drawn up.

This showed that: 'Quite a number of stewards are beginning to learn the lessons of past setbacks. There's been a fair drop in the number of stewards we've got in the plant since the sacking of Robbo two years ago, with a higher percentage of the stewards who do remain prepared to have a go. We're not in a situation where anyone could take a steward's job because they thought it was the first step to being a foreman or anything like that. In taking a steward's job now you're putting your neck on the line.'

"At some of the gates on the Monday there were over a hundred picketers. The evening shift was very well covered as well. There was probably two thousand of the workforce actually participating in the pickets on Monday and the Tuesday. That's out of a workforce of 14½ thousand.'

Lost momentum

What destroyed this momentum was the deal stitched up between trade union national officials and the company on the Saturday night. On the Tuesday, workers at Longbridge and most other plants - although not at Cowley - voted two to one to accept the deal.

"You can still see the effect of the reliance on officialdom. So many of the arguments in relation to strikes now revolve around the issue of whether it will be made official or not. It was only a minority - although the size of the minority surprised me - who accepted the argument that we go on strike and if the officials hack us that's a bonus.

"Many of the people who did vote for a return to work have been apologising to me since for doing it. They say, what could we do, we didn't know how we could win when the officials have done this deal etc.'

"People realised that in order to defeat the Tories' pay policy and the likes of Michael Edwards who hasn't lost a battle yet over Leyland - we would have to generalise the strike. The fact of challenging the Tories and the involvement of Len Murray, Michael Foot and these people only served to reinforce the idea that we were talking about a national issue for the working class.

"People went along to the park thinking that we didn't have enough going for us without the massive official support from outside to win the dispute."

One factor that reinforced this feeling that they weren't strong enough to win was the way Jack Adams put the stewards' recommendation to continue the strike.

"I don't think it would have made a decisive impact on the vote, but there's no doubt the way he presented it did help the vote to go for a return to work. It was agreed the day before the leading stewards meeting that they wouldn't bullshit the workers, that they'd give a proper presentation to them of what happened at the meeting between the officials and management at ACAS on the Saturday.

"But they would also be putting the recommendation of the leading stewards that the strike continue and the reasons for it. What happened was that Jack Adams went over backwards to give a fair representation of the officials' case, and his presentation of the leading stewards argument for
the rejection of that case was low key.

'Jack Adams and quite a high percentage of the leading stewards are very concerned about their relationship with the officials as well as their relationship with the shop floor, and they are trying to keep a very careful balance between the two. That's a relic of the old participation system, where the link up with officials and looking to a higher level of leadership reflects itself particularly through the senior stewards.'

In terms of the officials, it was not only the right wing leaders of the engineering and electronics unions who effectively sabotaged the strike. The 'left' leaders of the TGWU were not that much better.

'Kitson didn't come out for the deal. But his attitude wasn't really much different from that of Chapple and Boyd. I saw the union leaders on Weekend World. It anything the attitude which was adopted by Kitson was a worse effect than the attitude that was adopted by Ken Cure. Everything Kitson said was ducking away from any sort of positive approach. He wouldn't say go back to work and he was saying if you stop out we'll continue to make it official. But he was putting in such a way as to give the impression that it would be a complete waste of time.'

'The TGW & over the last couple of years has always wanted to appear more closely involved in backing their members than the other unions. Rank and file members have got more control and have more influence in what goes on inside the TGW & than in the AUEW or the EEPU. But what Kitson did in this case was to allow a whole number of TGW & policies to effectively go by default.

'The so-called 'compromise' deal involves a new arrangement of the trade unions inside Leyland, with a severe sapping of any power the shop stewards have got and a no-strike clause. The TGW & had a policy of being opposed to these things. Yet they were agreed on the nod in the so-called improved offer. Kitson overturned a whole year or two years' work by the senior shop stewards inside BL by allowing this so-called improved offer to go forward.

'Leyland have not only got away with a 10 per cent wage cut, but have managed to show in every piece of legislation they were looking for over the last 18 months or so.'

'The new procedure agreement wipes out the rule of the shop steward and institutes a type of work council system where you've got representatives sitting in joint committees with management responsible for dealing with any sort of negotiations. It's like the old Whitley council system.'

'The vote at Cowley went the other way than at Longbridge. The three stewards gave their views on this:

'Bascially, Cowley felt more secure. They were in as good or even a better situation than Longbridge were last year. They've got the Acclaim, and the reorganisation means the Rover plant being shut down and jobs being moved across into Cowley. It looked to them as if they'd get a secure future. They've got weapons they can fight with, since the company can't afford to lose the Acclaim now.'

'Longbridge isn't as secure as it was last year. The Allegro is definitely known to be finishing at the beginning of next year. The Mini is working at a quarter of the capacity it was working at and there's doubt about how long it will carry on. There's only really the Metro - and now people are beginning to have doubts about the golden future the Metro promised. To people in Longbridge it looks now like just another in a wide range of similar cars. So there's great feelings of apprehension about the future at Longbridge.'

Bell to bell

But why were people who were frightened to keep up the wages strike back out of the gates a week later over what would seem to be a less important issue?

'On the surface of it it looks ridiculous that workers accept a 10 per cent wage cut and then walk out a few days later over the rest break thing.'

'But we faced the same position last year. At Easter the workforce was faced with this ultimatum -- accept this 92 page document -- if you start back after Easter you will be deemed to be accepting it'. People did start back. Yet within a few days they were fighting it.

'There was the dispute over topping up allowances for certain groups, which was very much a minor issue. But it was an issue that everyone could see. They were faced with it every day, it was a real genuine issue, and they thought that they were the only ones who knew what it was about.'

'National negotiations on national wage claims and procedure agreements tend to wash over the heads of workers. But when it comes to a question of actual working conditions, daily then they know what it's about and they are quite prepared to accept what no-one else knows what it's about, and they are prepared to fight on it.'

'Before then they've had back of the 92 page agreement that affects working conditions drastically, they've had resistance. Usually one part of the plant has been isolated, they've been out a couple of days, they've got broke and they've gone back. They haven't gained the support. That's the difference this time basically.'

'It's all confined to one area of the plant. But a lot of other workers have been ladda'd off and the feeling is still relatively solid.'

'In some areas of the plant the company hasn't really imposed the 92 page document yet. In other areas, where they have been working flat out from hell to help, the people really feel that the imposition of the rest allowance cuts on them was just the final straw.'

'It's very little to do with tea breaks. We don't have ten breaks as such. They're called relaxations allowances or rest allowances for a specific reason. You need the rest allowance to recover from the work and to have a chance of surviving. In the breaks which only last 15 minutes on the track, you have to go to the toilet, get yourselves some tea, go and get yourselves food if the canteens are open. For a bloke whose working himself into the ground to keep pace with the track these rest allowances are the only thing that keeps you sane. So it's not a tea break strike. That's the important thing.'

'It is a fatigue allowance. I was reading an article in Taylorism that some PFI fellow wrote. He was talking about the Bedoc system. Built into the timing on the job is the system of fatigue allowances. They calculate on the very cold scientific basis that the optimum work that they can get out of people spread over a period can only be reached if there is rest from fatigue. So the rest allowances are actually part of the calculation in getting the maximum efficiency out of a worker.'

'Without adequate breaks, the level of absenteeism rises. It reflects itself in the bloke who can't get in on the Friday or the Monday.'

'But the company think they've got the answer to that with the way they operate the disciplinary scheme. Half the people in our area have got written or further warnings on their necks at the moment.'

'The management are taking the Bedoc system to its ultimate, breaking down the fatigue allowance calculation by whipping out all the old people and the sick people and so on. When people come back after being sick, and sign off, and sign fit for lighter work, they've been telling them, "We've got no work for you, go back on the box or take your redundancy." They're trying to get rid of the old, the sick, the disabled and just to keep the young people. With three million unemployed, they don't think they have to worry about keeping people for a pick roll because they're fit for lighter work. They just want the young spinsters.'

'It's the law of the jungle up there. Only the fittest survive. If you're not prepared to supply the amount of energy they need, they get rid of you.'

'The pensions people did a survey a couple of
of weeks ago, and they reckon that in Longbridge there's only two people who will reach retiring age in the next twelve months.

The danger for the rest allowance strike at the time of the interview was that only part of the plant so far is affected - the body and assembly lines, as opposed to the part supplying engines for Cowley.

'Any strike can't stand still. It's either got to escalate or it's going to stagnate and deteriorate.'

Unfortunately, it was a fortnight before the senior stewards agreed to try to get the other sections out.

'At first they tried every bureaucratic manoeuvre under the sun to prevent a resolution for this going through the joint shop stewards. At the last meeting at the beginning of the dispute we put a resolution in, but we weren't allowed to move it because it hadn't been on the table for five days. At the second meeting, our resolution was talked out by another raised at the meeting. At the third meeting we found they'd moved round to our position - two weeks too late.'

The result was that a large section of the plant was not touched by the first two weeks of the strike.

Demoralisation

'In the track areas, on the body side and the assembly side, the argument was put successfully on the first day on the night shift that though management weren't imposing the cut in rest time on them yet, they had to take action. The shop stewards' advice to continue working normally didn't have much effect.

'But in the power and train area - which produces engines for Cowley - there wasn't the people there to put these arguments. The easy option was taken, so they found themselves working until such time as management feel the opportunity is there to impose what they want.'

The strike so far had been very passive.

'The overwhelming defeat and the overwhelming demoralisation that came out of the defeat on pay has had its effect on the people who would normally be arguing for picketing the gates, for taking action and activity. They just haven't had the energy to argue for those policies. The only people who've actually argued for them have been committed revolutionaries - basically the SWP and our contacts. And we are far too small to swing major issues like starting picketing.

'There's no号召 being produced, and so people have felt 'why bother picketing?' It's a very passive strike.'

Yet despite this:

'It's got to be pointed out that the present strike is the longest major strike in Longbridge for a good few years.'

'It's the longest strike I can recall, going back to 1983, which was the 13 week strike.'

The battle over pay in Leyland may have joined 1981's long list of defeats and catastrophes. But the one day of mass picketing and the subsequent rest break strike show that there is a minority of workers prepared to fight, despite everything. And that means Thatcher and Edwards cannot expect to get their way for ever.
Reaping a bitter harvest in the engineers' union

The latest batch of election results in the AUEW contain few surprises. They confirm the trend which was highlighted in 1977 when Terry Duffy, until then an unknown from Wolverhampton, beat Bob Wright as successor to Hugh Scallon.

Last year the trend was speeded up when Duffy stood for re-election and romped through on a first ballot (taking more votes than all the other candidates combined) to put him in the job for life.

This time round there were four elections for places on the seven-seat Executive Council. Again two of these were won outright by the 'moderates'. Jack Whyman demolished Roger Butler, one of the strongest Broad Left contenders from Southall District, in the London and Home Counties seat (13,581 votes to 6,706). In the North East Jim Murray, convener at Vickers and leading exponent of 'Workers' Plans' was hammered by George Arnold (12,934 votes to 4,695). The other two EC elections for the South Wales-West Country areas and Midlands-North West go to a second ballot which the right should win comfortably.

So far, so bad. But it doesn't get much better. Out of a total of seven elections for Divisional Organisers, four were won outright in the first ballot by the right-wing wiping out the hopes of key Broad Left candidates Derek Robinson and Ron Halverson in the process. To rub salt in the wound Robinson was beaten by Terry Duffy's brother, Dennis, in perhaps the most symbolic election of the lot. The vote was 9,064 to 4,325 — another clear majority of about two to one. Halverson went down by 4,224 votes to 2,874.

Curiously, the headline in the Morning Star which reported the results read: 'Left holds ground in AUEW poll'. Later the article admitted, 'the left was disappointed at the low votes declared for accomplished candidates... but no left positions were actually lost to the right'. Ron Greenwood might need this reporter in Spain.

Hardening attitudes

Inside the same issue of the Star there were three different analyses of the election results. The first two, completely contradictory, came from Ken Brett, who topped the poll in the battle to find a replacement for John Boyd as general secretary. First, he said, 'My emergence as the top candidate of the poll is inductive that members appreciate my record as assistant general secretary for 13 years, which they recognise as the necessary prerequisite for a competent general secretary.' But then, he went on, 'The maximum effort of all progressive members must now be marshalled to combat the machinations of the right wing forces and its agents in the media to reverse the result of this ballot.' Why stop now, Ken, when you were doing so well?

Brett, in fact, has virtually no chance in the second ballot when the votes of Gavin Laird (54,708) and Gerry Russell (21,805) will combine to destroy his first round vote of 55,143 votes.

However, the other, and much more serious, verdict on the results came from Derek Robinson who claimed his own defeat was the result of a 'fraud'. He had, he said, been 'guaranteed' at least 7000 votes but came out with less than 5000. So what happened? Did his own supporters exaggerate the 'guarantees' they could win from the members or did 2000 votes go down the pan at Peckham Palace?

Well, there is no shortage of evidence, of course, to show that procedures for counting ballot papers at Peckham Road are a farce. But that, in itself, is only a minor propaganda point. A little bit of fiddling at head office can no more explain a set of ballot results than it can make sense of the much more serious defeats workers have suffered in the last few years, at BL and elsewhere.

The 'fraud' charge only stands up in the sense that nigh on everything John Boyd does is 'fraudulent'. It would be rash to expect anything else from him. The mucking of Derek Robinson himself is one example. There's the Edward and Hugh case, the regular sell-outs of workers fighting back as at BL, Plasne, Laurence Scott and many more. The censorship of Brian Kelly's election address. Blatant manoeuvres on amalgamation. Abuse of the union journal. The bumping of Norman Atkinson. Attacks on AUEW conference delegations. All of these things are 'fraud'. But Boyd gets away with them, despite all the gnashing of teeth from the left, because the balance of forces, unfortunately, is still in his favour. And the election results show it.

The reasons why are not hard to find. Engineers have been hit as hard as any group of workers by redundancies, short time working, attacks on union organisation and erection of shop stewards power and influence. To hold any organisation together in the present industrial climate is a monumental, uphill struggle — and all the pressure is on to 'keep the head down'.

This is not a situation in which militants can expect massive victories, especially in major elections. Public humiliation at the hands of Boyd we need like a hole in the head. However, a solid minority does exist inside engineering, as elsewhere, which grows increasingly bitter with the treachery of the present leadership. That minority, and it is very small even if you include all the various factions which exist, must make its focus around every factory struggle which does take place.

Never is the difference between 'left' and 'right' so clear than when a group of workers are involved in struggle. Through solidarity work in support of disputes like Staffs Products or Laurence Scott, spreading the struggle around the country, a fighting opposition can be rebuilt on much stronger grounds than the electoral sands of the past.

Recent strikes at BL and at Rolls Royce in Scotland, and a number of smaller disputes, give much more cause for optimism than any of the AUEW ballots. That is where our future strength lies.

John Campbell

Derek Robinson's charges of fraud only stands up in the sense that nigh on everything John Boyd does is 'fraudulent'.

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Are the Tories finished?

The government's loss of a safe 17000 majority seat at Crosby followed on from some bitter criticism at the CBI conference at the beginning of last month. But its record is not simply one of failure from a ruling class point of view. Dave Beecham takes a closer look.

"Mad Monetarism" is a favourite phrase of the Labour left, union officials in particular. It lets them off the hook of having to explain what Thatcherism is about, what the serious aims of the Tory government are and, above all, what the employers think they can win from the crisis.

The fact that there is an economic and political logic to the government's strategy and the employers' offensive threatens anyone who believes in reforms or parliamentary roads... or reconstructing the Labour Party. The central aim of the employers is to shift a proportion of 'national wealth' from wages to profits, using the economic downturn to raise the level of exploitation, so that British capitalism is in a much stronger position to compete internationally in a recovery than it was during the recession of the mid-1970s.

The issue for the employers is productivity - which Socialists Review observed in September is a central part of the draft social contract. Economic Issues Facing the Next Labour Government, agreed between the TUC and the Labour Party.

The Problem

But they may not get it. The problem was well described in an article in the Investors Chronicle last June:

"An upturn is unlikely till next year and by then some of our slimmed-down companies will be close to starvation. Second, when demand does eventually pick up there will be considerable short-term productivity gains for the survivors. But management must then be able to resist the inevitable pressures to increase wages faster than productivity and to re-employ some of the 3,000,000 plus workers who will still be without jobs. This will be difficult. For the upturn will quickly bring about a profits boom and workers who have been forced to accept low wage increases in the recession will want a large slice of the cake."

It was this question - whether companies were 'slimmer, fitter and tauter' to use the Tory phraseology that dominated the CBI's national conference at the beginning of November. The issue was no longer whether they could shout loud enough for the government to hear their protests about interest rates, the National Insurance Surcharge etc. They were discussing the fact that some relation of the economy was necessary, and whether they could cope with the strains. In particular had they made enough gains on the shop floor, in terms of conditions, speed-up, use of machinery and so on, so that they could either resist or ride the pressure for higher wages when it comes? Not in 1981 or at the start of 1982 but in their view, at the back end of next year.

Pay in 1982

One speech especially at the CBI captured the mood. It was made by Ronald Utiger, chairman of British Aluminium, Tube Investments managing director and something of an unknown 'cadre' of the ruling class.

The gist of his argument was as follows. The monetarist argument has confused economic debate - there should now be 'a gradual recovery not a rush' enabling greater productivity and lower pay settlements to be built on.

Above all (he said) there should be a balanced recovery: Tory policy has been knocked off course by events in America; selective government investment in industry is required along with action to reduce employers costs rates, energy and national insurance. 'Simplistic arguments against a change in strategy should be rejected and it should be accepted that some risks have to be taken.' Under the present situation has equally big risks - a vicious circle. Finally, Utiger moved to his key point, the notion that 'any recovery will mean we lose control over pay':

'Think carefully about this argument, it is a danger common to any recovery at any time. Are those who use this argument really saying that we have got to continue in the present situation forever in order to control pay? I cannot believe that this conference can accept that.'

There are several points to emerge from this.

The struggle at Leyland has been just a dress rehearsal. The real battle on wages has yet to come. The employers and thus the government are most concerned about what happens in, say, 12 months time, when they think unemployment will not be working as effectively to frighten workers into submission.

Secondly, the intelligent ruling class view is that 'pure' monetarist policies have had it. There has to be state intervention: the economy is not a street-market' (to quote the chairman of Dunlop).

Next they are very worried about a sudden upturn. They do not believe they can control it. They are also concerned about alienating the union bureaucracy too much, especially with any big new legal attack on the unions. On the other hand they are aware that controlling militants will be very hard in any upturn. So they are taking changes which, ideally, allow them to choose the battle ground (as with the Employment Act) and which enable employers to take the offensive.

Hence the likely move, for example, to legalise victimisation by making it lawful to select strike leaders for the sack. The move to permit employers to sue unions for civil damages would be in the same vein. The big employers do not want to tackle the closed shop head on, nor do they want to make agreements legally binding. Both these moves might bring them up against their ultimate allies, the union bureaucracy.

Productivity Offensive

Behind all these hopes, fears and desires lies the main issue - productivity, and in particular whether the employers can get more out of workers in the same, or shorter, time; whether they can run their expensive machinery more continuously, for longer periods, in order to compete with their international rivals. They have overall problems, but in individual cases there has been a highly successful offensive in companies like Rolls-Royce, Perkins Engines and parts of GKN.

The battle the employers are really concerned about also show their priorities. The importance of the Longbridge relaxation time dispute has not been that it's leyland masses management out to 'get the unions', but that it's symbolic of the current offensive - that companies want to draw back time and want to intensity work, because if they don't do it now they will lose the opportunity.

The strategy of the more intelligent employers, faced with the wage rise in the week to 39 hours, is therefore, to use it to bring in wider changes: a new shift system, elimination of breaks with machines run continuously, changes to machine running, even wholesale moves to completely new

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working systems and new bonus schemes with cuts in hours beyond 39 a week, so long as workers can be made to work more efficiently.

At the same time, and on a much wider scale, there has been non-replacement, cuts in numbers of indirect workers, introduction of self-supervision, elimination of staff back-up, introduction of VDU's onto the shopfloor etc.

Some of these changes, unlike the BL stick-wielding approach, have been quite cunning: for example, the moves at Rolls-Royce and elsewhere to a 4½-day week, with a half-day Friday, in return for longer shifts on the other four days and the fact that maintenance is no longer done at weekend overtime rates.

The Problem Of Cadre

The existence of the alternative gives the centre of the Tory Party and the mainstream of the CBI a much greater authority. It means that there is a much greater chance of the 'moderate' group winning through in the latter part of the government's term of office. What the employers do not have, however, is any great confidence in their ability to deliver the goods. There is a problem of cadre.

One of the striking things about the collection of senior managers and directors that makes up the CBI conference is the large group of non-executives, who do not figure in the major policymaking; there is a large 'middle-group' content to go along with the mood for the most part (one year 'bust the unions' - the next year 'help the unemployed'); and there is a third group, almost entirely at the top table.

These men are over 55, and by and large over 60. They represent an age group which grew into positions of authority beginning with the last war; in most cases because they were trained in the state machine - the bureaucracy, the services, arms manufacture, the government scientific establishment. They are a very strong, forceful and relatively homogeneous group, which takes in a good section of the ruling class intelligence, the economic establishment etc.

But their feeling is one of weakness. There is no sign of any new group - what other reason can there be for someone as basically insignificant as Michael Edwardes exerting such an influence.

It is striking how old the senior men of the CBI and industry are and how there is a void of talent beneath them. The replacement for Sir John Meithven, Sir Terence Beckett, almost immediately fell ill. He in turn was 'replaced' by a stop-gap 'eminence grise', Sir Arthur Knight, the retired chairman of Courtaulds and the NCB. All the keynote speeches at the CBI's conferences are made by men near or beyond retirement age.

Worse still (for them) is the realisation that the last great restructuring of a major piece of British private capitalism was at GEC in the 1980s. The success on that occasion depended not on one man, Weinsock, but on a team of between a dozen and twenty senior managers who all had the same approach, and the same training. Today the restructuring of crucial sectors of (state owned) capital, British Steel and British Shipbuilders, depends on single Herculean figures imported by Thatcher - in these cases MacGregor and Atkinson.

There are rather subjective standards by which to judge GECing days. They win, nevertheless their standards. Their theme is international competitiveness - and they are competing against ruling classes either with a new, emergent, generation of cadres, or with a system that actually provides for the advancement of the top business cadre between the state and private industry (the former includes Germany, France, the US; the latter, Japan).

The Tories Can Win, If...

It is very important for us to realise that there is a serious ruling class strategy contained in Tory policies. Some of their mistakes - over interest rates, the value of the pound, inflation - were partly a result of their ideology, but only partly. In reality, they have been 'blown off course' (as Harold Wilson once claimed he was) by international events. You can't really have pure monetarism in one country, any more than you can have Bennism unless you have a ruthless dictator at the same time.

All the same despite the Tories' mistakes, they move into 1982 with the following advantages. They have reached 5 million unemployed without a major sustained protest. They have cut real pay without very much resistance. State owned industries - BL, Rolls-Royce, British Aerospace, British Steel, British Shipbuilders - are being successfully rationalised with relatively little opposition so far. They have been able to retreat from dangerous confrontations with the miners, dockers, firemen etc and have gained backdoor concessions, while at the same time dodging the weaker sections - hospital workers and civil servants. They have forced a lot of companies into a position where they have had to rationalise. They have succeeded in shifting the balance of power for the time being, and may yet succeed in shifting it further with the new Tobbit Bill.

But they have not crushed workers. The employers have only been able to get some productivity improvement in some factories. They have had to rely on trade union officials to get them off the hook on half-a-dozen separate occasions. They are internationally weak.

The fact remains that Thatcher still has two years to an election (a year if she chooses the spring of 1983 which is possible) and is faced with a Labour 'opposition' that seems already to have conceded the battle - especially the left, who don't quite know where the battle is. That is a pretty good position to be in, with the devastation that the Tories have presided over, and to a degree actively encouraged.

And, why couldn't they do with another five years?
The curious origins of Christianity

"Away in a manger, no crib for his bed;
The little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head."

Thus a famous Christmas carol, and it is important to remember that there lies an ancient religious core behind the orgy of commercial exploitation, the rituals of gluttony and drunkenness, the statistical rise in marriage break-downs and everything else we are about to endure. Whether the Nativity of Jesus Christ is the final cause of modern celebration or merely a convenient excuse for the collapse of some of the more objectionable of our social constraints, it is one of the few occasions on which modern British socialists have their attention drawn to the problems posed by religious belief.

It is therefore worthwhile asking what we know about the origins and history of what is still today the official religion of the British state. For a long time any such inquiry was an enterprise fraught with extreme dangers. Church and state together offered extreme discouragements. Torture and murder awaited believers who differed from the established churches merely on points of doctrine, let alone for those who questioned orthodoxy in its entirety.

The rise of modern capitalism, however, needed a vast expansion of scientific enquiry. It became increasingly difficult to stop the procedures developed to aid profitable activities such as navigation from spilling over into the investigation of Christianity itself.

There were still attempts to resist this process. Shelley was expelled from Oxford University in 1812 for writing The necessity of atheism. And when Bruno Bauer tried to write a critical history of Christianity in 1840, he was immediately expelled from his professorship in theology at Bonn University. Eventually, however, resistance became a hopeless task, and by 1862 the Anglican Bishop Colenso could publish his view that the Book of Genesis could not be taken as literal history.

Our main source for the origins of Christianity is the Bible. Since this is the work of self-confessed propagandists, it would be very useful to find some independent evidence. If we could find in the records of the time some information about Jesus or about his teaching, from a writer not influenced by Christianity, then we could give that a great deal more weight than the works of those who had an axe to grind.

But such sources are hard to find. As Gibson ironically remarked two hundred years ago:

"During the age of Christ, of his apostles, and of their first disciples, the doctrine which they preached was confirmed by innumerable prodigies. The lame walked, the blind saw, the sick were healed, the dead were raised, demons were expelled, and the laws of nature were frequently suspended for the benefit of the church. But the sages of Greece and Rome turned aside from the awful spectacle, and, pursuing the ordinary occupations of life and study, appeared unconscious of any alterations in the moral or physical government of the world."

"Under the reign of Tiberius, the whole earth, or at least a celebrated province of the Roman Empire, was involved in a preternatural darkness of three hours. Even this miraculous event, which ought to have excited the wonder, the curiosity, and the devotion of mankind, passed without notice in an age of science and history. It happened during the lifetime of Seneca and the elder Pliny, who must have experienced the immediate effects. Each of these philosophers, in a laborious work, has recorded all the great phenomena of nature, earthquakes, meteors, comets, and eclipses, which his indefatigable curiosity could collect. Both the one and the other have omitted to mention the greatest phenomenon to which the mortal eye has been witness since the creation of the globe."

Some non-Christian sources do contain evidence. The writings of the first century historian Josephus speak directly of Jesus. He wrote:

"Now about this time there arose Jesus, a wise man, if indeed he may be called a man. For he was a doer of marvellous acts, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with delight. And he won over to himself many Jews and many also of the Greek nation. He was the Christ. And when on the indictment of the principal men among us Pilate had sentenced him to the cross, those who before had loved him did not cease to do so. For he appeared to them on the third day alive again, the divinely inspired prophets having foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And until now the race of Christians, so named from him, is not extinct."

But Josephus was an educated and orthodox Jewish priest, and his work was largely concerned to record Jewish history after the community in Palestine had been shattered by the Romans in the year 70. Faced with the above passage, which clearly states that Jesus had the attributes of a god, we have a problem. For a strict monothelitist to call Jesus a god was a horrible blasphemy against Jehovah. Further, if Josephus recognised Jesus as a god, and one who fulfilled the prophecies of Judaism at that, then why should the remainder of the book not be marked by this momentous discovery?

One explanation, favoured by many Christians until very recently, would be that Josephus shared with the Jewish people in general a malignant rejection of the truth of Christianity explicable only in terms of some inherent vileness.

Fortunately, there is a more rational explanation of the passage. We know, from Christian sources, that the copies of Josephus circulating in the third century did not contain this passage but that those of the fourth century did. The passage is therefore what scholars would call a "later Christian interpolation": plain people like us would call it a blatant forgery.
This sort of thing pervades the study of the whole question. Quite apart from the accidental ravages of time, the evidence has been doctored time and again. It is therefore very difficult to prove, from non-Christian sources, the historical existence of Jesus. Contemporary opinion seems to be prepared to accept at least the probability of his existence, but can say very little more.

The fact of Jesus's existence, however, is of minor importance, since what is at stake is the nature of his teaching and the question of his relationship to God. We have to turn to Christian writings today called the New Testament. But these cannot solve the problem either, since we know, for certain, the following things about them:

- they were collected long after the events they describe.
- they were written long after the events they describe and are not the work of their traditional authors.
- they contain demonstrable errors.
- they contain two different fundamentally contradictory accounts of Jesus.

Let us look at these remarkable facts in turn.

We know from Christian sources that there were a mass of documents circulating in the first two centuries after the life of Jesus. It is not until 180 that Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons, starts to argue that there are four gospels, and only four, which deserve to be taken seriously. These now form the ones in our bibles and are called the 'canonical' gospels. Some of the others are rejected as the 'Apocrypha', and are accorded no serious status by modern Christianity. The principles as to what should be kept in the canon and what left out was taken by interested parties more than a century after the formation of the early Christian church.

We have, therefore, a fair degree of certainty that the canonical gospels are the only reliable accounts of Jesus's life. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, were composed in the period between roughly 70 and 150. They are not, therefore, contemporary records of the events they claim to recount word for word, but are the product of the early Christian church.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke are known as the 'synoptic' gospels, because they contain a great deal of common material, often the same down to the phrasing, which means that they must have had a common source, now lost. Matthew and Mark have additional material in common, again probably from a lost source.

The gospel of John is quite different. Both in the story it tells and in the philosophy underlying it, and so must have been written independently. Of the four, the original version of Mark is probably the earliest, but has been much altered since.

We find some obvious errors if we look at the content of these works. Luke, for instance, claims that the home town of Jesus was Nazareth but that he was born in Bethlehem. Matthew, more simply, just gives Bethlehem as point of origin. Luke tells a nice little story to fit his two towns together: that Jesus's family lived in Nazareth, but had to move to Bethlehem, the home of their ancestors, for the purpose of a Roman census. But there is no record of the existence of the town of Nazareth before the third century, when it was site of Christian pilgrimage. And, still more damning, the vast and cosmopolitan Roman Empire did not require its subjects to return to the home of their ancestors for the purposes of a census.

In fact, the probability is that the location 'Nazareth' is the result of a process of corruption by which the name Nazarama, applied to a Jewish sect of the time, was misinterpreted as referring to a place.

'Even the most elementary study of the gospels reveals that there are two quite different bodies of doctrine present within them.'

It is open to a Christian to reply that all of this is true, as it is, but that, if we take only that the gospels are unreliable as evidence, have only the status of heresy, are much corrupted and contain minor errors, what matters is their substantial teachings, which could still be true despite the fallibility of human transmitters.

Unfortunately, this line of argument is disingenuous are for Christianity. For, even the most elementary study of the gospels reveals that there are two quite different bodies of doctrine present within them.

Take the simple, but vital, question of the antecedents of Jesus. Matthew and Luke alone give an account of Jesus's family tree, although they differ as to who exactly begat whom. But they both also retell the story of the virgin birth which reads all of those antique Jewish conceptions quite meaningless, since Joseph had nothing whatsoever to do with the conception of Jesus. Despite this, Luke, for example, repeatedly refers to Joseph as the 'father' of Jesus and to Joseph and Mary as his 'parents'.

John tells quite a different story. For him, there is no messing about either with elaborate genealogies or virgin births. The 'word' has always existed, and it descended on Jesus when John the Baptist saw the dove fly out of heaven.

The later books do not help us much either. Revelations, for example, has very little to say about Jesus and is mainly concerned with an imaginative account of the fall of the Roman Empire. Paul, on the other hand, occasionally mentions Jesus but shows no knowledge or interest in his life and teaching, claiming to have gained his insights by direct revelation.

If we return to the question of the birth of Jesus, we find the key to these two distinct traditions. The lineage of the house of David is important, indeed vital, to the Jewish tradition of prophecy, in which the Messiah had to fulfill a number of conditions. The virgin birth, on the other hand, is a philosophically distinct tradition, partly of Grecian origin, which looked to a divine being for salvation. The Jewish Messiah was a man, the 'Word made flesh' was a god.

The defence of their local god, Jehovah, was, for the Jewish masses, one of the ways in which they struggled against the burdens imposed by local rulers who made deals with foreign masters.

The traditions were quite different. The Jewish tradition was not remarkable in being monotheistic; that was quite common in the ancient world. It was remarkable in being a popular monotheism.

The geographical position of Palestine meant that it had always been part of the border country between the great despots of antiquity, and so its population had never been crushed in the way that the peoples of the valleys of the Nile or the Euphrates were. An independent state had stuttred along, relying almost with this or that empire as the chance came.

The Jewish tradition was thus one of popular revolution. Time and again it proved the rallying point for the revolt of the masses. Its Messiah was very much of this world, uniting kings and oppressors, and ushering in a millennium of real material benefits for the people. The beloved Messias was considered as the leader of the greatest of the empires, the Romans, this tradition based. Between 66 and 70, it led to a great revolt, culminating in a heroic defence of Jerusalem against the legions of Titus and a final suicidal defence of Masada on the Dead Sea. The Jewish Jesus, along with John the Baptist and many others, was one of the organisers of this tradition. The 'Roshannah', with which he was welcomed to Jerusalem originally meant 'free us'.

The divine Jesus was quite another matter. His enemy was not the Romans but death. His Kingdom was not of this world. He preached salvation in another and better world.

For this other tradition, slavery and oppression were light matters to be borne patiently in the hope of salvation and resurrection. This was not a tradition of revolt but of acceptance. It was the religion of those who had been crushed by the chains of a slave empire and who had no will left to fight back against their conquerors. It was a tradition which compromised with this world and its powers, and which made no distinction between slave and master, rich and poor, on the road to salvation.
At the formal level, these two traditions were irreconcilable. Generations of atheists have amused themselves pointing out the two threads in the Bible. And generations of Christians have laboured in vain to reconcile these opposites. We cannot say with certainty which represented the actual teaching of Jesus; but all of the weight of probability points to the Jewish Jesus of revolt. The divine Jesus is a later addition by people who had neither the courage nor the opportunity to carry through the teachings of a revolutionary.

In its historical context the matter is relatively simply resolved. The teaching of the Jewish Jesus was part of the great wave of anti-Roman agitation which originated in Palestine but spread through the Jewish communities of the Mediterranean cities, to the poor of the Roman Empire prior to the great rising of 66. After the crushing of that revolt, and just at the time our gospels were starting to take shape, that teaching was modified to take account of new conditions, this time of despair rather than of hope.

A vital part of this process was to break away from the Judaic tradition. Consider what the Law meant, not as a set of formal rules, but as a social programme in a slave empire. A compulsory day of rest for everybody, a concrete slogan for a slave. A prohibition on usury is a revolutionary slogan for a poor peasant labouring in debt. The code we find today in Deuteronomy and regard as mere ritual was, in classical antiquity, a set of ideas which led the mind of slave and slave-owner alike to thoughts of revolution. Against that tradition, the developing Christian church doctored the records, and imported a new and different tradition in which the Law was nothing.

The composite which emerged had very little that was original.

From existing Jewish prayers it compiled what we know today as The Lord’s Prayer. From existing Jewish teaching it compiled what we know today as The Sermon on the Mount. From pagan tradition it took the communal meal of wine and bread which we know today as Holy Communion. From the Samaritans it took the notion of the Holy Spirit as a dove. From the Syrian Adonis, the Phrygian Attis, the Greek Dionysus, the Egyptian Osiris and the Persian Mithras, it took the common idea of the virgin birth. From these religions, too, it took the idea of the death of the god and his resurrection, of immortality and of the god’s birth at the winter solstice. Even the symbol of the cross came from the worship of Osiris.

In all of these borrowings there was little unique about the new church. For an empire which lined the Appian way from Rome to Naples with crucified slaves after the suppression of the Spartacus revolt there was little to note in one more such incident.

But one borrowing was crucial. The popular nature of Judaism had given it an organisational form quite different from the formal cults of official religion. Christianity took over this vital ingredient and thus changed itself from a transitory cult to a permanent church.

At first, this church was a very democratic one, without hierarchy and without even doctrinal agreement. Many of the documents which are today studied as sacred texts were originally written in early factional fights.

Social conditions in the Roman Empire were favourable to the growth of religion. The Roman Empire had turned the Mediterranean world into a vast prison camp ruled by a single despot. For those prevented by terror from any part in the things of this world—especially the slaves but also the free women—the idea of another world was a powerful one. As the church grew, it attracted wealth and, with it, a hierarchy. Onto its stubborn organisation, the church grafted a stable bureaucracy.

As the vast Empire decayed from within, ruined by its own success, the church became more and more the sole reliable organisation. While it grew, it remained a minority religion, largely urban in character; our very word "pagan" originally meant "country dweller".

But the church moved further and further towards paganism, too. The doctrine of the trinity, over which much blood and ink were shed, conduced the point of polytheism to the ancient mysteries. The cult of the Virgin conduced the point of the mother goddess. The transformation of local gods into saints conduced the adaptation. Soon idols were admitted to the church in the form of images and holy relics.

Thus a church which had been born in revolt and which had survived intermittent persecution came to conquer the Roman Empire. In 317, the emperor Constantine, battling against rival candidates, adopted Christianity, although he postponed his baptism to just before his death. Although it was to be more than sixty years before the Christians got their way and were officially allowed to persecute non-believers, the church was now effectively part of the state and its future was assured.

But we might ask who had conquered whom? In 366 there was a conflict over the succession to the seat of Peter between Damascus and Ursinus. Damascus became Pope by the simple expedient of hiring gladiators; 137 dead bodies were counted in the cathedral after his victory. And over what were they fighting? The crown with which Damascus was awarded was the crown of the ancient priests of Jove, and the chair upon which he sat was the holy chair of Mithras.

There is nothing in the record of Christianity to differentiate it from any other religion. Even in its early history, it meant many different things to many different people. Since then, the same form has stretched even further to fit new times and new needs. At times the face of the other world has been the excuse for inaction in this world. At other times the original revolutionary impulse has been reborn in millenial movements struggling for freedom.

In all its forms it answers to the needs of men and women burdened and heavily laden. It gives them an idea of happiness which is not present on this earth.

To end with a famous quotation: "Religious suffering is at the same time an expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of heartless world and the soul of soulless circumstances. It is the opium of the people."

Colin Sparks

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For a long time Tariq Ali was probably Britain's best known revolutionary. Now he has decided to leave the International Marxist Group and apply for membership of the Labour Party. Here he argues with us that his decision is a correct one—and Pete Goodwin and Chris Harman reply, restating our case for building an independent, revolutionary party.

"Neither to laugh nor to cry, but to understand" (Spinoza)

In a letter to The Guardian (23 November 1981) Chris Harman suggests that by joining the Labour Party I am abandoning Marxism and repudiating the core of my remarks made during "the debate of the left": if this were true then, of course, there would be no point in argument. I could be easily denounced as another in the long line of revisionists, social-traitors, renegades, etc., and that would be true. But Chris Harman is fully aware that matters are not so simple.

When I first came to Britain in the mid-sixties one of the first left papers that I read was The Labour Worker (if I recall correctly the editor was Alan Barchard) which was littered with articles bearing the signatures of Y or Yr Z with the Constituency Labour Party they belonged to mentioned in brackets.

True that was a long time ago and we have seen many changes since that time. One of these is that the far left is stronger than it was. But are we qualitatively in a different league?

I think not. Even if all the far-left groups were united they would still not be as strong (especially in terms of a proletarian cadre) as was the Communist Party of the twenties.

The point I am trying to make is the following: we are confronted with a crucial strategic choice today and if the wrong decision is made (as it was at the recent SWP conference) then there is a real danger of isolation, reinforcement of a leftist mentality and objective pressures in the direction of becoming a sect.

I have always been in favour of a strong collaboration with the SWP and its predecessor and my attitude has not changed because I have left the IMG. It remains the same.

The debate between us revolves round analysing the important developments taking place in British politics. Socialist Review as well as other journals on the left including the Labour left tended to dismiss the formation of the SPD as an irrelevance. In "Gang show on the road?" you refused to accept the challenge being posed by the traditional bureaucratic leadership of the Labour Party. You wrote:

The apparently impressive showing for the centre party in opinion polls is almost certainly not going to be translated into electoral success. Just ask the simple question: can Jenkins or Williams stand anywhere against sitting Labour MPs and win seats? The answer must be ten-to-one against success for them.

The string of SDP successes in local elections in Labour strongholds is an ominous pointer in another direction. You subsequently corrected your misinterpretation and the last issue of SR accurately described the class character of the SDP. It should have made an additional point, namely, that the SDP electorate has a multi-class character. Unfortunately it has received tens of thousands of working class votes. In reality what is taking place is the emergence of a purely bourgeois alternative to the Tories.

It is the defection of a representative layer of the Labour right to form the SDP that confronts the labour movement with its most serious crisis since the thirties. The traditional leadership is assailed from the right by the SDP and their supporters in the Parliamentary Labour Party and from the left by a rank-and-file led by Tony Benn.

This crisis won’t blow over quickly. It has deep roots in British capitalism’s paralyzing disorders and the prolonged experience of the Wilson-Cripps Labour government. What is really taking place is that the entire tradition of Labourism is being called into question on the left as well as the right.

It is the closed and oligarchic character of the British state that makes Benn’s radical-democratic reforms of the parliamentary apparatus frightening for the ruling class. Abolition of the House of Lords would certainly not cure unemployment (Denis Healey often makes this point!), but it would weaken the undemocratic bourgeois system of political domination and weaken the system of patronage which has served both the bourgeois and Labour bureaucrats so well over the past six decades.

The Benn movement is a current in ferment, wide open to serious programmatic and strategic discussion and, in general, in favour of alliances with extra-parliamentary forces. At the same time it takes the battle into the Labour Party very seriously and has little sympathy for ultra-left or anarcho-syndicalist ideas.

Benn’s support for measures of rank-and-file democracy initiated by the Campaign for Democracy in the Labour Party was of key importance in helping to push through the reforms inside the party. His opposition to the right-wing policies of previous Labour governments has already produced results. Paul Foot and I pointed out in Socialist Worker he has moved closer to our view on that particular question since the ‘debate of the decade’ and his vigorous championing of conference decisions has created a new situation inside the Labour movement.

The size of Benn’s meetings in right-wing Labour strongholds like Newcastle and Leeds during the deputy leadership campaign was incredible. Almost all the Vietnamese Solidarity Campaign and the Anti-Nazi League had meetings of that size in provincial centres. Two thousand in Newcastle and four thousand in Leeds turned up to hear Benn despite

The Character Of Bennism

Many of the points made in Socialist Review’s special issue on Bennism in July are uncontroversial. But you are wrong in relation to the likely impact of a Bennite programme on the ruling class.

The central characteristic of Bennism is that, while it is undoubtedly a left-reformist current, it is not at the present time an expression of the left bureaucracy of the Labour movement. The hysteria which greeted Benn’s decision to stand as a deputy leader from left bureaucrats is well-known.

What this crucially important fact indicates is that the movement can either continue to move leftwards or become a left cover for the bureaucracy and a future Labour government. In my opinion the activity of socialists is not unimportant in determining the direction such a movement takes.

Left programmes can be anaesthetized by the dominant sections of the ruling class without playing a reactionary role at any given moment in the class struggle. The Bennite programme possesses both these features.

The Bennite programme is left reformist in its aims and methods: it does not involve the expropriation of the capitalist class or the replacement of the capitalist state by a proletarian one. Consequently its strategic methods are rooted in bourgeois reformism on the grounds of the bourgeois legal and parliamentary order. The apex of Bennism is legislative action by a Labour government backed by strong popular support and implemented by the state bureaucracy under mass pressure through the established legal-constitutional methods.

At the same time, Benn’s programme of reforms will meet fierce resistance from the capitalist class and its state bureaucracy, partly because of the socio-political content of the measures themselves—which would hit sections of the capitalist class—and more importantly because of the popular political impact of Bennism which could throw up powerful working class currents on the left and throw the bourgeoisie on the defensive.

The Character Of Bennism

Many of the points made in Socialist Review’s special issue on Bennism in July are uncontroversial. But you are wrong in relation to the likely impact of a Bennite programme on the ruling class.

The central characteristic of Bennism is that, while it is undoubtedly a left-reformist current, it is not at the present time an expression of the left bureaucracy of the Labour movement. The hysteria which greeted Benn’s decision to stand as a deputy leader from left bureaucrats is well-known.

What this crucially important fact indicates is that the movement can either continue to move leftwards or become a left cover for the bureaucracy and a future Labour government. In my opinion the activity of socialists is not unimportant in determining the direction such a movement takes.
Why you are wrong

Chris Harman and Pete Goodwin

Tariq’s argument for joining the Labour Party rests on an analysis of ‘important developments in British politics.’ We think the argument is wrong.

First, because there are some serious flaws in Tariq’s analysis of current political developments.

Second, and more fundamentally, because even if he were right on every point about current developments, that still leaves a yawning gap at the end of his argument.

We will start with current developments.

Tariq makes a lot of the growth of the SDP. Of course he is right that earlier this year we grossly underestimated their electoral prospects. Now, after Warrington, Croydon, Crosby, and a host of council by-elections, we are more than ready to eat humble pie. Tariq is right that the SDP does pose a desperately serious electoral threat to Labour.

But he is wrong about the likely consequences of this for Labour. He (and, he claims, Tony Benn) understand that Labour’s only serious electoral chance lies in turning the entire organisation into a gigantic lever of popular mobilisations.

The SDP threat will therefore, in Tariq’s view, make it in the interests of even the most craven electoralists to move left. Hence his optimism about continued advance by the left in the party.

All the evidence, however, points to the SDP threat having exactly the opposite effect. It is reinforcing the traditional calls for party unity. To Tariq and us, Michael Foot may sound pretty pathetic when he clams to speak for ‘the sick and tired brigade.’ But he is getting an increasing echo.

Clearly Foot already has the ‘soft lefts’, the Kinnocks and the Silkins, sewn up. But the pressure for ‘unity or else we’ll throw away the election’ is already making inroads into the ‘hard left’. The Labour Co-ordinating Committee declares a moratorium on discussing whether Benn should stand again for deputy leader. Bennite GLC councillors mutter about Ken Livingstone opening his mouth at the wrong time. One could give a lot more examples.

Above all there is the fairly miserable record of the reselection conferences. Tariq should read the interview with LCC Secretary Nigel Stanley we publish in this issue. As Nigel makes clear there is no mood for compromise. The nearer the election gets, the more the SDP threat firms up, the more that mood will eat into the Bennites.

But it is not just the SDP threat that will tame the Bennites. It is also the trade union bureaucracy. Traditionally the trade union bureaucracy has been the power behind the scenes in the Labour Party, emerging more openly when the party is in difficulties. Things are no different today.

Not even the extreme right wing of the union bureaucracy shows any serious sign of decamping to the SDP. The union bureaucracy has now got what it wants in the Labour Party in terms of Michael Foot as leader and the Alternative Economic Strategy (TESC) style as policy. A large chunk of it would no doubt be quite happy to see Dennis Healey fall under a bus tomorrow. But above all it wants unity round Foot (or if he can’t do the job Silkin or Shore).

Tariq would probably agree with this. But he underestimates its importance because he believes that Bennism is still the present time an expression of the left bureaucracy of the Labour movement.

Of course, not every Bennite is a trade union bureaucrat. But Bennite politics is very closely linked to the left trade union
bureaucracy. It draws some of its strongest support from middle levels of bureaucracy. It does not organise in opposition to its upper levels. It may be that sometimes it goes 'too far' for some of the top 'left' union leaders. But these now have a weapon, in terms of the ballots that delivered the NUPE and FBU votes to Healey, that they can use against the Bennites if they try and go too far again.

The Bennites have two choices. Either they can take the struggle into the rank and file of the unions, which means not just fighting on Benn for deputy but on day to day economic struggles which must certainly would bring them into vicious conflict with the left bureaucrats, or they can compromise. All the traditions and the arguments of the Bennites indicate that most of them will choose compromises although occasionally rebelling against its consequences with wild, but shortlived, swings to the left.

One other point about current developments. For all its real importance, the growth of the new Labour left still leaves the Labour Party an electoral machine, with a low level of participation in its month to month activities and dominated by the politics of committee and manoeuvre. Calls for a 'mass campaigning party', from for instance Peter Hain, have not made more than the tiniest dents in that.

So we think Tariq has seriously misestimated the prospects for the Bennite left in the Labour party. For the reasons we have given we believe that the vast majority of the Bennites will be willingly or unwillingly drawn into the 'bureaucratic dance' once again. That they will, however grudgingly, unite behind a leadership centred on Foot-Shore-Rinnoe et al, in which honoured seats are kept for Healey and Hattersley (and Benn if he behaves). This process is already well under way.

But suppose it is we who have got this wrong. Suppose the Bennites do continue to 'blaze away' and suppose they blast their way through to a Bennite leadership of the Labour Party. And suppose that this transformed Labour Party wins an election and forms a government. And suppose that it does indeed start pushing through a popular, radical reformist programme.

What happens then?

As Tariq quite rightly notes, this will upset the ruling class. In the London clubs and at society balls, in officers messes and at legal dinners, there will be open talk of resistance. The Telegraph, the Mail, the Express will shriek bitterly. There could even be abortive attempts by sections of the ruling class to upset the government immediately.

But the bulk of the ruling class—the most experienced capitalistic class in the world—will react rather differently. The inner eneaves of the Bank of England, the CBI, the treasury, the big banks, will endeavour to work out a coherent strategy for dealing with the government. If indeed it has popular support they will disown any premature attempts against it.

Instead they will put it quite bluntly to the radical ministers that they will cooperate with them—providing the cooperation is reciprocated.

Resistance

In this way they will embroil the government in their own tentacles, progressively reducing its opportunities for radical action at a later stage. Meanwhile, they will expect that as the 'normal' symptoms of capitalist crisis continue to express themselves—aggravated by the lack of confidence of big sections of capital in the government—unemployment will grow, prices will soar, the government will lose its popularity, and the ground will be prepared for a more direct ruling class assault upon it at a later stage.

This scenario is not based upon idle speculation. It is based upon past experience of radical reformist governments coming to power with mass backing. It is what happened, for instance in Germany when the Kaiser's rule collapsed in November 1918. The great industrialists, the state bureaucrats, the officer corps, were prepared to cooperate with a 'socialist' government that had just banished the emperor (not merely the House of Lords) — and for the first few weeks there were not only right 'socialists' in that government, but men like Emil Barth, a leader of the Berlin revolutionary shop stewards, compared with whom Tony Benn seems like a member of the Primrose League.

But the 'socialists' had to pay a price for this cooperation. They had to turn against their own followers with Barth, for instance, denouncing workers who went on strike for 'besmirching the revolution with wage demands'.

A similar scenario was played out in Spain in the summer and autumn of 1936. In most of the major cities that made up the Republican zone at the beginning of the Civil War, power was lay with workers' organisations. Men who more natural to come to head the government than Largo Caballero, a former socialist minister, like Benn, swinging very much to the left as a result of his experiences in office, booting his agreement with State and Revolution—and gaining from the Tariqs of 1936 the title of 'the Spanish Lenin'.

What remained of the state machine and the bourgeoisie in the Republican zone had little choice but to cooperate with Caballero. This did not, however, prevent them laying down terms for the cooperation. Caballero had to agree to an ending of the 'excesses' carried through by the workers movement, to the condemnation of 'wild expropriation of property, to the imposition of discipline in the armed forces. And the repatriation of those foreign powers who might conceivably support the Republic.

The example of Chile is much more recent, and people should need no reminding of it. However, a certain amount of rewriting of history has been taking place on the left of late, and certain points have to be emphasised. For two years the Chilean bourgeois did collaborate with Allende—in order to entrap and deal with him at a later stage. In return 'all' they demanded was that Allende do the reasonable thing—condemn strikes like those of the copper miners that were 'damaging the country' and recognise the 'constitutional' and 'non-political' character of the Pinochet coup. And Allende gladly did— he was after all a reformist, who believed in reforming institutions, not in revolutionary change.

The end result in each case was far from the revolutionary outcome Tariq implies is inevitable. In Germany the left socialists were forced out of office after eight weeks, the right socialists after 18 months. In Spain, Caballero and the left socialists were allowed to remain in office eight months, before giving way to progressively more right wing governments. In Chile the generals literally did support Allende as a rope supports a hanging man in September 1973 men who had sat in his own ministries and maintained discipline in his armed forces organised the bombing of his presidential palace, and the murder of tens of thousands of worker activists.

Is there anything in Bennism to indicate that it would, if left to itself, lead to a different outcome?

Tariq claims Bennism is a 'reformist' but 'not a bureaucratic' current. If it ever comes to power, it is in reformism that will matter. For it means that even if it trends on a few House of Lords ears, it will, willingly.
collaborate with the main sections of capital. For this is something already written down in black and white in its programme.

Amazingly, Tariq nowhere refers to the actual ideas propagated by the Bennites. Yet these are explicitly collaborationist ideas. What else is the Alternative Economic Strategy but a scheme to pressure big business into working with the government and the unions? What else does Tony Benn mean when he talks about ‘the democratic tripartite principle’? Why else continual harping on about ‘planning agreements’? Why else do none of the ‘hard’ Labour lefts call for more than 25 per cent public ownership and then go on to argue that their programme of economic nationalism will benefit all of British industry (including the 75 per cent that would continue to make profits for private capital)?

Tariq writes (in City Limits, 27 November) that ‘at the last Labour Party conference a new socialist party could be seen struggling to emerge from the shell of Labourism’.

But as a revolutionary of 14 years standing, he should recognise that even if he is right, it is a reformist ‘socialist’ party — one whose ideas would lead it to fall straight into the trap of collaborationism that destroyed the left socialists in Germany, Spain and Chile physically as well as politically.

**Control**

Collaborationism is not something which we can merely foresee happening in the distant future. Where the left Labour hold control of local councils, you can see it in the here and now. Livingstone’s GLC has seen no way to improve London’s transport services other than imposing increases in the tugs regressive, anti-working class form of taxation (as Jim Kincaid showed in SR of July). At the same time, its ‘solution’ to unemployment in London is to pay a left academic £25,000 a year (again out of workers’ rates) to ‘attract’ private industrialists to invest in the city. Is it surprising that it is seen as sufficiently distant and remote for a proportion of working people to vote social democratic? What happens with Bennism in one city, can happen just as easily with Bennism in one country.

It is, of course, true that as a hypothetical left Labour government runs into trouble, there will be bitterness among its supporters with arguments about alternatives, and even wild talk from ministers. But that is not at all the same thing as the bulk of its supporters — let alone its key figures — moving over automatically to a politics that goes beyond collaborationism in time to prevent disaster. People do not move over to the need for revolutionary measures against capital merely as a mechanical reaction to the failure of reform.

There has to be a pole of attraction arguing for quite a different sort of politics — a pole that exists in every workplace, every shop stewards committee, every locality. And the argument to be effective cannot be a purely ideological one. It has to be an argument in practice as well as theory, basing itself upon working class struggles against the effects of collaborationism. Organising these struggles, giving them direction and showing that the self activity of workers there is an alternative to what the left parliamentarians offer them.

Tariq will, no doubt, claim that it is possible to build that alternative pole of attraction inside the reformist party. Yet all past experience shows otherwise. The left inside a reformist party spends its time arguing with the leaders in the membership meetings and committees. It does not go out to organise workers in the factories and housing estates for immediate struggle against those leaders. That is why, although there have often been cases where large sections of reformist parties have split off in a revolutionary direction after reformist policies have led to defeat (Germany and Italy in 1920-21), there is no case of the left within a reformist party being able to develop an independent revolutionary politics in time to prevent defeat.

Things can be no different with the British Labour Party. The experience of nearly 90 years is that revolutionaries who join it with the best intentions soon get entrapped into its structures, seeing the battle to pack out GMCs and selection conferences as more important than those on the factory floor.

The very structure of the Labour Party ensures this. It is built upon the separation of the political and the industrial — of politics and workers’ struggle. Being ‘practical’ in Labour Party terms means using the affiliated trade union bodies to support what you are doing in parliament, the local council or the GMC, not proving the relevance of your political beliefs by leading the day-to-day struggle of workers.

Tariq will be as much subject to this logic as anyone else. We can say with certainty that the longer he remains in the Labour Party, the less he will resemble the revolutionary we used to know.

Tariq has one argument left to him. The revolutionary left has become a ‘ghetto’ (his phrase in City Limits), ‘qualitatively in the same league’ as it was back in 1967 when we used to produce Labour Worker.

Things may seem like that to someone who has been in the IMG, which with 500 members is still little bigger than IS (as the SWP was called) was then. But it does not at all seem like that to us. The SWP is a small party with only 4,500 members, and we have only grown slowly over the last couple of years. Nevertheless, we manage to have a presence in 90 per cent of the workers’ struggles that takes place — if not leading them, at least providing fraternal advice that makes sense to many of those involved. That is a qualitatively different situation to 1967.

The place our members spend their time is not ‘the ghetto’, but the picket line, the shop stewards meeting, the anti-Nazi demonstration, the student occupation (although Tariq does not seem to notice it, such things still occur), the CND activity. In all of these we can work alongside and discuss with people who are influenced by Benn — but without suffering the constraints which inevitably impede the arguments of socialists who join the Labour Party.

**Bennites**

If Tariq had chosen to join the SWP rather than the Labour Party, he would have been working alongside Bennites, but arguing against them. He would have been agreeing with them on the need for a better world, and then arguing that only revolutionary action, not reselection or deputy leadership elections, could get it. He would have been insisting that the road to revolutionary action is paved now with every act of workers’ resistance, however meagre, and he would have become obsessed with the tactics and strategies needed to lead that resistance to victory — something the Bennites hardly think of.

As it is he mates his criticisms of Benn — he does not mention his nationalism or his faith in class collaboration — as if you need to drop arguments of principle in order to fight alongside people against common enemies.

Well, we have not needed to drop such arguments. We hope, even at this late hour that Tariq will think again about following a course that leads to doing so.
The Lothian medicine comes south

A half day strike of teachers and local authority workers in London was due to take place on 1 December in protest at the new Tory proposals for reshaping local authority finance. But few workers outside local authority employment understand their significance as yet. Gareth Jenkins explains.

Among Labour-controlled councils the name of Heseltine evokes a mixture of anger and panic. For good reason. The Tory Environment Secretary’s proposals, now speeding through parliament and likely to be on the statute book by early December, put an end to some of the most cherished illusions about their ability to achieve reforms at local government level.

Once they are in effect, local councils will lose virtually all the autonomy and have to act as mere tools of national government. This means that Labour councils will be forced to act as rubber stamps for Tory policies. What has already been imposed in Scotland where resistance from Lothian Regional Council collapsed ignominiously— is now being copied south of the border. At the heart of Heseltine’s legislation lies a complex web of controls designed to stop ‘profligate’ local councils in England and Wales from using the rates option to pay for services that would otherwise be cut as a result of the government starving them of funds.

The Tories, of course, have made no bones since coming to office about their intentions. Most councils, under threat of future financial penalties, have told the line: but some, most notably Lambeth Council (under Ted Knight), and now the Greater London Council, led since May by Ken Livingstone, have opted to resist cutbacks in jobs and services (and indeed to go for some expansion) by raising extra revenue via the rates.

Ken Livingstone, in particular, has argued (see Socialist Review 1981:6) that rate increases, far from simply passing the cuts on, have a progressive, redistributive element that acts in defence of working class interests. On that basis, the GLC went ahead with its manifesto promise to slash London Transport fares and paid for it by a supplementary rate demand which came flooding through people’s letterboxes just over a month ago.

Undoubtedly it was paid for too in terms of the Labour Party losing the Croydon parliamentary by-election and the St Pancras GLC by-election. The SDP have been able to capitalise on the pervasive discontent about yet another burden on living standards (in some cases, rates becoming larger than rents). The Tory government—after reducing grants to the GLC so as to make the supplementary rate twice as high as it needed to be—taking steps to close off the rates option once and for all.

What the Heseltine legislation proposes is as follows. First, a cash limit will be placed on each local authority’s expenditure. On the basis of its own unit-cost analysis of items of expenditure (for example, the average national cost of educating under-fives), Whitehall will calculate annually what it reckons each authority needs to spend, to which it will then add a percentage ‘tolerance’ to take account of local factors. (It is obvious, by the way, that this hits the large urban centres hardest as their needs are likely to be much greater than the shire counties.)

This ‘Grant Related Expenditure’, as it’s called, then forms the basis of all subsequent operations. Authorities will still be able to fix rates in the traditional manner, but only as a proportion of the Grant Related Expenditure (with central government providing the remainder via the Rate Support Grant).

The real purpose of Heseltine’s legislation is to force those Labour-controlled councils...who have persistently defied the Tories, into imposing massive cuts and redundancies.

Any local authority whose expenditure is far larger than that warranted by the government’s own estimate, is any authority that has not cut back on jobs or services, is then faced with a huge problem: how does it bridge the gap between what it wants to spend and what the new proposed legislation allows it to spend?

Traditionally, as we have seen, it could levy a larger or a supplementary rate, thus making itself less dependent on central government grants.

This is where the next stage of the Heseltine proposals comes in. Authorities will be permitted to raise a first supplementary rate; but it will be limited to a percentage of the initial cash limit. They will also be permitted a second supplementary rate, but only if they meet tight conditions (Heseltine wanted a legalling binding referendum with the questions written by the government, but is likely to be forced by Tory backbench pressure to use some other device). Both supplementary rates will also fall very heavily on domestic rates—payers, since industrial and commercial ratepayers will be largely exempted.

If at the end of this local authorities still can’t balance the books the Secretary of State is empowered to step in to decide what cuts should be made and to set the following year’s budget.

The real purpose of this legislation is to force those Labour-controlled councils, mostly in London, though also in other places, like Sheffield, South Yorkshire, Manchester and Merseyside, who have persistently defied the Tories, into imposing massive cuts and redundancies.

Having championed a radical, yet constitutional, version of municipal socialism, left Labour council leaders now realise that they are on a hiding to nothing with the new legislation. They also realise that their credibility will sink to zero if they go along with its operation. Ted Knight, for example, admits that the scale of cuts in Lambeth would entail the sacking of at least a thousand employees, together with catastrophic reductions in all the services. Rents would rocket, repairs...
Education Authority would have to increase class sizes, close more schools, and raise provision for the under-fives, as well as cut a deep swathe through the post-school education sector. Redundancies among teachers would be enormous.

With the rates option firmly reeled off, left Labour leaders realise that they have no choice but to stand and fight. But how? No firm proposals to counter Heseltine have yet emerged.

One idea floating around is resignation and hanging over to the Tories to do their own dirty work. Another is the idea of a referendum to break the council, services will have to be based not on the town hall but on such organisations as tenants' associations.

In reality the leadership of any community campaign to defend council services will have to be based not on the town hall but on such organisations as tenants' associations.

Their capacity to fight, however, will depend on the confidence of the trade union campaign. And that brings us to the second lesson of the Lothian experience, in many ways the crucial one. When council leaders talk about trade unions, do they mean the leadership and official structures, or the rank and file? When they talk about defending education, for example, do they look to the Executive of the NUT or to the militants in the union, who the Executive has spent so much valuable energy victimising for fear of being pushed into anything like a 'live and let live' policy?

The answer should be obvious. But the problem is that they are likely to have an exaggerated respect for official channels.

Just as the councillors and the council officers see themselves as the 'official' leaders of the community, so the trade union officials see themselves as the 'official' leaders of the trade unions. Their interests tend to converge; they meet on a regular basis for negotiations, far away from the realities of the workplace, the council side reassuring the trade union side that it is doing the best in difficult circumstances, the trade union side agreeing not to rock the boat for fear of getting something worse. Inevitably, the rank and file are going to be suspicious of any defence of services which makes out that past cuts from 'comrades' in the town hall are superior to those from the class enemy at Westminster.

Lothian proved that a leadership based on the council and trade union leaders was passive, cautious—and disastrous.

'December 1st is only an opening salvo in a much longer and more intense struggle involving a much larger scale of action'
Centrism: more than just an insult

No serious sectarian slinging match is complete without the use of the word 'centrist'. It is, for instance, one of those terms of abuse used by the smaller left sects in relation to the SWP and to each other. Not surprisingly, many people who are new to left politics regard it as an obscure bit of jargon they'd prefer to do without. Who cares whether one group of 200 people calls another of 300 'centrist'?

Yet, as Ian Birchall explains at certain points in history the term designates a very important phenomenon. When it was first used by revolutionaries at the end of World War One it applied to organisations with hundreds of thousands of activists. When it was used again, by Trotsky, at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War, it characterised a party (the POUM) bigger in Catalonia than the Communist or Socialist Parties (which merged), with five thousand armed militiamen.

So what is a centrist?

Centrism is the name applied to that policy which is opportunistic in substance and which seeks to appear as revolutionary in form. Opportunism consists in a passive adaptation to the ruling class and its regime, to that which already exists, including, of course, the state boundaries. Centrism shares completely this fundamental trait of opportunism, but in adapting itself to the dissatisfied workers, centrism veils it by means of radical commentaries.

That is Trotsky's definition. Revolutionary in form, opportunist in substance.

So, for example, Tony Benn, who makes no claim to be a Marxist, is not a centrist. (He's a middle-of-the-road reformist pretending to be a left reformist.) But many of Benn's supporters are centrists—they use the rhetoric of class struggle, even to criticise Benn, yet in practice end up reinforcing Benn's positions.

Marxist terminology

The substance of Marxism lies in three things: the historical role of the working class, the need to smash the state machine and the need for a vanguard party. And it is on these points that the centrist, despite a rhetorical and sometimes erudite commitment to Marxist terminology, will turn out to be ambiguous.

'We need the working class, but there are other social forces to be reckoned with in modern society.' 'The state has to be radically restructured but this needs parliamentary action backed up by mass struggle.' 'We need a revolutionary organisation, but democratic centralism is hopelessly out of date.' 'We need a revolutionary organisation, but trade union militants can't be subjected to total party discipline.' When you find yourself listening to language like this, it's probably a centrist talking.

Centrism, as a serious political phenomenon, is not a question of naive or dishonest individuals. It is a product of a society in crisis.

People do not go to bed one night as reformists and wake up the next day as revolutionary socialists. As people move between two radically different views of the world, they often stop off at halfway positions, holding a variety of confused or inconsistent views. Of course, certain centrist leaders will seek to exploit such confusions and inconsistencies in their own political interests. But the vast bulk of those who make up centrist organisations or currents are a vital part of our audience—it is our job not so much to denounce their inconsistencies as to try to clarify them.

The problem of centrism in the socialist movement first became of vital importance in the First World War. The war drove a deep wedge between those who put loyalty to their own nation first, and those who continued to argue for proletarian internationalism.

But among the opponents of the war two camps soon emerged. On the one hand were those like Karl Kautsky, whose knowledge of the Marxist classics was so great that before the war he had been known as the 'Pope of Marxism'. He now argued that what was needed was to end the war by negotiation, so that the old international, including pro-war and anti-war elements, could be cobbled together again.

The other camp, including Lenin, argued that there could be no turning back. The war had shown a fundamental divide between those who wanted to smash the bourgeois state and those who didn't. So Lenin called, not for peace negotiations, but for turning the
war into revolution. In this three-way line-up, Kautsky and friends came to be known as ‘the Centre’. In the period immediately after the war, when millions of workers were determined that a similar catastrophe should never occur again, the ranks of the centrist organisations grew rapidly. Towards the end of the war Kautsky and others were expelled from the German Social Democratic Party and formed the USPD (Independent Social Democratic Party). By 1920 the new party had 800,000 members, as against 50,000 in the German Communist Party. This caused deep problems for the international revolutionary left, united in the newly founded Communist International. The Russian Revolution was extremely popular with workers all through Europe, and many of the old-time politicians who had thoroughly discredited themselves during the war were trying to climb back into favour by jumping on the pro-Russian bandwagon. The Communist International had to take a very tough line towards the centrists, especially the centrist leaders—otherwise the new revolutionary international would have been taken over by parasites and has-beens.

**Revolutionary crises**

The International drew up a set of twenty-one tough conditions designed to keep out centrists. As the president of the International, Zinoviev, put it: ‘Just as it is not easy for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, so, I hope, it will not be easy for the adherents of the centre to slip through the 21 conditions.’

Centrists grew very rapidly—only to fall apart just as rapidly. In October 1920 the USPD debated its attitude to the Communist International. After hearing a four-hour speech from Zinoviev delegates voted to join it; 300,000 members did so and merged with the revolutionary Communist Party. Within three months the remaining rump of the centre round Kautsky collapsed back into the Social Democratic Party.

In subsequent revolutionary crises the role of centrist has been similar. At the beginning of the Spanish Civil War in 1936 the POUM was a serious contender for the leadership of the Spanish working class. It had significant working class support and a leadership with a creditable revolutionary anti-Stalinist past.

Yet the inconsistent politics of the POUM led to disaster. It failed to make a head-on challenge to the influence of reformists and anarchists in the trade unions and in the army. It stood for a government composed exclusively of representatives of working class organisations—but when the other left parties rejected this view it entered a coalition with bourgeois representatives. The POUM opposed reformism but failed to fight it. And as a result it cut its own throat—and left the Spanish workers to face a defeat that would last a generation.

In more recent times the experience has been pathetic rather than tragic. In 1960 the French PSU (United Socialist Party) was founded by members of the Socialist Party disillusioned with their leaders’ support for the Algerian war and capitulation to Gaulism. In its early years it took some principled and courageous initiatives in favour of Algerian independence. But the party consisted of a bunch of quite divergent political groupings and used the excuse of ‘internal democracy’ to avoid a clear decision between them.

Its relations with the leaders of the CFTC trade union meant that it never organised its trade union militants on a fractional basis. In the general strike of May 1968 many PSU militants played a key role; but the party as a whole had no impact because it could not make up its mind whether it was developing the embryo of workers’ power in the factories or organising a come-back for former prime minister Mendes-France.

In the early seventies, when the Socialist Party started to rebuild on a new basis, a large part of the PSU went over; a former PSU leader, Michel Rocard, now heads the most right-wing tendency in the French Socialist Party. The PSU lingers on, as a kind of ‘Beyond the-Fragments’ rump, unable to make up its mind whether to campaign against the Mitterand government’s sell-outs or to negotiate to join it.

Just because centrist is a half-way house to any centrist party or current will contain a variety of groups moving in different ways: some moving from revolution to reformism, some from reformism to revolution—and some staying where they are because they prefer to fish in muddy waters.

So, relating to centrists requires a certain amount of subtlety. Blanket denunciations are easy, but winning those who are moving the right way needs a bit more skill. We can’t all recruit three hundred thousand new members in four hours, like Zinoviev, but we can try.

Above all, the question of centrist varies according to the ups and downs of the class struggle. When masses of workers are moving to the left, then centrist presents enormous dangers. For if centrists take the lead of the movement, they will fudge the issues and deflect it from the path it should follow. But if the masses are moving to the right, then the task is to attract those few centrists willing to swim against the stream.

**Leninist dogmatism**

In 1920 the Communist International put up the barriers against centrists who found it fashionable. But by July 1921 Lenin was criticising ‘exaggeration’ in the fight against centrist.

In today’s situation there is little danger of the SWP being swamped by a flood of centrists seeking to join us. We have to meet, debate and work with centrists as part of the process of building an organisation. But at the same time total clarity about centrist is necessary.

A study of history, from Kautsky to Rocard, and an insistence on the basic principles of Marxism, are necessary to forestall the danger that when a revolutionary upsurge comes, the centrists will make the running. And for that we need a party with a clear programme and a trained cadre. Just the sort of Leninist dogmatism any self-respecting centrists would have nothing to do with.
Still no stopping the decline

The most striking feature of last month's Communist Party congress was the strength of the pro-Russian position in the debate on the party's leadership. The congress is the most heated debate of the Congress on the Morning Star and Afghanistan. In each case it got the votes of about 40% of the delegates (the pro-invasion amendment on Afghanistan lost by 115 votes to 157).

How is it that the pro-Russians are apparently gaining strength, thirteen years after the party condemned the invasion of Czechoslovakia and more than four years after the pro-Russian split to form the New Communist Party?

The answer begins with the crude figures of the Communist Party's decline.

The CP completes its annual membership count every July. In 1973 membership was 29,900. By July 1979 it was 20,599. Years of social contract and collaboration by the union leaders who the CP promoted had cut membership by nearly a third.

But even more significant is what has happened over the last two years. By July 1981 membership had already 18,456. The CP had lost another 2000 members during two years in which the Labour Party was growing and the Labour left making, on the one hand, unprecedented gains. When you remember the central place 'left advanced' in the Labour Party has for the CP then that is really catastrophic.

We have argued for a long time that the Communist Party has ceased to have a rationale for a separate existence. Since its policies are indistinguishable from the Labour left and a Labour government of a new type is at the centre of its strategy, then is it logical to shut up shop and join the Labour Party? What was once simply a matter of logic is now a question of hard political reality as the CP declines and the Bennites grow.

"Even the few social assets the CP has, a traditional concern for industrial organisation and 'theory'; are now devoided. Broad Lefts in a number of unions are now run quite happily by Labour lefts and the Bennite camp is aware of 'theories'."

This logic of liquidating into the Labour Party did make a couple of appearances at the congress - at least in verbal form. Two resolutions were put, one to launch a campaign for affiliation to the Labour Party, the other to try and avoid CP standing election candidates against Labour. The fact that each got support of a quarter of the delegates is an indicator of the frustrations. So were some of the speeches for them, like this:

"Our votes get lower and lower and our comrades more and more demoralised... For the past 25 years we have had declarations of grandeur believing we can negotiate with the Labour Party from a position of strength."

However, even the motions passed that would have resolved nothing. Everyone knows that the Labour Party would simply turn down affiliation. And avoidance of standing candidates against Labour could easily mean not standing candidates at all - not a happy situation for a party one hundred per cent committed to the parliamentary road.

If the arguments for the motions were valid, that did not provide a strategy for an independent CP. Rather it meant winding the CP up and going on mass into the Labour Party. If the CP as such rejects this conclusion, many of the members have already voted with their feet - from a large chunk of the Eurocommunist intellectuals, to trade union activists like Jimmy Reid or the ex-CP members who formed the Labour Party's first factory branch at Timex in Dundee, to even a few pro-Russian elements now grouped around the paper Straight Left.

Bureaucratic inertia

As members peel off, inevitably a higher proportion are left who adhere to the one strategy which can provide a rationale for the party's continuing separate existence - being pro-Russian.

The only other thing to keep the party going is the bureaucratic inertia of the leadership, people whose lives and prospects are totally bound up with the continued separate existence of the party. The message they give amounts to little more than 'Carry on regardless' and 'Try harder'. And because that is the message, CP congresses are peppered with meaningless blind pronouncements like this one from general secretary Gordon McLennan this year:

"The main resolution of our last congress analysed why there was a membership decline and made proposals to win resumption of party growth. That analysis was a correct one and still applies."

This after the loss of another 2,141 members.

However, continual unsuccessful calls to 'try harder' eventually create bitterness even in the most leaders of organisations. And the pro-Russians are there to give voice to it.

Nothing reveals this more than the fate of the Morning Star circulation campaign. Falling Star sales have gone hand in hand with declining CP membership for years. In 1980 another 1,232 daily readers were lost and editor Tony Chater announced to the CP executive in January 1981 that 'at this rate the very survival of the paper'. A make or break campaign was launched with much ballyhoo to get 3,000 extra readers by the end of 1981.

Yet by the time of the congress ten months of make-or-break campaigning had resulted in a further decline of over 400. What made things even more galling was that sales were actually declining during the People's March?

Tub thumping optimists

Not surprisingly this produced a very bitter debate. One area blamed another for not pulling their weight.

"I wish all comrades worked as hard for the Morning Star as the comrades in West Midlands for "Do the Work!" (West Midlands delegate of course). In 1980 national circulation declined by 1200, but in Yorkshire it only declined by 9! (from a Yorkshire delegate of course)."

Circulation manager Joe Berry viciously attacked Eurocommunist critics of the content of the paper for dedecion of duty. 'Dave Cook knows nothing about literature... Stealing funds didn't organise a campaign round Leeds.' Even the tub thumping optimists were weighing in against one section of the delegates or another.

But there was a line up in this mutual recrimination. The leadership was proposing 'Carry on regardless', which meant simply shifting the 3000 extra sales target from the end of 1981 to the end of 1982! And that despite the fact that a price increase of 4p is now certain. The doozie certain that the fund raising band of Eurocommunists, perhaps 50 delegates, continued to press their case that the content of the paper needed to be changed by broadening out. The pro-Russians with more than 100 delegates argued that strong party branches were essential to build the circulation of the paper and that greater priority should be given to industrial coverage and the achievements of the socialist countries.

The pro-Russians really mauled the Eurocommunists. The Euro amendment would 'open up the paper to trendy lefties and drop ours', it promised a 'visual chat show', if it were passed 'we will have lost our paper, it will no longer be ours'. And one Euro supporter simply described the present paper as 'dull and boring' and 'a chore to read', in general they were largely defending the paper as it is now, it was the pro-Russians who wanted to change things.

Clearly the leadership did not have the positive support of the majority of the congress. And it was partly split on how to get it. In his introduction editor Tony Chater had described the Eurocommunist amendment as 'inutile nonsense' but by the end of the debate the executive speakers claimed they supported it 'on conditions which took any teeth out of it whatsoever!'
A possible arena for useful socialist debate

In the summer issue of Socialist Review (1981-7) we reported on the initiative of a number of socialist intellectuals to set up a Socialist Society. At the time we commented that the enterprise was basically worthy of support, but that the project was somewhat woolly and that various contradictions had remained unresolved.

But at the time a Steering Committee has been regularly meeting to prepare for the launching of the Society. It has not resolved the contradictions, but has produced some concrete proposals for action.

The basic aims of the Society would be to provide a framework for theoretical and polemical discussion of socialist ideas. In practical terms various proposals have been floated.

Firstly, it is intended to produce a series of pamphlets on the key issues of the day. The first two, on the SDP and on NATO, are already being written.

Secondly, there have been negotiations with publishers with a view to producing a series of books on current problems, either by single authors or based on seminars at which a variety of viewpoints would be put forward. Suggested titles include the state, the economic crisis, Northern Ireland and the Third World.

Thirdly, it is proposed that the Society should have local organisations which would set up meetings, classes and conferences on current and theoretical topics.

The proposed political basis of the Society could not be explicitly Marxist, though it would call for support for public ownership and the radical transformation of the existing state. Clearly this leaves open the possibility of collapse into being a left cover for the Labour (and not-so-left). There are no guarantees that the Society will not go down the same drain as the left clubs of 1959-60, the Centre for Socialist Education of 1965, the May Day Manifesto of the Manchester and the National Convention of the Left of 1986. But if the Society does get off the ground, it will be a modest gain for the left, offering an arena in which it may be possible to have clear and sharp political debate without sectarian abuse.

The Society’s main audience will probably be among left intellectuals, and its chance of succeeding depends partly on the particular problems of the left intelligentsia in this period of industrial downturn and political upturn.

Since 1968 there has been a substantial encroachment of self-proclaimed Marxism within the British academic system. Though this generated some interesting work it remained on the margins of struggle — indeed for many the Althusserian mystique offered a positive justification for the separation of theory and practice. But now the situation is changing.

The academic left is under attack, not only in the form of an ideological backlash, but more fundamentally in terms of the massive cuts that the government is implementing in higher education. On top of this there is the rise of Bernstein and the collapse of Eurocommunism as a viable tendency. Thus far in the recent development of the academic left has been the proliferation of publishers and caucuses in specialized areas — radical philosophers, socialist economists etc. There is a need for some sort of coordination between such bodies.

The Socialist Society may, then, respond to some of the needs of the period. It make no pretense to be an alternative party; its present Steering Committee contains members of the Labour Party, CP, SWP, ILMG, BNP and non-aligned individuals. Its existence will not change the one iota our task of building a revolutionary party rooted in the working class. But the battle of ideas is one part of that task; and if the Socialist Society provides an arena for that battle, we should welcome it and help it to develop.
Kurt Vonnegut

Sugar pills with a bitter coating on them

There were one quadrillion nations in the universe, but America was the only one with a national anthem which was gibberish sprinkled with question marks... The motto of this nation was this, which meant in a language nobody spoke any more, "Out of Many, One": "E Pluribus Unum".

The anthem and the vacant motto meant not have mattered much, if it weren't for this: a lot of citizens were so ignored and cheated and insulted that they thought they might be in the wrong country, or even on the wrong planet...

So begins Vonnegut's book Breakfast of Champions. Many people think that Vonnegut is a science fiction writer. In fact, his deepest concerns are with the present, with the American present in particular. His interest in science is not a technical one, but a moral one, occasionally an explicitly political one. He has written about his own assignment to the 'drawer labelled science fiction'.

'Years ago I was working in Schenectady for General Electric, completely surrounded by machines and ideas for machines, so I wrote a novel about people and machines (Player Piano). And I learned from the reviewers that I was a science fiction writer. I didn't know that. I supposed I was writing a novel about life, about things I could not help seeing and hearing in Schenectady, a very real town, awkwardly set in the gruesome now.'

There can be no doubt in the mind of anyone who reads Vonnegut that he regards the world today as a pretty horrifying place. Not that his sympathies lie with the oppressed, the victims of the present state of affairs. His books are, nevertheless, extremely funny. They are funny because they are recognisably faithful to the bizarre, absurd world we inhabit. He writes that the biggest laughs are based on the biggest disappointments and the biggest fears.

Vonnegut's humour is the humour of intelligent people in hopeless situations, the humour of the prison camp, of the ordinary person who finds himself powerless in the face of the insanity of the system. One of Vonnegut's favourite jokes is an exchange between two tramps: 'Well, it ain't no disgrace to be poor.' 'No, but it might as well be.'

Vonnegut, a self-proclaimed pessimist, he dates his conversion from optimism based on science and progress to 'the day we dropped scientific truth on Hiroshima'.

He was in Dresden during the firebombing of that undefended civilian city by Allied bombers, and survived through being in a slaughterhouse with other American prisoners. From that experience came Slaughterhouse five, perhaps his best known book. It is not surprising that he became a pacifist. On many occasions in his work he insists that the war against Hitler was just one, but that doesn't blind him to the fact that many lies were told about that war by the Allied governments, including the story of Dresden.

From a Marxist point of view there is much which is infuriating about Vonnegut. His books do not contain a consistent view of what is wrong with the world, and what ought to be done about it. There is also a lot of populism and a good dash of sentimentality. But equally there is a great deal of cynicism, too. A critic wrote that Vonnegut 'took sugar pills and put bitter coatings on them.' There's truth in that, but it isn't wholly fair.

There are many recurring themes in Vonnegut's work, and recurring characters and situations as well: the moral irresponsibility of many scientists, the feeling of uselessness which a good part of the population experiences, loneliness, and the importance of a sense of community and of a harmonious culture.

Some of his most interesting writing is collected together in a book of essays and speeches entitled Wampeters, Foma and Granfalloons.

One of my favourites is a demolition job on the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, entitled 'Yes, we have no Maumbah.' Questioned on the issue of civil rights, the Maharishi replies that any oppressed person could rise by practising Transcendental Meditation. 'He would automatically do his job better, and the economy would pay him more, and then he could buy anything he wanted.' Vonnegut comments:

"In other words, he should quit hitching, begin to meditate, grasp his garters, and float to a commanding position in the marketplace, where transactions are always fair. I opened my eyes, and I took a hard look at Maharishi. He hadn't wanted me to India. He had sent me back to Schenectady, New York, where I used to be a public relations man years and years ago. Maharishi had come all the way from India to speak to the American people like a General Electric engineer.'

His comments on the American political system are also very incisive:

"If I were a visitor from another planet, I would say things like this about the people of the United States in 1972: These are ferocious creatures who imagine that they are gentle. They have experimented in very recent times with slavery and genocide. I would say 'The two real political parties in America are the Winners and the Losers. The people do not acknowledge this. They claim membership in two imaginary parties, the Republicans and Democrats, instead. Both imaginary parties are bosssed by Winners. When Republicans battle Democrats, this much is certain: Winners will win.'"
Disappointing scuttle

Socialism in a Crippled World
Christopher Hitchens
Penguin £4.95

I really would like to review this book warmly. Its heart is in the right place. It hates capitalism, it hates Stalinism, and it wants people to be free. Reading it was an old-fashioned pleasure in many ways: no structuralist gobbledegook, lots of hot indignation at the injustices of the twentieth century, and an invigorating insistence that socialism will need to be built out of Black, Brown, and Dickens as well as Marx, Lenin and Trotsky.

But that "but" comes because socialism needs more than hot indignation and a love of liberty. It needs a 'more' that the book doesn't even try to supply. What, for example, is socialism?

At moments the text hints it might be moving away from the Labour Party of the past to the 'great period of socialist transformation' under the 1945 Labour government, even though a few pages back the author states that the Labour Party is committed to maintaining a financial and social system that encourages division and selfishness. Then again, it might be Bolshevik, warmly praised in Chapter 2 but dismissed "beyond all argument" in Chapter 9.

Besides, the text never arrives at any sharp sense of what socialism means and involves, it's forced into eccentric movement like some sort of electric crab.

Again and again, it scuttles to and fro between despair at Western capitalism and excoriation of the mess of the Soviet Union, in successive chapters it bobbles backwards and forwards without any indication of a direction.

As the search for something to stick a claw at and stop the world spinning for a moment gets more frantic, the piles of unanswered rhetorical questions get bigger and bigger - two whole pages of them in Chapter 9, for example, and they are still coming thick and fast in the last chapter. And the becoating, emptiness of the style gets more and more irritating. For example: "Tragedy ... represents a struggle for survival, and not the forces of asceticism, evil, darkness, terror, death, oblivion, and it moves towards catastrophe, obliteration, the defeat of the spirit."

Why is this? What is a book clearly written by a generous, sensitive man in the end a mess, a bedraggled bag of symptoms rather than a genuine prescription for any cure?

The answer can be found if you look at the text's sense of who it is that is oppressed and who it is that will liberate themselves with socialism.

This group is variously described as "us", "humanity", "community", "commonwealth", "manhood", "workers" and so on. But it's also the old quote from Marx, the book for the most part avoids anything as vulgar as class analysis so that it never faces the question of the role of working-class organisations, the parties, trade unions, inside building socialism. Similarly, the persistent use of 'man' to mean 'men' and 'women' is not just a verbal flaw that someone on the left ought to avoid - it betrays the fact that the text never even glances at feminism and its part in achieving socialism in a crippled world. And the same is true of blacks. And the unencumbered, lion-hearted man.

Granted these absences, what socialism comes to mean in this book is a state of mind. Socialism happens when we get our heads straight, so the author ransacks literature from Shakespeare to Brecht, carelessly abstracting from different societies, and different times the decent, kindly, progressive thoughts that can be found. No wonder he was so well reviewed in The Guardian.

Socialism, the text implies, comes not from working-class struggle but the prerogative of a few heroic individuals who have somehow escaped manipulation and accumulated the right insights. And so we shift from gazing reverently at faded photos of Marx in Chapter 1 to see if we can tell ourselves his secret, imagine in Chapter 2 the Russian revolution would have been saved if only Lenin had had been well enough to address the Twelfth Party Congress.

I'm not enjoying this so I'll stop. If this review sounds sour and querulous it's because I'm disappointed - disappointed because a text which promises so much in the end delivers nothing.

Paul O'Flinn

What produced Solidarity

Poland: The state of the Republic
Reports by the experiences and future discussion group (DIP)
Washington
Edited by Michael Vale
Pluto Press £4.95

The first ten years have been characterised by growing stratification, the end result being a widening of the income differential to a ratio of 1:20.

Social differences are growing. Part of society continues to live with lower than the socialist minimum income, while another segment consisting of the privileged, has incomes several or even dozens of times the average.

Inequality and injustice are everywhere. There are hospitals that are so poorly supplied that they do not even have cotton wool, and our relatives die in the corridors; but the hospitals are equipped with private rooms and full medical care for each room. We pay fines for traffic violations, but some people commit highway manslaughter while drunk and are let off with impunity. In some places there are better shops for superior vacation houses, with huge fences in grounds that ordinary people cannot enter. People see all this and they soon realize that the ruling officials drive luxury cars..."There is an increasing tendency to fill posts with "one's own people" - from the younger generation. This is the case not only with leading positions in agriculture or the administrative apparatus, but with all kinds of publishing houses, institutions of learning and scientific jobs. A recent study shows that a child whose parents have a higher education has 7.5 times the chance of staying within the ranks of the intelligentsia than the child of a farm worker has of entering them."

The two reports contained in this book could have been entitled "What produced Solidarity?" They contain graphic details of the state of Poland just before the August strikes of 1980 - the class divisions, the corruption of the bureaucracy, the growing bitterness of the ruled, the economic crisis, the drift towards chaos, the breakdown of order and law, the pressure for change, the emergence of new people, the daily intensification of the struggle...
all sides of any sort of faith in the regime.

The reports were based upon the dimension of a hundred odd people from the middle layers of power — academics, specialists, managers, planners. They had been brought out under the auspices of the regime — but the conclusions were too honest, and had to be published unofficially. The result is a revealing document of a society that has reached the stage of economic, political and ideological bankruptcy.

This is shown most graphically in the area of the political sphere. Year after year the rulers of Poland and other East European states boast about the health of their central planning. The claim is still accepted by many of the left in the West, but if you will no longer talk of socialist paradiese, do talk about "socialist societies based upon planning." Yet one of the conclusions to be drawn from the reports tells us:

"We have shame planning and shun fulfillment and even overfulfillment of plans . . . playing game of politics in industrial and social life, universal that in no one, even at the highest levels of power, can distinguish any longer between what is real and what is not..."

Another conclusion is that planning has ceased to provide the names of planning, coordination has become impossible, while any check on performance is purely illusory.

And the reports point out:

"The economic plans fall far short of the targets set. The flood of erroneous and misleading recommendations, and the position of the plans to the achievement because their bearing no intrinsic relationship to one another. . . ."

Yet another notes that every "five year plan" tends to collapse in its third year. "Each time the resource balance fails, unleashing a frenzy of corrective measures that freeze resources already invested and contribute even less non-produtive expenditure in areas where, with good planning, only 50-60 percent of the actual output would have been needed."

"The emergence of Solidarity has not fulfilled this prophecy. Yet there are two problems with the account of Poland as described by the reports. The first is practical: despite their massive documentation of the division of Polish society into social classes and material interests, the authors see their goal as being the suggestion of measures that can restore political trust in the authorities. The assumption is that reforms are possible that will leave the bureaucracy with its power, but ensure that the power is exercised in a less arbitrary way. Like the present 'moderate wing' in Solidarity, the authors fear 'revolutionary' tendencies more than a reconsolidation of bureaucratic rule in a slightly reformed fashion."

This is true in the second problem: the authors' facile account of what is wrong in Poland is not linked to any theoretical explanation of the forces that made things the way they are. We are, for example, told again and again that it is the foreign investment that leads to the breakdown in planning, to wasted resources, idle factories, half-buried construction sites, to continual hopping and changing in the order given to managers and workers. But we are not told why investment targets are always missed.

You cannot explain that unless you emphasise what Poland (and the USSR for that matter) has in common with Western states: a bloated, inefficient and overly competitive accounting system which forces each capital to invest to the maximum, regardless of the economic chaos that causes. Instead, like all reformers, the authors have to believe it is the peculiarities of their own country that have produced crisis. In this respect, they are like those people who build a small boat on the "beach of Britain" and pledge to "save our national industrial base".

"It is true that in Poland the crisis is further advanced than elsewhere in the East. But just as it is further advanced in Britain than in most other places in the West, but the basic cause of the crisis everywhere is not the same: it is the same in both, not of its individual parts. That is why working class revolution, as opposed to reformists, isypressing, is the only real way out. East or West."

Chris Harman

Safe but sorry

The Trade Union Directory
Jack Everson and Colin Ollin
Pluto Press 19.95 paperback

The latest 'Workers' Handbook' from Pluto Press is The Trade Union Directory — a guide to all TUC unions, published just as Pluto is celebrating its tenth birthday. It is worth considering, therefore, how this book compares with other directories. Pluto has already won for organised workers, because — quite frankly — this book is a great disappointment.

It is more of a handbook for bureaucrats than for activists, giving more on official structure than information that relates to the workplace. While it is meant to help a union member at work, at home and in other situations, it wouldn't help an AWE member at Lance Scott to get NUS support for the striking of Arthur Snipe's products from Brawat Supplies.

I have shown this book to a number of people and even one of them turned first to the section about their own union. Each of them had little enthusiasm, with one earring: between 'this is a very soppy version of the union's constitution' plus this isn't a real left views' to 'this just isn't true'.

Does a book from such a socialist publishing house not meet the activists' aspirations, especially as Pluto once had a reputation for giving a good workers' handbook? It isn't that hard hitting books don't sell. After all, the best sellers were Ertl's The Employers' Offensive (1970) and Pat Kirkner's The Hazards of Work (1973). These books were primarily written for the rank and file, and were sold in thousands by the rank and file. They both had a lasting influence.

A good workers' handbook provides accurate information, a lot of cross referencing and a sharp and critical appraisal of the limitations of trade union officialdom. The point of publishing the material is to turn every reader into a self-active agent, not someone who waits for the local official to sort things out. Readers of The Hazards of Work, from safety experts and readers of McLuhan's Your Rights At Work get to know the details of employment law.

But the recent handbooks have been much more aimed at officials, often described as the machinery and, much less aimed at arming the rank and file. The books on Pensions and Non-Wage Benefits are intended to be of use to the official, the one least likely to sell well. The real best sellers — the early volumes sold — are the ones that capture the imagination of the rank and file. They are often written to help the rank and file understand the contradictions of the situation and the nature of the enterprise, against the requirements of official structures and machinery. The new Directory is not much more than a description of the machinery and will be of little use to those who are trying to change it.

Alex Watson
Capitulation for beginners

by Robert Lechaim and Boris Van Loan

Writers and Readers £1.95

This book fails between two stools. On the one hand it assumes too much for it to be a good introduction to capitulation, while on the other it assumes too little for it to be an interesting read for someone who already knows a lot about the subject.

This problem is reflected throughout the book. There are some very illuminating sections on the history, and certain contemporary aspects, of capitulation. The Vietnam war, energy crises, etc. are interwoven with explanations of Capitalism, Keynesianism etc. which complicate rather than clarify things, and leave only those cut of 175 pages to an over-simplification of Marx's central 'falling rate of profit' theory.

What is more, there seems little reason for the order of the sections; and, to make matters even worse, unlike previous books in the 'Beginners' series ('Fifty'), 'Lenin', 'Nuclear Power' etc. the cartoons and illustrations add little to the text; they actually obscure points in some number of cases.

The book's orientation towards the American market (the third sub-heading is 'Who is there now?', also aggravates matters. Obscuring the relevance of the subject to potential readers in this country.

Overall it's a very sad book; because an attempt has been made (and for all my criticisms it is a valiant attempt) to simplify volumes of tortured text, written by many greats, but boring, thinkers, and this attempt has, again unlike the other books in this series, failed.

There are obvious reasons for the failure, the main one being that there are going to have to be a lot of failures before a book is published that can replace the twenty or so classics we now regularly recommend readings, and buy directors and friends and relatives for Christmas. But following very close behind this problem is the author's own, an almost liberal economist moving backwards, but not far enough to handle the subject of this book, and certainly not far enough to make even the most frivolous allusion to reaching a situation where books like this need never be written.

Alan Gibson

The Devil dollar

by Ricardo Parboni

Book £3.95

This is a highly analytical account of the international monetary system over the last decade, written by a talented Italian academic, from a semi-Marxist perspective. It's a curious, yet in many ways fascinating book.

The curiosity lies in the author's claim to have a novel interpretation of the crisis. That involves excessive emphasis on what has been happening to the dollar over the last few years, almost total silence on what's been happening to profits and in-effectives, and the idea that the crisis has been an 'essentially Euro-Japanese one'.

The key thesis is that US capitulation could avoid the crisis because of the relative rate of the dollar as a reserve currency. He argues that the devaluation of the dollar after 1973 forced the burden of adjustment to the US, oil price increases, the European economies in particular (a half-truth at best) and that the devaluation was a deliberate move to maintain US hegemony against all the consequences of the consequences (as if there was any alternative to the dollar's devaluation given the weakness of the US economy).

During the last two years, with the US economy in disarray, a noticeable global slump, all in the context of a rising dollar, thoroughly undermined Parboni's claims, although you'd have to divine from it his new introduction to the English edition (the book was first published in 1980) where he summarizes rather well what has really been happening.

Where the book is fascinating is in the way it sheds light on the complex operations of the money markets, and the complications of government policies.

Parboni is right about the unique role of the dollar, and the desire of the American ruling-class to hang onto the advantages that gives them — preventing any moves towards an alternative system. He is also very scurrilous about the way in which the European Monetary System has helped to reinforce the dominance of West German capital in Europe. He should be right in this, given the complexity of the European political scene and the difficulties facing Paragon in the new world economy (an economic environment in which the West German government has been a lot more successful than the US government).

The danger is that book becomes another of the 'Is all the fault of the nasty Americans' (British authors at the West German type) which is so common amongst the left European left. In Italy as in Britain that sort of analysis breeds nationalistic responses in the name of defending the economy against the pressure of international capital. A useful book then, perhaps the best available on its subject, but deeply flawed. Parboni really should be putting the conflict between different national ruling-classes at the centre of his account which is a refreshing change from most treatises on the subject.

Pete Green

Good idea, but ...

Pluto Big Red Diary and Directory 1982: The Art of Resistance

Big Red Diaries are used to be something I'd look forward to at Christmas time, even if I never bought one. But this year is very disappointing. The best that can be said about it is that it was a very good idea.

It looks as if it was hastily put together by people who weren't very interested in what they were doing. It does seem such a sad waste of a great opportunity. One has only to think of the art of the Russian revolution in the posters of France '68 to see that any book about the art of resistance has a wide range of choice when it comes to striking images. Yet you would not have thought so when you look through this years diary.

The same lack of interest is evident in the text or rather lack of it. Information about the examples of the art shown is restricted to very brief picture captions.

There isn't even an introductory text to explain why Pluto thought it was a good idea to put out a diary on the Art of Resistance. Maybe they didn't think it was a good idea, and only the reason they put out a diary is that they felt obliged to because they put one out last year.

Peter Court

Crisis in the Third World

by Andre Gauder Frank

Heinemann £5.50

This is a companion volume to the author's earlier Crisis in the World Economy. It is also a much better book than its predecessor probably because Frank is on much surer ground in the field where he first made his reputation as a Marxist critic of economic orthodoxy.

Crisis in the World Economy was a bit of a mess — a poorly organised collection of newspaper columns, official statistics and lengthy quotes from the experts, all mixed up in an eclectic and sometimes incoherent theoretical framework. Crisis in the Third World suffers from some of the same faults of style and presentation. The enormous quantity of information that has gathered together does become indigestible. Yet here Frank's attention is fixed, if not always firmly, on a single target.

That is the idea that the question of underdevelopment has somehow been solved — that the 'miracle economies' of Brazil, Mexico, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore etc. have solved the.

The growth of the 12 or so newly industrialised countries (NICs), as they are now called, has been spectacularly more twice as fast as the average in the West over the last decade. Economists are talking about 'a new international division of labour'. The model of export-led growth, supervised by the IMF, with massive borrowing from the world's banks and complete freedom for the multinationals, is now being held up for the rest of the world to emulate.

The great merit of Frank's book is that shows just how distorted this image of 'success'. For one thing there is large chunks of the Third World which are regarded as 'explicable' by capital — where it is deemed a waste of resources even to attempt to improve the balance of the population. A country like Bangladesh where 70% of its population lives below the poverty line, has no role to play in the new world economy. The country which is similar to the Third World in many respects is the rural region of South Africa, where colonial agriculture destroyed the old
pattern of subsistence farming and left a legacy of entrenched desert and mass famine.

Where sustained growth has occurred it has gone hand in hand with a polarization of wealth, intensified political repression, and greater and greater vulnerability to the world crisis. Frank devotes a great deal of space to the first two in particular. At times his account, built out of indices and official documents, reads like a never-ending horror story.

To give just one example: in Brazil, one in ten workers in São Paulo (up to 95%) are excluded from any benefits. The result is a growing number of Brazilians (up to 80%) being forced to live in squatter settlements.

Frank's book is of crucial importance because it has placed the current economic and political crisis in Brazil within a historical context. It does not just tell us what is happening, but why it is happening. The book is a valuable addition to the growing body of literature on the economic and political crisis in Brazil.

The book is also a powerful call to action. It is not just about understanding the current crisis, but about fighting against it. Frank's analysis of the causes of the crisis is based on a deep understanding of the historical and political context in which it has developed. He makes a clear case for the need for a radical change in the way the economy is structured and managed.

Frank's book is an important contribution to the growing body of literature on the economic and political crisis in Brazil. It is a valuable resource for those who are interested in understanding the current crisis and for those who are looking to take action to address it.

The book is well written and easy to read. It is a valuable resource for anyone interested in understanding the current economic and political crisis in Brazil. It is a must-read for anyone who wants to understand the causes of the crisis and the way forward.
Naive hopes drowned in blood

If you’ve seen the poster for the film Gallipoli you’re inclination is probably to avoid what is presented as yet another boring war adventure film. You could miss a very good film. Jane Ure Smith explains why.

The Australian film industry has turned out some extremely impressive films in recent years. Films like My Brilliant Career and Sunday Too Far Away. Gallipoli is no exception.

But the director manages to avoid all the clichés. What emerges is an anti-war film with all the power of the original All Quiet on the Western Front. Along the way it is also very funny.

The film does not focus on the actual Gallipoli landing. That is dealt with extremely effectively and economically as he climax to the film. The rest is taken up with recreating the atmosphere and ideological pressures which forced a generation of young men in Australia to rush off at the first available moment to fight in a war halfway across the globe.

The absurdity of the situation is most apparent in a scene when the two main characters, having decided to enlist, get stranded in desert east to Perth. They come across an old woman with a donkey, out of touch with the world situation. They tell her there is a war going on, explaining it is a war against Germany. The old man is confused.

Cashing in on the Nazi act

Mephisto

Director: Roland Joffé

Mephisto tells the story of a young German actor as he gradually sheds his sympathies with the left in pre-war Hamburg and becomes a state actor for the Nazis.

On one hand it is about an individual who compromises his beliefs and ideals as he gets caught up in the current of events that move too quickly and powerfully to swim against. More importantly, the film’s message is that an actor is not on the fringe of political reality but has an active part to play in the real world.

Gustave, every colleague, every colleague’s dialogue, every question, every comment, every event has a meaning that is relevant to social and political events.

The actor is ambitious. Small parts and workers’ theatre in the factories of North Germany become shabby. He wants success, appreciation and applause—so what if it’s the Nazis that offer it? He tells the story of the actor. It has nothing to do with me!

As he gets more and more caught up in the Nazi propaganda machine and the freedom of his friends and family becomes more difficult, he becomes more difficult for him to buy. His head is in the sand. He can no longer see that his wife and black mistress are in exile. He cannot pretend that impressions are not made on his freedom. But what can he do, he is only an actor?

The film is set in the period when Bertolt Brecht was writing about the relationship between theatre and politics, and it borrows several arguments from Brecht’s writings.

Brecht argued that every aspect of a theatrical performance has an important part to play in getting across the message of the story. Hence, lantern-slide subtitles, passports, and Kurt Weill’s music were all part of a new approach that emphasised the “direct, didactic” aspect of the text.

For Brecht the role of the actor was clear. He is there to project a political message, to be very much a part of social reality, in fact, he is a tool for social change.

Mephisto harks back to this point again and again for two and a half hours. Unfortunately it says very little else.

Stylish and elegant direction are lost on a plot that has very little substance and, while the camera work is devastating, the best shots have absolutely no relevance to the story.

The tragedy of German cinema that is nearly always tilled with post-war guilt because the bourgeoisie didn’t do anything to prevent the rise of fascism. Like The Tin Drum and The Marriage of Maria Braun, Mephisto is one long apology. The actor symbolises the bourgeoisie of Berlin that was too caught up in its own decadence to notice what was happening in Germany.

The lifestyle of this intellectual elite is reconstituted to show all the gluttony and debauchery of a Roman orgy. Mephisto is a beautifully made film, but I wish that it was more than just a way that modern Germany can purge itself of its history.

After all Brecht argued that theatre (and cinema) should show the way forward, not apologise for the past. Marta Wolfe
THE REVOLUTIONARY CALENDAR

DECEMBER 1944

On 6 December 1944 British aircraft began bombing the working class districts of Athens. Heavy guns mounted on the Parthenon assisted the bombardment, and tanks moved through the streets firing at pockets of resistance. The military operation was not to dislodge the German occupiers—they had evacuated seven weeks before—but to defend a British imposed government against the resistance movement, ELAS, that had driven out the Germans. The Battle of Athens had started.

ELAS had been formed early in 1942, very much on the initiative of the Communist Party. It became the only real centre of national resistance. The pre-war dictatorship had collapsed, and the Royal Government, exiled in London, was compromised because of its association with the dictatorship. The bourgeois leaders remaining in Greece either collaborated with the Nazis or kept their heads down.

Militarily, ELAS was one of the most successful resistance movements in Europe. By the time of ‘liberation’, ELAS controlled virtually the whole of Greece outside the main cities. Their local councils were the effective administration, and the German puppet government based in Athens was impotent.

In the cities too, the resistance was in effective control. A German plan for mass conscription of forced labour was defeated after demonstrations, occupations of public buildings and a general strike lasting a month.

The resistance faced the future after ‘liberation’ with an estimated membership of two million out of a total population of only seven million. ELAS was in a position to take power.

The British government under Churchill recognised this, and it was the reason for their attack. The ‘war against fascism’ was not allowed to get in the way of the primary aim—defending capitalism.

From the start of the war, Churchill had tried to minimise the influence of ELAS. British gold and arms were poured into Greece to support any armed resistance group opposed to ELAS, while ELAS were starved of supplies. One group, EDES, was only formed when its leader, Zervas, suspected of being a German agent, was given back to the British two alternatives: be publicly denounced or go to the mountains and form an armed band.

The strategy failed and the British made their preparations to eliminate ELAS after ‘liberation’. In 1943, an Allied officer, Don Stott, conducted negotiations for a ‘separate peace’ with the German authorities in Athens. The Germans were to withdraw and the British to land without harassment to avoid a period of chaos.

There was no opposition to this strategy from Stalin. Churchill and Stalin had already agreed that Greece was in the British sphere of influence, just as Eastern Europe was going to be under Russian control. Churchill wrote in November 1944:

‘Having paid the price we have to give to Russia for the war of action in Greece, we should not hesitate to use British troops to support the Royal Hellenic Government... I hope the troops will not hesitate to shoot when necessary.’

The day before the British attack, he sent an order to General Scobie, commander of allied forces in Greece:

‘Do not hesitate to act as if you were in a conquered city where a local rebellion is in progress.’

When the British-installed prime minister Papandreou offered to resign to reduce the possibility of civil war, the British ambassador was instructed ‘should he resign, he should be locked up till he comes to his senses’.

From the strength of the British attack one might assume that ELAS and the resistance were trying to take power but they were not. Under CP influence, the political aims of the movement were limited and talk about socialism was to be put off until after the establishment of a democratic republic. The Western allies were to be supported because they were the allies of the Soviet Union. The Communists recognised British’s pre-eminence role in Greece. They put this into practice before ‘liberation’ by placing ELAS under the formal command of General Scobie and by participating in the Royal Government.

The council only came when ELAS was instructed to disarm, leaving its supporters defenceless against the armed bands of the Royalists and the fascist Greens.

A mass demonstration against the instruction on 3 December was machine-gunned by government forces in the streets of Athens. Twenty eight were killed. It was the signal for a general strike which paralysed the city. ELAS occupied the key public buildings. The scene was set for the battle.

But still the Communist leadership hoped for a compromise. The initial instructions were not to fire on the ‘allied’ British soldiers. ELAS units outside the Athens area were instructed not to join the fighting.

The British government had no such scruples. Thousands of troops were withdrawn from fighting the Germans in Italy to reinforce the Athens garrison. With superior forces they managed to push back the ELAS defenders.

The final blow came when Moscow announced at the height of the fighting, they were appointing an ambassador to the Royal Government. ELAS were not defeated, they surrendered. Scobie admitted that he didn’t have the forces to control any area outside Athens and that the majority of ELAS forces had not participated in the fighting.

Stalin had ensured a defeat for the working class movement in Greece which was not to be experienced for decades.

The British role was best summed up by a young—and still left wing—Denis Healey in a speech attacking Labour Party members of the British coalition government early in 1945:

‘The upper classes in every country look to the British Army and the British people to protect them against the just wrath of the people who have been fighting underground against them for the past four years. There is very great danger that we shall find ourselves running with the Red Flag in front of the armoured car of Tory imperialism and counter-revolution.’

Pete Gillard