The Peace of Bishops Stortford

If the history of the Labour Party was written up like those old style school history books then the Bennite Wars look like being followed by 'The Peace of Bishops Stortford'. For Bishops Stortford is the home of the comfortable ASTMS training centre, where the leading lights of the Labour Party executive and the trade union barons held their two day summit at the beginning of January.

When they assembled on the fifth the press was gleefully predicting another nail in Michael Foot's political coffin. But when they emerged on the sixth, Foot wasbeam ing about 'one of the best and most successful conferences in the history of the party', and David Basinett proclaimed 'peace has at last broken out in the Labour Party.'

Of course after the initial bright glow sceptics began to pick around in the embers. Tony Benn was not actually saying publicly that he was not going to stand for deputy leader. The Tatchell affair and the Militant inquiry were apparently not openly discussed. And, of course, quotes could be obtained from Bennite enthusiasts like Chris Mullin that the war was over.

But the Peace of Bishops Stortford looks like being real enough, because it is grounded on the firmest base of any peace treaty — the recognition by one side that if they fight on to the end then they are going to lose. The side that is recognising that is the left.

After nearly three years of unprecedented left gains in the Labour Party, that may seem surprising. Only three months after Benn came within a hairsbreadth of humiliating Dennis Healey even more so.

But already, in the autumn, there were a couple of disturbing signs for the Labour left of their underlying weakness. First there were the union 'membership consultations' for the deputy leadership. The way NUPE branches voted for Healey showed how thin was the layer of activists the left were enthusing. It also provided soft left union leaders with a clumsy but effective weapon to use against the Bennite enthusiasts should they want to try a re-run.

Second there were the elections to the National Executive Committee at the conference itself. It wasn't just that the left lost control of the committee. The way they lost it was a sobering reminder that roughly half the trade union block votes were firmly under the control of openly right wing union leaders with the capacity to get together and play rough.

There is an atmosphere of fear in the party — fear of losing the next election.

Since October the Labour left's problems have got worse. The evidence that the SDP is more than a nine-day wonder has become overwhelming. The traditional 'unity to win the next election' call was being remarkably ineffective before the conference. Now the SDP's successes have most powerfully revived it. As one leading hard left Labour activist put it to me, 'There is an atmosphere of fear in the party — desperate fear of losing the next general election.'

The natural conclusion from that on the left is to settle for what they have already achieved. That is reflected in the pronouncements of some leading figures in the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy. It is also the rationale of the recent left wing split in the NUT, or the recent SDP gains among teachers.

Consequently, this is a more effective, coherent strategy for the SDP to attack than relying on the professionalism of the party to transform itself. It is also more effective than depending on the Labour left to stop themselves becoming too successful.

But on the right the SDP has a lot of work to do. It must now work hard to bring the full wrath of the Labour Party and trade union establishment down upon the SDP. And the more the trade union block votes are isolated, the more effective will be the SDP's attack on the Labour Party's leadership.

Also working in that direction will be the debate of the new leadership over the fate of the Labour Party at the hands of Healey and the judges. Faced with the prospect of sacking and defeating the SDP in May there is going to be a lot of running for cover.

So far these powerful pressures have done there work rather messily. Immediately after the conference it looked as if Benn might settle comfortably into the shadow cabinet. But then there was the row with Foot about 'collective responsibility', ending in a draw — with Foot successfully blackballing Benn, but Benn still picking up a respectable number of MPs' votes.

On top of that was the Tatchell affair with Foot apparently really going for the night of the long knives, and Benn really coming back fighting with his pronouncement that he was the real deputy leader. It looked as if the threat of the SDP was not making the slightest political impact. It also looked as if the fury of the right, both sides were making tactical blunders which made developments totally accident prone and unpredictable.

Certainly many on the 'hard left' seem to have heeded Benn's claim to the throne with embarrassment. Many of Foot's supporters must have thought that he was out of his mind by targeting the relatively godless Tatchell alongside the more easily isolated Militant.

But given the balance of forces, Foot can get away with his blunder and Benn can't. If necessary (and he dearly hopes it won't be) Foot can get a majority on the NEC to reorganise Bernardssea Labour Party or expel a few leading members of Militant and, with the greater union block votes of the right and the far more reluctant block votes of some of the left, get it endorsed by conference next October.

Those same forces, could, even more decisively, defeat Benn in a re-run deputy leadership election.

Of course the left could raise a lot of dust in the meantime. They have already demonstrated that over Tatchell. But at the end of the day it would be a deeply demoralising experience, very internalised and guaranteed to bring the full wrath of the Labour Party and trade union establishment down upon them. Then it really would be back to the 'bad old days of the fifties'.

They now seem to be recognising this. 'We cannot seem to be isolated into the position of what is seen by Labour supporters and local activists as one of continual aggression and in-fighting', says Labour Co-ordinating Committee secretary Nigel Stanley in a letter explaining why the ICC will not be supporting a new move to get together the Labour left under the banner Labour Unison 82.

He also argues that, 'The deputy leadership campaign has shown that much more work is required outside, in the workplace and in the community.' For many of the Labour lefts that will be simply a ritual incantation to cover their falling into line behind Michael Foot (and Dennis Healey). But a minority will take that lesson seriously. We must work alongside them and argue with them to take it to the logical conclusion.

Pete Goodwin

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THE LABOUR PARTY: MYTH & REALITY

BY DUNCAN HALLAS

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A defeat for us all

'More than two weeks after the imposition of martial law in Poland, Marek Kowalewsky still cannot believe what has happened... He sits at home in Warsaw brooding over where the Polish revolution went wrong... Kowalewsky is typical of middle-level Solidarity activists who pinned their hopes on democratic reforms. A short time ago he believed that the union's roots in Polish society were so strong that it would prove impossible for even the most repressive regime to remove them. Today he sees those roots withering around him.

"If the Russians had come it would have been different. Then we would have known who we were fighting against. But it's our own army. We're confused, and we don't know how to react." (Report from Warsaw, the Guardian 4 January).

A major defeat has taken place. The most powerful working class movement seen in Europe since the war has been halted in its tracks. The world's biggest union has been broken. The activists sit in internment camps. Those who try to resist get three, five or even seven years jail sentences. The membership, bitter and bewildered, is locked out until they sign pledges renouncing their own organisation and its internal leaders. In the factories the five day week has been scrapped, wages are held back as prices are increased by up to 400 per cent, economic measures are pushed through which, one advisor to the Zurich bankers told the Guardian, 'are beginning to have a whiff of Friedman about them', mass unemployment threatens for the first time.

The defeat is not just a defeat for Polish workers. It is a defeat for all of us. Just as the great strikes of August 1980 that created Solidarity were an inspiration for others to follow — with Italian workers boasting they would turn Turin into the 'Gdansk of Italy' and American unions naming their protest at Reagan's cuts 'Solidarity Day' — so the success of 30,000 police and a 300,000 strong, mainly conscript army in crushing the union will be an example that right wing generals everywhere will not be slow to learn from.

Defeats can breed defeatism. That is the danger in Poland today, where underground activists are having to resist widespread demoralisation in order to hold together at least the remnants of organisation. It is also the danger for the non-Stalinist left internationally, who can all too easily fall prey to the paralysing conviction that nothing can be done against the military might of 'strong states'. For those who believe that the Polish defeat becomes just one more inevitability, a proof, as they claim Chile was a proof, that to push reform beyond a certain point is to invite catastrophe.
Still more dangerous is the likely revival of '1984' notions of the Eastern states, of views which depict them as unchallengeable monoliths, against which nothing can be done. It is but a short step to deciding, however reluctantly, that defence of the 'Western democracies' is the lesser evil to the pressure of 'totalitarian tendencies'. Yet the real lesson to be drawn from the Polish defeat is quite different.

First, Poland shows, despite everything, not the strength of the Eastern regimes, but their weakness. For 17 months the apparently all-powerful totalitarian apparatchik was paralysed by a workers' movement that had spontaneously grown up underneath it. The system had created in opposition to itself a class capable of challenging it for power - just as Marx predicted capitalism would. The new power was sufficient still to frighten the regime's thugs as they moved in to the kill.

According to Solidarity activists who were interned:

'...Ironically, during the first days of martial law, the security forces rather than the Solidarity activists seemed to feel more afraid ... The police went out of their way to be polite. It was as if they expected the tables to be turned at any minute'. (Quoted, Guardian, 4 January).

If at the end of the day, the regime's thugs were successful, there was nothing inevitable about that success. In any contest between rival powers, what matters is not only relative strength, but how that strength is deployed, how each side responds to the moves of the other. This leads straight into the second lesson. The militarisation of the Polish regime over a period of months meant that its forces were increasingly subject to a centralised command, which was clear that a final test of strength was inevitable. Carefully testing the ground to see how favourable things were to be, while flogging the other side into a false sense of security through promises and negotiations. It only moved into action when success seemed most assured.

By contrast, Solidarity's leadership worked on the assumption that conflict could be avoided, that the generals were to be tricked, that the old party leadership was not, until a mere seven days before the final confrontation. Instead of testing their supporters in struggle, they urged them to keep calm, to refrain from strike action, to show stoicism in the face of endless shortages and queues, of police provocation and press slanders, of a growing militarisation of the country and increased threats to everything Solidarity had won. This allowed the military to move against the union at a time of their own choosing, to take the union activists completely by surprise, and to smash its apparatus while the working class was bewildered, hardly knowing what to do.

The workers were defeated, not because they did not have the strength to defeat the regime, but because a leadership did not exist within their organisation that knew how to build and direct that strength. They are now paying the most bitter of prices for that absence.

The price of moderation

Solidarity was born from a spontaneous upsurge of workers, and gained its strength as the focus for everyone in the country who suffered exploitation and oppression. It was their self-activity that held the regime back, for so long, from moving against the union. Yet hardly was the union in existence than the majority group in the union's presidency was trying to dampen down this self-activity - in the misguided belief that doing so would prevent the regime attacking the union.

As early as December 1980 Lech Walesa was telling workers, 'Society wants order now, not the confrontation and the strike.' It was a message repeated each time there were new flare-ups of workers' militancy or fresh attempts by the regime to whittle down the power of the union.

When at the beginning of last year, hundreds of thousands of workers in Bielsko Bia\a, and in Bie\a\a Gora went on strike against the way the regime's officials and security police build themselves luxury villas and special hospitals out of state funds, one of Walesa's close colleagues complained:

'We want to stop these anti-corruption strikes. Otherwise the whole country would have to go on strike'.

In March, after a force of 200 police had beaten up and hospitalised Solidarity representatives in Bydgoszcz — including one of the national leaders, Rulewski — Walesa first of all opposed calling for an immediate all-out strike and then called the strike off at the last minute without consulting the union's National Commission.

In the summer a new great wave of agitation swept the country, with a rash of 'local strikes', often including tens or even hundreds of thousands of people - dock strikes on the Baltic coast, a strike in the Polish airline LOT, the occupation by 14,000 women textile workers protesting against hunger in Zyrardow, the 180,000 strong one-hour general strike in Zelenia Gora, the print strike in Ol\a\yn over TV slanders, the strike in Radom demanding punishment for those who imprisoned and beat up workers in 1976, the hunger march in Lodz. At one point there were strikes in two thirds of the country's provinces. As late as October one report told that 'strikes and threats of strikes continue to dominate Poland ...' (Guardian 21 October).

The Solidarity leadership, far from trying to develop these spontaneous struggles into an onslaught against the regime, tried instead to bring them to a rapid end. Walesa was continually on the move, from city to city, urging people back to work. As one of the Gda\a Solidarity leaders, Andrzej Gwiazda, put it in July, 'Walesa is presently devoting all his energies to suppressing strikes'.

This restraining of spontaneous struggles was bound to weaken the forces behind Solidarity. As we warned in Socialist Review back in April:

'There is a danger of the group around Walesa beginning to act like a conservative trade union bureaucracy. That would be disastrous, since it would mean Solidarity giving up its position as a focus, a leadership, for all those who are discontented and frustrated. Workers in small factories would no longer look to workers in large factories for backing, discontented intellectuals and students would no longer find any protection, the peasants would fall back into the passivity that comes from feeling they have been abandoned by everyone in the towns.

'The very scale of the social and economic crisis means that the balance of forces between Solidarity and the regime cannot remain frozen at the present level for long. Solidarity has gathered massive strength because it has offered people hope in a desperate situation. If it refuses to do things that build that hope, they could all too easily fall away from it. As that happened the regime would be able to refurbish the old mechanisms of repression in the localities and in the factories.'

Such arguments were not the result of any great, original insight on our part. They followed from the whole experience of the international workers' movement over more than one and a half centuries.

Once a workers' movement has reached the point of challenging the fundamental interests of a ruling class, it cannot stand still. Either it continues to grow stronger by supporting each and every struggle of the most oppressed and 'backward' sectors of the population, who have never before even thought of politics, showing them how their interests can only be satisfied if they follow the traditionally advanced sections into an assault on state power. Or it begins to lose steam, to slide backwards.

By the summer, the dangers of 'standing still' were apparent to a growing number of regional Solidarity leaders. Gwiazda told the Solidarity national conference:

'Our union is doubtless in difficulties ... A year ago the authorities would not have dared to bring so many union activists to trial, a year ago the General Prosecutor's office would not have dared to launch so many investigations against independent publications and union press. In this respect, we have not achieved progress, but have gone backwards instead. This was because we did not respond to minor attacks which were meant to find out if we would concede.

'I think we made a mistake when we did not firmly resist the first attack ... We mustn't avoid conflicts through concessions. Concessions bring us closer to a fundamental conflict'. (Congres Post, BIPS, Gdansk 1 October).
The tendency of the Walesa grouping to ignore the feeling of other Solidarity leaders had already produced the beginnings of a split between “moderates” and “radicals” early in the year. At the time of the Bydgoszcz crisis in March the split became open. Rulinski and other Bydgoszcz leaders denounced Walesa from their hospital beds saying that “Walesa has blundered. We can compromise on supplies of onions, but not on strike blood”. The long time dissident Karol Modzelewski resigned as the union’s spokesman in protest at Walesa’s “undemocratic behaviour”. Anna Walentynowicz — whose sacking had provoked the great strike in the Lenin shipyard the previous summer — was removed from her union position in the yard because she was too opposed Walesa’s compromise.

By the Solidarity Conference in the early autumn, the split was quite pronounced. It was said that although both Walesa and Gwiazda came from the Gdansk shipyards, they were not on speaking terms. Three candidates with various “radical” views stood against Walesa for the presidency of the union and shared between them 45 per cent of the votes. And a number of “experts” — intellectual advisors to the union of moderates views — were voted off the new National Commission of the union.

Yet this did not fundamentally alter the approach of the leadership. Partly this was because Walesa was still allowed to nominate a presidium — the day to day leadership of the union between National Commission meetings — packed with people who agreed with him. He was thus able to continue to urge an end to strikes and to proclaim the need for agreement with the government.

In truth the “radicals” did not have a clear alternative strategy to Walesa’s. They demanded far more radical things than him — whether it was self-management in the factories, free elections, or in Walesa’s case, a challenging of Poland’s links with Russia — but did not have any mechanism other than the ones of simple trade unionism for achieving these things. Their aim remained to use the threat of strike action to get the regime to negotiate with them over concessions — not to build out of the workers’ unity and strength created in the course of strike action a weapon capable of smashing the regime.

The radicals’ successes at the Solidarity conference may have served to alarm the regime a little. But they did not alter the basic approach of the union to the regime.

The Solidarity congress ended on 7 October. For the next seven weeks the Solidarity leadership continued as before, to hold back the spontaneous movement at the base. On 17 October, when Jaruzelski replaced Kania as secretary of the regime’s party — thus achieving a further concentration of power in military hands — Walesa seemed to welcome the change.

“At least it means power is concentrated in one man’s hands. What we need is a strong reasonable government we can negotiate with.” (quoted Guardian 20 October).

This judgement did not seem to have been affected either by the deployment of police, using tear gas, to arrest Solidarity activists distributing leaflets in Silesia nor by the dispatch of special detachments of soldiers to 2000 centres throughout the country “to fight corruption, bureaucracy, and malfunctioning” and “to intervene in local conflicts”.

On 29 October a token one hour national strike was called in protest at the police actions in Silesia. Yet this did not stop the National Commission of the unions agreeing less than a week later to call for a suspension of strikes for three months — at a time when Western reporters could claim that “the growing strike wave appears to be the most serious since Solidarity was formed in August 1980”. (Guardian, 27 October).

It was at this point that the idea of either a “government of national unity” made of Solidarity, the Church and the Party, or of a “national accord” between the three began to be seriously raised.

Negotiating with Jaruzelski

On the second day of the Solidarity National Commission meeting in the first week of November an invitation was received from the government for Walesa to join joint talks with Jaruzelski and Cardinal Glemp for the Church. The invitation caused widespread confusion within the union. According to one left wing Western journalist in Poland, “Strong regional leaders — in Warsaw, Lodz, Bydgoszcz, Szczecin — were against participation in the tripartite talks. But the National Commission did not take a stand and the next day the weekly presidium meeting of the union ended with a communiqué expressing goodwill to the talks.” (II Manifesto, 12 November).

So in the month of November, when the final elements of the military takeover must have been being put together, the mass of union members saw their leaders engaged in apparently quite friendly talks with Jaruzelski — the head of the armed forces.

The inability of the radicals within Solidarity to cope with this manoeuvre by the regime had two effects.

The first and most obvious, was that the mass of the union’s membership were lulled into a sense of false security. They were demobilised just at the time when the regime was preparing to mobilise its forces for a final confrontation. As late as 1 December “Solidarity’s negotiators expressed moderate optimism at the outcome of preliminary negotiations — both sides showed a willingness to make concessions...” (II Manifesto, 9 December 1981).

The second was to some extent to refurbish the image of the regime itself. Under Gierek and Kania it had lost its ability to draw behind it other sections of the population; its base had narrowed down to a couple of hundred thousand top managers, bureaucrats, police chiefs and army officers, and perhaps half a million middle ranking functionaries. So Jaruzelski was trying to project himself as a new form of ruler, representing a hard-fought-for national
interest as against 'extremists' on all sides. It is very difficult to tell — especially from a distance — how much effect this had in the final confrontation. But there are several indications that in the run-up to the military takeover Jaruzelski did gain a certain popular support that had been lacking to his two predecessors.

A journalist with contact with Solidarity activists could write:

'Jaruzelski has a reputation, as premier, as an intransigent "liberal". As head of the army, he refused to use troops against strikers in 1970, 1976 and 1980. This has gained him great respect among the workers. And apart from this, he appears as a man of action more than a man of verbal promises'. (II Manifesto, 12 November 1980).

An opinion poll organised by Solidarity at this time showed that 90 per cent of the union's members put their faith in the union. In second and third positions came the church and the army, while the Communist Party was not even mentioned ...' (Il Manifesto 22 November).

But another opinion poll was much more ominous from the union's point of view.

'Polls conducted by the Radio and TV public opinion centres showed that Solidarity's popularity, while still 70 per cent, had dipped from its summer high of 90 per cent, while 51 per cent was expressing approval of the government and approval of 56 per cent a few months earlier'. (Sunday Times, 3 January 1981).

On 2 December the regime made a decisive move which should have destroyed all illusions in its intentions. It used hundreds of police with helicopters in a military style operation to dislodge students occupying the headquarters of the University of Warsaw. It also announced it was calling upon parliament to grant it exceptional powers to ban strikes and demonstrations. The immediate reaction of Walesa to the police operation was to urge continued moderation. He told a large crowd: 'We must stick together. The union is a powerful weapon hanging over the authorities — but it can't be triggered all the time'.

At a meeting of union activists in Radom the next day he repeated his plea for caution, maintaining that confrontation should be avoided and warning of the consequences of a general strike (Financial Times 4 December). But even he seems to have realised that the regime was taking the confrontational route. He went on to say, in words which the regime's radio broadcast a few days later in an attempt to discredit him, that 'confrontation is inevitable and confrontation will take place. Let us abandon all illusions. They have been rubbing their noses at us'.

The others at the meeting were much more radical than Walesa. They ignored his appeal and talked of beginning an armed struggle. And this is the moment the government introduced its special law. And speakers went on to talk of a union organised referendum on the continuation of Communist Party rule, and if necessary the formation of a provisional government to oversee free elections. A former 'moderate' Zbigniew Burak, chairman of Warsaw Solidarity, cal-led for the formation of a workers' militia to operate during strike actions.

The radicals were at last beginning to talk in terms different to those of negotiations and winning the union to their positions. But they were doing so very late in the day, after the regime had had months to prepare its ground and when the union's strength had begun to decline. One speaker argued that about a third of the workers were beginning to accept the government's claim that it could solve the food crisis if only the strikes ended. Karol Modzelewski argued, 'The union is not as strong as it was; it is weaker and every activist knows it.'

Now the union had to try, at very short notice, to reactivates a membership which for months it had been criticising for being active. It was telling those who had urged not to strike over food shortages now to prepare to strike over the right to strike. It was urging them to build a workers' militia to confront a government led by a general it had praised.

Confronting the army

In the week that followed, the union seems to have made some preparations for a confrontation. By 12 December, one report claimed: 'The majority of union activists see a confrontation as inevitable in the near future and are already taking counter measures in the factories; the big factories the organisation of workers' militias is not infrequent. Nor is the forcing out of orthodox Communist Party members' (II Manifesto, 12 December 1981).

But all this was too little and too late. The only way the union could win in an all-out confrontation was by a widespread and deep-rooted movement, challenging managerial prerogatives in each factory and the power of the police in each locality, questions of authority structure, from little ministries, giving support to every voice raised against discipline and hierarchy within the armed forces. This would have continually thrown the regime on the defensive, so that the bitter internal wrangling within it would have got worse and the possibilities of co-ordinated action by any of its forces would have been reduced to the minimum.

During the great upsurges of the Polish workers' movement in 1980 and again in the spring and summer of 1981, the Polish regime was forced on to the defensive in this way — its leaders did find it possible to give any consistent orders to these below them, and there were ripples of discontent within these armed forces.

Even in the highly privileged police, used to daily acts of repression, a movement began calling for the right to form a union linked with Solidarity. If the Solidarity leadership had had a revolutionary perspective, it would have called mass workers demonstrations in support of this movement, it would have led to a better barricades and every police station offered protection to those from the ranks who the military authorities were trying to discipline. And alongside its open activity it would have encouraged the formation of secret groups of trusted supporters in as many military and police establishments as possible, ready to switch sides the moment the situation demanded.

Against the background of such a movement — but only against such a background — it would have made sense to speak of workers' militias who were reliably armed and backing in proper military training being able to defend physically the police and the hardline sections of troops, while other sections of the army vacillated or came over to the workers.

Jaruzelski himself seems to have understood that. Certainly in three previous crises — in August 1980, March 1981 and the summer of 1991 — he had rejected calls from sections of the regime for military intervention, grasping that the spontaneous forward movement of the workers could tear apart his army. But by the beginning of December this spontaneous forward movement had stopped — or rather had been stopped by the repeated pleas of the Solidarity leadership.

It could not be restarted merely by the leadership doing a 180 degree turn. A mass movement only gathers strength as workers gain confidence for political battle from economic victories, and in turn see every political victory as feeding back into economic gains. Such confidence cannot be turned on mechanically by the leaders pressing a switch. Yet if the workers themselves lack such confidence, then they will never persuade any rank and file member of the armed forces that it is worth taking the immense risks involved in turning against his officers.

An army will only fall apart if its members think there is a good chance of the masses enjoying victory. Otherwise, every doubt will be stifled and the army operate as a monolithically efficient machine for carrying through repression.

That was why Karl Marx could write back in 1848:

'The offensive is the death of every armed rising; it is lost before it measures itself with its enemies. Surprise your antagonists while their forces are scattered, prepare the way for new successes, however small, but prepare daily — rally in this way those vacillating elements to your side which always follow the stronger impulse and which always take the safer side; force your enemies to retreat before they can collect their strength against you; in the words of Danton — audacity, audacity and still more audacity'.

Since Marx wrote, there have been numerous instances of a working class finding itself in situations where an all-out confrontation with the military forces of the state has become inevitable — but with a leadership which believes it can avoid such a confrontation, holding back workers from struggle and trying to conciliate their opponents until at the last possible moment, doing a complete about turn and expecting, magically, to enjoy victory. The result, almost invariably, has been serious defeat.

The about-turn of the Solidarity leadership was finalised at a meeting of the National Commission in Gdańsk on 11-12 December. At this meeting:

'The majority of the Solidarity leadership took a position of total confronta-
People were prepared to give their lives in working-class action, as seen in a poster that says, "The revolution is in the streets."

The battle of ideas

How was a union born from such a fantastic, spontaneous upsurge of workers' activity as that of July and August 1980 dominated so long by leaders who were concerned to dampen down further such activity? The people who led the strikes and formed the union committees in the first place were neither hardened bureaucrats nor experienced rank and file activists. There were few dissidents with years of prison and underground work behind them and a few veterans from the strike committees of 1976 or even 1956. But most were people taking action and organising for the first times in their lives.

So, for example, the chairman of Solidarity's organisation in the Warsaw area explained 18 months ago:

"All our organisation is entirely new to us. It is run by people who have never organised a meeting or written a leaflet in their lives before." (Quoted in Socialist Review 1980: 10)

This was true in every plant and every region. The union was not led by people who had spent 10 years as shop stewards, five years as convenors, three years at Rusklin, 15 years sitting on the District Committee and then eventually ran for a full time position. It was built by people who were elected by their shops to strike committees in August and were delegates to a structure 10 million strong by October.

People's ideas are always shaped by the interrelation of two things - the ideas that are dominant in the society around them and their experiences as they act together within that society. Which factor predominates depends on a large extent upon the degree of crisis in society and the level of collective struggle. In normal times the ruling ideas are indeed the ideas of the ruling class; the notions that have been emplaced into people's heads by the schools, the churches, the media and by the humdrum routine of everyday life. At times of social convulsions and huge class conflicts new notions begin to emerge and to compete with these 'ruling ideas'. Consciousness is shaped by contradictory conceptions, some of which derive from collective self-activity, others of which deny the very possibility of such self-activity.

The tangled background

The Solidarity membership was no exception to this rule. On the one hand they had been through the great experiences of July and August 1980, with workers alone standing up against a monolithic state machine and forcing it, against all the odds, to concede their demands. On the other, they had been brought up in a society in which the prevailing ideas were a bunchpot of Stalinist rhetoric, Polish nationalism and Catholic mysticism, and it was with this that they had to try to interpret their own self-activity.

The result, inevitably, was the creation of weird, hybrid ideas. People would display great faith in working-class action - but still bend their knees before priests. They would express an identity with long-established working-class traditions by calling their union 'Solidarity' - but in many cases would believe that President Reagan or Margaret Thatcher were their allies. They would hate the ruling party - but would identify with the army as an embodiment of the nation. They would oppose all authority and fascism - but still pictures of the pre-war authoritarian nationalist Pilsudski on their walls. They would fight bitterly against corrupt local officials - and yet still believe in 'national unity' with these officials.

Only months of bitter struggle and of sharp ideological clashes could even begin to pull apart the contradictory elements of hybrid consciousness and create a real understanding of what society was and what needed to be done.

The process of ideological clarification was further complicated by another factor. The huge upsurge of the workers' movement pulled behind it many other sections of society - especially much of the middle class intelligentsia. These saw in the workers' action a way out of all the petty frustrations that had plagued their own lives. When the Gdansk shipyard occupied, a whole number of intellectuals went to the port to give the workers support and advice. The workers,
still lacking confidence in themselves, not only — quite rightly — welcomed this support enthusiastically, but often deferred to the allegedly superior organizing and intellectual expertise of the "advisors".

The same process was repeated in a slightly different way in many of the small factories which were unionised in the aftermath of the Gdansk strike. Often the people elected to local union positions were not shop floor workers, but the 'intellectuals' of the factory — the professional engineers, the upper grade white collar workers.

These people who began by following the lead of the shop floor were soon often taking over ideological leadership from the shop floor. Yet their interests were not quite the same as the mass of workers. They had relatively privileged positions within existing society, even if they did not like the ruling class. But the latter, not least in opposition to it, was bound to be the highest goal.

Thus, one of Solidarity's 'advisors' Jadwiga Staniszewska has described the atmosphere in the first Gdansk negotiations when the 'experts' from both sides met together behind closed doors.

'A peculiar, semi-relaxed atmosphere, gentle, even ironic, prevailed. One reason was that the experts on both sides were more or less members of the same Warsaw militia... It had only been a matter of our political attitudes we could easily have changed places... This climate dangerously increased our mutual loyalty to each other...'

This phenomenon too was something which often happens in great revolutions. Thus Trotsky described in his History of the Russian Revolution how, in the first days after the overthrow of the Czar in February 1917, the elections to the soldiers Soviets occurred:

"The soldiers truthfully elected those who had been for the revolution against monarchical authority, and knew how to say this out loud: these were volunteers, clerks, assistant surgeons, young wartime officers from the intelligentsia, petty military officials — that is, the lowest layer of the new middle class... The representatives of the garrisons thus turned out to be much more moderate than the soldiers themselves. But the latter were not conscious of this difference: it would reveal itself to them only during the experience of the coming months."

Another factor of tremendous importance is the role of the Church. Both the Western press and Western Stalinists give the impression that Catholic oratory was the driving force behind the creation of Solidarity. The reality was very different. Throughout the last 18 months, the aim of the Church has been to prevent any great confrontation between the workers and the regime. At the height of the Gdansk occupation, the late Cardinal Wyszynski was among the first to be televised in the country for years — in which he called for a return to work. At the height of the Bydgoszcz crisis in March the Pope urged a compromise, saying workers wanted to work not strike. On the day before the military takeover, Wyszynski's successor Glemp issued what could only be seen as an attack on the radicals now making the running in Solidarity. In a letter to the Pope, Solidarity spokesmen, among them the older, more cautious Growing in our society which many see ending in confrontation, a sickness provoked above all by expressions of social hatred in contrast to the teachings of the Church."

And, of course, after the military had moved in, he urged 'Pole not to fight Pole' by engaging in active resistance.

The Church speaks not, however, simply turn back on the workers' movement.

In Poland it is not in the position it is in say, Italy, where it has vast holdings on the stock exchange. Its position depends on its ability to force the regime to make concessions to it — and often in the past, the regime has not been willing to, even going so far as the autumn 1980, when the Wyszynski under house arrest. And so the Church has to maintain popular support as the only thing with which to bargain.

Polish nationalism

This means that at each great crisis point in the last 25 years, the Church has tried to give the impression of going so far with the opposition, while insisting that the aim must be compromise.

Because the Church maintains this position of semi-opposition and because in the past it has faced repression, it enjoys a level of support among Catholics. But the latter were not conscious of this difference: it would reveal itself to them only during the experience of the coming months."

The role of the Church in Polish society is much more complex. It has always been a factor in Polish politics and the role of the Church — its history has been one of long periods of national oppression. From the late 18th century right down to 1815 when it was divided between Russia, Prussia and Austria, its language often suppressed, its people subject to draconian regulations. Since then it has been the aristocratic/prussian who took the lead in the national insurrections against Russian rule.

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The two faces of nationalism. National anthem and flag at the Solidarity congress (above); and the army as the 'highest manifestation of the nation' (right).

reality of mass strike action and open political agitation, and not just discussion — and the Russians did not intervene.

In fact it was the radicalness of the Polish movement that frightened the Russians from invading. At a time when they were increasingly dependent for solving their own economic crisis on trade and investment links with Western Europe, the last thing they wanted was an Afghan type war in an advanced industrial state in the middle of Europe.

Groupings in Solidarity

Something else also held them back. This was fear of working class upheavals inside Russia itself. They feared a repetition, on a vastly more dangerous scale, of the strikes in their huge autoplants in June 1980, the street clashes which took place in Estonia later that year and the riot that broke out in the Caucasus town of Ordzhonikidze in the autumn of 1981. But many Poles were blinded by their nationalist disdain for all Russians, whether bureaucrats or workers, from grasping this.

The impact of these different pressures was to create within Solidarity three different — although by no means fully formed — tendencies.

The first was crystallised around Walesa and the Catholic 'experts' in the first months of the union's existence. It dominated the presidency of the union right up to the end and was strongly backed by the Church. Walesa had literally dozens of private meetings with Wyszynski and then Glemp.

The second was the current influenced by the long time dissidents of KOR — especially Mickiewicz, Kuron and Modzelewski.

These were much less prepared to concede any of the union's principled demands than Walesa and the Church-inspired current. But they had also long since gone back on previous revolutionary beliefs. They argued that the union had, by independent action, to force radical reform from the regime — and to avoid pushing for anything more than reform.

As Kuron wrote early in September 1980:

'We have to organise ourselves democratically and take the affairs of the country into our own hands. Yet full independence is impossible: we have to take into account the external forces guarding the leading role of the party in the state.'

Three months later he elaborated:

'In Poland a great social movement is being born. The people are taking their fate into their own hands. And nobody can stop them. And anyway, to stop now would be to condemn themselves to catastrophe...'

'So we have on one side these great social movements, independent and self-governing in various spheres of life; but on the other side the need to preserve the so-called 'leading role' of the Party, in other words its control over the central administration, the police and the army. It is necessary to reconcile these two things. We must do this. We must form a completely new model resting on compromise.'

In the first upsurge of the workers' movement in the summer and autumn of 1980 such a perspective could seem to make sense. A regime which was taken by surprise and knocked off balance was forced to retreat, conceding most of what the workers wanted. But as the crisis of the regime deepened, the perspective fell apart.

How could you refuse to put any brakes on the workers' movement and at the same time guarantee the regime's control over the police and the army? Especially when the regime could see the very success of the workers' movement threatened to undermine that control? How could you leave the regime knowing that the very success of the workers' movement threatened to undermine its control? How could you leave the increased supply of goods in the shops?

By July 1981 this was absolutely clear to all concerned. At a Solidarity conference in Warsaw, the chairman of that region's union, Bujak, summed up the situation exactly:

'If we consider ourselves merely as a trade union, as the government expects us to, then we must think of ourselves as a trade union of women on a sinking ship.'

In the August issue of KOR's paper Robotnik there was a round table discussion by various leading KOR members and trade unionists on the way forward. The editor of the paper, Litynski, summed up the general feeling:

'We have arrived at a situation which seems to have no way out. The economy and the state are disintegrating. We can discuss pointlessly whether this decomposition results from conscious or semi-conscious sabotage by the apparatus of power or from the impotence of the power apparatus after the events of August 1980. Solidarity has accelerated this paralysing decomposition of the organs of power in a certain sense. The strategy that consists in standing aside to see how the regime moves and in making compromises with it seems ineffective. Solidarity loses its point and devalues itself.'

Bujak spelled out what the mood was among the workers:

'Our movement is weakening. At the beginning it was based on an implacable hatred for the regime and against the Party. But today that is not enough. Completely new motivations are necessary. The members of the union do not understand the tactics of the leadership... The protest strikes and the local struggles do not succeed in uniting into a coherent plan. People were wary of me in a mass meeting at Ursus. Only when I explained that the self-management leads to a taking of power did people understand and agree with me... In this phase people want a clear programme. It
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doesn't matter too much whether they understand it, as long as they see it as a way out of the crisis. There exists a desire, one senses, for a strong government, although this would have to impose restrictions ...

Kuron himself underlined this last danger:

'Part of society could turn to the idea of a strong government as a ray of hope. We can already see this idea grow around the figure of Jaruzelski ... They think a strong man can control the army as part can save the country.'

Thus the KOR approach inevitably broke down, with those who adhered to it waver- ing between the 'cool it' attitude of the Walska group and the demands which could only mean an onslaught on the central power of the state. In practice, in the great arguments of 1981, different members of KOR took different sides, and people like Kuron would move from one position to the opposite and back again, until in the end, as we have seen, he proposed things which could only mean doing what he had ruled out as impossible.

The Solidarity radicals

The third tendency to emerge were the 'radicals'. In the strict sense of the term these were not a single tendency, but a variety of individuals and groupings characterised only by their distaste for the Walska approach — hence the standing of three rival candidates in opposition to Walska in the union elections.

They were activists desperately seeking some way out of the impasse they could see the movement entering, but with no clear ideas what it was. Each could pick on some crucial aspect of the situation, but none could put the pieces together into a coherent whole.

Reading their speeches to the Solidarity Congress, you get the impression of people trying to find their way out of a locked room, blindfolded. In the first days of December, the blindfolds began to slip a little — but then it was too late.

The failure of groups within Solidarity to deal with the growing crisis led to another interesting phenomenon — a growing interest in the idea that the formation of parties could somehow overcome the inability of the union to act.

By the summer the right wing nationalist Confederation for an Independent Poland was growing rapidly — aided by the way the imprisonment of a few of its leaders made it seem like a persecuted, radical alternative both to the regime and the Solidarity.

But the demand for parties was much wider than that. People who a year before identified the very notion of a party with the regime's Stalinist party now saw some such structure as the way out of the impasse. As Kuron said the Solidarity National Commission in July:

'The awareness of the necessity for a transformation is extraordinarily strong. Hence the demand for a party. Wherever we turn everywhere there is the call for a party. I've already heard the demand several times in this hall: 'Let's form a party!'

Yet the formation of parties was conceived of as something separate from, even if parallel to, Solidarity. It was not thought of as a way of organising within the base structure of the union to co-ordinate the spontaneously developing struggles, regardless of what the 'moderate' presidium wanted, leading them in the direction of an assault on state power. For the notion persisted that Solidarity itself could not take power.

For Kuron the union had to preserve itself as a means of defending workers against whatever power existed, and therefore could not take power itself:

'Solidarity cannot carry out the work of transformation and formation of a new system. There is no one who can carry it out, therefore we must form a party which can carry it out, so the argument goes ... But:'

'...A party which overthrows the existing order and takes power becomes a party state. That we recognise already from 37 years experience'.

Yet a party which merely struggled for parliamentary elections, with the intention of taking power when it would, admitted, get nowhere, since it did not yet have the means of bringing them about.

The talk of parties that took place was very much like an engine revving without a clutch: it did not connect with anything. Whatever its popularity among a minority of activists, it was, for the mass of ordinary workers something very remote: 'People are not interested in parties, Economic power, yes, but not political parties,' Bujak noted.

What was lacking in all this ideological ferment was a revolutionary Marxist pole of attraction — a genuinely revolutionary socialist tendency, showing in theory and practice the possibility of building the embryo of a new society out of the workers' self-activity and struggle.

Such a tendency would have been able to fill the vacuum that existed from the summer onwards in terms of alternative policies for Solidarity and to have posed the question of the party in a way which connected with the movement.

It could have done so by showing that the party was not something that exists outside of the fighting organisations of the class, with their necessary openness and democracy, but rather a way in which those activists in these organisations who share a common revolutionary conception of the way to resolve the crisis, work together. In this way they co-ordinate their experiences and offer a coherent lead to the rest of the class, supporting the movement, even those disowned by the national union presidium, attempting to point them in a common direction of challenging state power and bureaucratic state capitalist property relations at every point.

What is more it could have begun serious preparations for the inevitable confrontation with the state long before the rest of the union saw the need after 2 December.

A union can sanction an insurrection. But it cannot make the preparations for it. For, although the precondition for a successful insurrection is mass, open, public agitation involving millions of people, there has also to be secret, underground operations aimed at arming workers and at building cells of reliable supporters within the police and armed forces of the enemy. The most advanced workers, organised as a party, can do that, but an open organisation of virtually the whole class, like a union, cannot.

Furthermore, if you wait until you have won the whole class for an insurrection before making certain preparations, you are almost bound to be too late in doing so.

For once the organisations of the class declare for insurrection, the ruling class is going to hit back, whatever the cost.

The fact that not even the embryo of a party existed in Poland is not all that surprising. The rise of Stalinism all but destroyed authentic socialism throughout the world for nearly two generations. The notion of socialism became detached from and opposed to the notions of workers self-activity and human liberation. In the West this meant that 'workers' parties' developed that could never lead workers struggles to power. In the East the effect was even worse: it meant that workers came to identify revolution with repression and slavery. Those who had seen the concentration camp with red flags above it could hardly be expected to sing their praises.

The fact that the official ideology of the society was a bastardised form of 'Marxism', far from aiding workers to understand the world, makes it more difficult. For they see this ideology as an integral part of an alien world, something that cannot possibly aid them. I know of foreign students who have rushed out to the bookshops of Warsaw or Prague to buy cheap editions of Marx or Lenin to be greeted with amazement by their East European fellow students: 'What are you wasting your money on that? It's not on your course'.

The absent alternative

On top of this, it has to be remembered that the building of an oppositional party as opposed to small activist groups was all but impossible until the Gdansk strike forced the regime right back on the defensive. When such parties have been built inside totalitarian regimes, it has usually been under circumstances of a regime in crisis, but where there has also been aid from countries where large fellow parties can operate more or less openly — that was the case with the Marxist parties in Czarist Russia or the Communist, Maoist and Trotskyist parties in Spain in the late decades of Franoism. The experience of Stalinism meant that the Polish Socialists and Solidarity leadership were too daunted to lead and the workers' movement too unintegrated to provide such aid in Poland's case.

That does not mean that there were no Marxists active in Poland. At one stage Kuron and Modzelewski had been revolutionary Marxists, attracting at least some students in Warsaw around them in the mid-60s. They retreated into a form of reformism, but some of that tradition seems to
What is remembered about the Chilean coup is the naked repression. But what is forgotten is the powerful base it had in the rightwing parties and the middle class.

Jaruzelski lacks that base.

The elements of workers’ organisation.

Yet at some stage a revival of the workers’ movements is going to occur. For Jaruzelski is still a very long way from solving all his problems. You can do many things with bayonets, but, as Trotsky once noted, you cannot sit on them for long.

An army of 300,000 can patrol the main streets with its tanks, it can break down the gates of factories, it can put up cordon to stop people moving at night, it can even go in and make people work by pointing its machine guns. But it cannot, by itself, penetrate every aspect of a nation of 30 million people, of ten million workers. It cannot police their thoughts, it cannot stop them miring, it cannot avoid the miring turning into go-slow, local sit-in strikes, new underground forms of organisation, and, above all, it cannot stop accumulated bitterness breaking out into new mass strikes and struggles on the streets when it is least expecting them.

Jaruzelski’s narrow base

For that reason the complete destruction of a workers’ movement always involves more than just action by a country’s army. It also involves the existence of a popular mass which support the repression. Thus, the suppression of the Paris Commune in 1871 was carried out by an army from Versailles — but it was actually applauded by nearly half of Paris, the bourgeois districts in the west, and by much of rural France. Mussolini and Hitler were able to do what purely military governments would never have been able to achieve, because they enjoyed the active backing of mass, petty bourgeois movements. When Franco staged his uprising in Spain in 1936, at least a third of the population were prepared to flock to his banner. Pinochet’s coup in Chile in 1973 could only produce a stable regime because it received initial backing from powerful parties of the right and centre — which between them received more than half the popular vote — and from mass petty bourgeois movements like that of the lorry driver-drivers.

All of Jaruzelski’s attempts to portray himself as a military patriot, concerned only with ‘restoring order’ have not yet succeeded in winning for him such masses. The regime had enormous problems before the 13 December coup because its only sure support lay with the 200,000 odd people who hold the most powerful positions close to the central political bureaucracy and the half a million or so petty functionaries who, by feathering their nests through some form of corruption or another, had earned the enduring hatred of the masses of workers and peasants. The military takeover has cracked together the heads of the warning factions within the most privileged classes, and thus been able to make sure that things get done, at least for the time being. But it has not been able to widen its support beyond them.

If anything, it has lost the support which Jaruzelski himself enjoyed before the coup.

An uncensored journalist’s report from Warsaw tells how:

‘Almost nobody believes Jaruzelski’s claim that there was no other option (than the coup) ... Popular hatred for the WRON (Jaruzelski’s ruling council) is
widespread ... and everybody calls the leadership the Crow ... ("wron" in Polish). Poles today are not looking over their shoulders at Moscow. The swell of passive, underground resistance and hate centres firmly on the Crow. Nobody blames the Russians. All the talk is about the Polish military and politics."

(Sunday Times, 3 January 1982).

The scale of the communication clamp down is actually a signal of the regime's weakness. If it had a mass, popular base of any sort, it would not need to close down telephone systems completely (a measure which itself has devastating consequences for the running of the economy) nor to ban travel from one city to another. It would have supporters in every section of every factory, in every street, in every shop, only too willing to denounce anyone acting or talking in a suspicious way.

Of course, Kadar in 1956 and Husak in 1968 were defeated. But the advantages Jaruzelski did not. Both had at their disposal half a million or so Russian troops—prepared in Kadar's case to murder 20,000 workers and to deport to the Soviet Union thousands more, in Husak's case to threaten such measures if "normalisation" was obstructed. The Russians and their allies have shown enormous reluctance this time to act directly.

Secondly the Hungarian upheaval came at the close of what could be called the phase of primitive accumulation of state capitalism—when basic industries were built up at the cost of enormous barbarities. It was therefore possible for the victorious counter-revolution to buy a degree of reluctant consent to its rule by returning to a more orderly tempo of accumulation and raising real wages by up to 20 per cent.

In Czechoslovakia the system was already passed the stage where that was possible. But workers did not suffer materially worse conditions under the Husak regime than before.

By contrast all Jaruzelski can offer workers is the six-day week instead of the five-day week, an unprecedented level of price rises, and threats to shut "unprofitable factories".

He cannot offer workers anything positive, because of his urgent need to pay the interest owed to the Western bankers. The economic crisis today is not one of economic expansion, that can be overcome by going more slowly on opening up to the world market. It is one of economic contraction produced, in part, precisely by the closeness to the world market, and can only be solved by the most unpopular of measures.

Jaruzelski seems at least partially aware of how isolated his army is. He seems to have suffered from the delusion when he staged the coup that, once in complete control of things, he would be able to get the "moderate" wing of Solidarity to negotiate an agreement with him. As one Western correspondent has reported:

"It is becoming increasingly clear that the authorities hoped to enter into some sort of low key dialogue with leaders of the free trade union. Diplomats analysing the actions of the military authorities and their treatment of the Solidarity leader, Mr Walesa, immediately after the takeover, believe they banked on separating him from radicals in the leadership and talking him into playing a role in national reconstruction."

(The Guardian, 5 January).

There is another indication that Jaruzelski understands that his base is very narrow—the fact that the wholesale imprisonments have not been accompanied by wholesale shootings as in Hungary or Chile. It is not that there are not the thugs in the police to do the shootings. It is that scale of bloodshed would reduce still further the possibility of positive collaboration from at least a majority of the work-force which is necessary to get industry running efficiently and to pay off the country's debts.

The fact that three weeks after the coup, industrial production was only 50 to 60 per cent of normal and lost production amounts to $100m a day (according to one Western trade attaché, Guardian, 5 January) shows how enormous his problems in this respect are.

Yet without widespread bloodshed, the general is not going to caw the workers into submission for all that long.

The economic crisis remains.

None of this means his regime is going to collapse immediately. He has the guns and the tanks, and for the moment that is enough to break up occupations and demonstrations. What is more, with all the reins of state power in his hands, he will be able to buy the allegiance of sections of the middle class.

But, with his narrow base, it will not be long before he runs into all the problems that beset the regime even before the creation of Solidarity 18 months ago, only in a more acute form.

Jaruzelski has militarised the management of industry, putting officers to watch over the action of the planners and enterprise bosses. Presumably this is because he thinks—in the manner of military gentlemen everywhere—it was just personal slowness and ineptness that produced the crisis, the wrangling between different interests, the corruption. He will soon find how mistaken he was.

For the moment increasingly reliable pointers suggest that industry is being strangled by shortages of raw materials, components, communications and by a failure to make decisions because mutual law has created an administrative vacuum. (Financial Times, 5 January).

Because the military has no other base of support than the upper layers of society, they will rapidly come to share all the vices of those layers. Already there are reports that underneath the veneer of military control there continues to be talk that the party is wrecked by infighting between hardliners, radicals and moderates ...

(Financial Times, 5 January). Doubtless it will not be long before such infighting is taking place between different generals, as they listen first to one voice then another in their desperate search for a wider base of social support and a way out of the economic crisis.

Those Solidarity activists who remain at large will not find it easy to rebuild organisation at first. But over time rebuilding should be possible. There will be all sorts of cracks in the regime that can be taken advantage of. For example, once the immediate post-coup emergency measures are removed (and the near-bankrupt regime cannot afford to lose $100m a day indefinitely) many managers will be very eager indeed to increase production at all costs—it will make all sorts of concessions to avoid lightening stoppages. In this way the confidence of workers in their ability to fight and win will be rebuilt. As that happens in the cities—of which the military machine cannot reach the internal contradictions of that machine will increase. As and that happens, the likelihood will grow of new splits in the regime that the workers' movement can take advantage of to rebuild its national structures.

All this will take time. Wounds never heal overnight, and the Polish workers' movement has suffered terrible wounds. But they need not be fatal. The class which rose again after the defeats of 1957, the defeats of 1970, the defeats of 1976 can rise again after the defeat of 1981.

**Bankers and Cold Warriors**

"Western governments yesterday generally sought to calm fears raised by the crackdown in Poland. They also avoided openly siding with Solidarity ... In Brussels Alexander Haig, the US Secretary of State said he saw no signs the Soviet Union was about to intervene. The general Western approach is to avoid dramatising the situation ... It was for this reason the US did not call for an emergency meeting yesterday, diplomats in Brussels said."

That was what the Financial Times could report the day after Jaruzelski's coup. The message from Washington, Bonn and London was loud and clear: the Russians had not intervened directly, so there was little for anyone to worry about.

The message came across in the editorials of the various newspapers on both sides of the Atlantic. The Washington Post described Jaruzelski's action as the last possibility for Poland. The Christian Science Monitor said he had in reality moved in an extremely moderate way. The Guardian insisted:

"There can be no doubt that General Jaruzelski, a man of patriotic and moderate reputation who has often repeated his desire to talk to his peers, out of sheer desperation yet within days the response had shifted markedly. The American government abandoned its low key approach and declared that the 'indirect' Russian intervention had taken place. Reagan announced economic sanctions against Russia. The whole Western
press proclaimed undying support for Solidarity. And then a bitter wrangle broke out between the Americans with their demand for action against both Russia and the Polish regime, and the European powers, led by West Germany and backed by Japan and the Vatican who advocated friendly pressure on Jaruzelski to proceed with "reforms."

The unified 'soft' Western response of the first couple of days was the honest response. For a month the American and European banks had been urging the Polish regime to reassess itself so as to pay the interest repaysments it owed them. Only ten days before a delegation of top bankers had flown into Warsaw and told the government unless it found some way to pay $500m interest immediately, they would declare the country bankrupt.

The American banks in particular had been insistent that the Polish government squeeze the population to get the necessary cash. This was despite the fact that they had already made massive profits from their Polish lending. The Wall Street Journal reported five days before the coup that the banks had 'found in governments like Poland a convenient borrower who will pay at rates Western industrial powers would scorn. Some bankers privately boast that even were they forced to write off their Polish loans now they might show a profit on their loans over the last decade, so lucrative have been the deals'. Or, as one West German banker put it in the summer: 'The US banks see the Polish problem as no different from that of Bolivia or Nicaragua' (Euromoney, July 1981).

It was hardly surprising that the banks welcomed the Polish coup just as they had welcomed the Bolivian coup or the Turkish coup. The day it took place, a West German banker told the Financial Times: 'What I am saying may be a bit brutal, but I think the Polish government was no longer in a position to govern the country. I now see a chance for Poland to return to a more normal working schedule and this could be a good thing for the banks.'

Mr Bernard Butcher of the Bank of America insisted: 'Whoever is running the country, we wish them the best and hope there is some return to a more productive economy.' (Financial Times, 14 December).

Two things produced the shift to a different governmental and press reaction in the days which followed:

First, was the extent of the resistance to the coup. It was not only that the Western ruling classes had a lot to gain ideologically by pretending to identify with this. More importantly, perhaps, it meant that the banks were not getting the 'more productive economy' they wanted.

Second, the Americans realised they had a heaven-sent opportunity to achieve international goals they had long been striving for—goals which had nothing whatsoever to do with Poland.

The US capitalism has faced a growing problem over the last decade. Although still having by far the biggest Western economy, it no longer enjoys the absolute supremacy it used to. Its manufacturing industries are increasingly losing out to the Europeans and Japanese. The only area in which it has absolute supremacy over the other Western states is in military capability. But the cost of maintaining this has been undercutting still more its ability to compete economically.

It therefore has increasingly looked to military responses to international crises as the way to achieve its goals—in Central America, in the Middle East, and above all in relation to Russia. It believes that on the military front it can both humiliate those who would challenge US interests and force the other Western powers to accept policies that suit its needs. This is especially true in the new cold war will force the Europeans to cling more closely to the US and, in the process, to bear a much greater burden of the Western Alliance's arms budget.

The Americans quite cynically, decided to use the Polish crisis as a means of pulling the West Germans back into line.'

Not surprisingly the more economically competitive Western states do not agree. The West Germans and the Japanese feel they do not need a Rapid Development Force to get their way in the Middle East or Central America—the Libyans, the Iranians, the Nicaraguans, even a radical regime in El Salvador will want to buy their goods and borrow their money regardless of the military balance. And when it comes to the Russians, the West Germans are in the middle of concluding a deal for a vast gas pipeline which will be massively profitable over the next 20 years. The Russians need that pipeline desperately and so do the West German government feels, they will not do anything to upset West German capitalism—even if its arms capability is not all that it might be.

These rows between the Americans and the Europeans were sharpening in the weeks before the Polish coup. The West Europeans made it clear they were not happy about the Camp David approach to the Middle East which placed complete dependence on Egypt and excluded the PLO. They boycotted Reagan's attempts to take sanctions against Gadaffi. A mere two days before the coup, they rejected US pressure to increase financing for NATO.

Perhaps most worrying for Reagan who was attempting to hot up the new Cold War were the friendly meetings the West German Chancellor Schmidt had first with Brezhnev and then, just as the Polish coup was taking place, with the East German leader Honecker. One of the great fears of the Americans for at least three decades has been that the Germans might be tempted to move to closer relations with the Russians at the expense of their contribution to the Western Alliance, thus threatening still further the US's ability to protect its interests worldwide. The meetings could be interpreted as tiny steps in that direction.

The Americans, quite cynically, decided to use the Polish crisis as a means of pulling the West Germans back into line. By raising the level of hysteria over Poland, the White House believed it could damage West Germany's relations with both East Germany and Russia, and repair the cracks in NATO.

If anything, the US has succeeded only in making the cracks wider. While the Americans try to create cold war hysteria over the Polish events, the West Europeans try to play them down. Reagan is busy making deals against Russia. The West Germans meet with the Polish generals' emissary, Rakowski, to discuss continuing economic co-operation in return for cosmetic reforms which will give the military dictatorship a less obviously oppressive appearance.

These developments complicate the situation for Western socialists waging a mass solidarity with our Polish brothers and sisters. We have to be doing our utmost to help them in their hour of need, using whatever means are at our disposal to ease the level of repression and to provide material support.

But at the same time, we have to avoid like the plague getting involved in operations that directly or indirectly help Reagan to intensify the Cold War.

Such efforts are already afoot in Britain, where the 'Polish Solidarity Campaign' has organised a demonstration with Tory and Social Democrat Cold Warriors on the platform, and the right wing union leaders, Chapple and Basnett have run an Albert Hall Rally of NATO enthusiasts from all four national political parties.

People who have long fought for the interests of American imperialism inside the working class movement, who supported the war against Vietnam and who never opened their mouths in defence of those suffering from the coup in Turkey or the political murders in El Salvador, are using the Polish events to undermine the movement against nuclear weapons and the new generation of missiles. The irony is, of course, that these weapons ever to be used in a 'theatre war' among those to be exterminated first would be the population of Poland, including the 10 million Solidarity members.

The task of the Chappelles and the Basinets is made easier by the fact that a sizeable chunk of the Labour left are still influenced by Stalinist hangovers that prevent them from seeing the necessary solidarity with the Polish workers. For example, an excellent antidote to the attempts to exploit Poland by the Cold Warriors would have been if CND had called for a solidarity demonstration of its own to show the gulf between the struggles against repression and war, East and West. This too was not done because of the residual influence of Stalinism within the movement, and the field has been left open to the hypocrites of the right.

Theonus falls upon us to fight for solidarity actions that genuinely help the Polish workers and sharply distance ourselves from the murderers in the White House.
Tony Cliff's State Capitalism in Russia

The Polish events are making many socialists look again at old assumptions about Eastern Europe. Mike Haynes argues that a great deal of enlightenment is to be obtained by reading a book first written 34 years ago, when Stalin was still alive and the number of genuine socialists opposed to him was miniscule.

If you haven't read Tony Cliff's State Capitalism in Russia it's about time you did. What you'll find there is a mass of information to show up the travesty of the claim that any sort of socialism exists in Russia. But if that were all that Cliff's book contained then it would just be one among many—although a pathbreaking one.

In fact Cliff's purpose is more than this. He aims to show why it is that Russia and societies like it can only be understood as specific forms of capitalism—as state capitalism. And it is this argument that still makes his book such a vital one for socialists today.

Of course, the view that the Soviet Union is a land flowing with milk and honey has few supporters on the left today. Even within the Communist Party people tend to see it as some kind of degenerate form of socialism. But what they deny is that this degeneration has gone as far as to turn it into a capitalist state. However degenerate it may be, however barbaric its political forms, however much it acts like a capitalist state, they still hold on to the idea that there is some core there which is non-capitalist.

What this core is they can't quite agree on. Some find it in planning, others find it in nationalisation, still others would have you believe it's there in the cheap fares on the Moscow underground! What you can be sure of is that the one thing they do not base it on is the Russian working class.

The socialism they see there is not a socialism of self-emancipation. It is not something they control and run. No—if anyone claims to find socialism in Russia they find it in just those institutions that dominate and oppress every detail of the lives of ordinary Russians. They find it in precisely those features of Polish society today, for example, that millions of Poles joined Solidarity to protest themselves against.

But if this is so where does it leave the idea that generations of socialists have fought for—the idea of socialism as the working class taking control of society through its own action so that no longer the few rule over the many?

Cliff's answer is that it leaves it nowhere and it is here that his book really takes off. He shows in detail how Russian workers were systematically robbed of the gains that they had made in 1917 and how, ever since the first five year plan began in 1928, they have been exploited to feed the myth of the Soviet economy over which they have no control. He then shows how the attempts to defend this in Marxist terms have ripped the very heart out of Marxism as an idea of workers self-emancipation. The real tragedy of the Russian revolution was not just that it was lost—though that is bad enough—but that in attempting to defend the wreckage of that revolution the very idea that was fought for in 1917 is lost. Cliff's book recapitulates that idea.

There are some on the left who would accept this and still draw back from calling the Soviet Union capitalist. They argue that it does not have the features they associate with capitalism—private property and markets. Planning and nationalisation may not make it socialist but they still distinguish it from capitalism. Cliff's great achievement is to show this argument up for the dangerous nonsense that it is.

The drive to accumulate

Capitalism cannot be reduced to a set of timeless institutions. It is the dynamic society that has ever existed and its form is constantly changing. It is a set of social relations that work through different forms, and at the centre of these relations is the competitive drive to accumulate capital. Production is expanded in order to expand production further, for to fail to do so is to lose out in the competitive race. And this drive, Cliff argues, works as much through state property as it does through private property.

He shows how in 1917 the revolution tried to break the drive to accumulate, but that with the beginning of the first five year plan it once again became central to Russian society. Whereas once the revolution had set out to change the world, under Stalin, the aim became no more than to beat the capitalist world on the terms that it set the Soviet Union. To catch up and overtake—to outdo capitalism at its own game—was the end to which the revolution had been brought.

This, Cliff argues, is the real meaning of the planning mechanism. It has never existed to meet human needs. It does not serve the interests of the Russian population because they have no say in it. Each year it is used to pump out their surplus labour, to invest it in bigger and better machines, bigger and better weapons as the Russian state tries to compete with the West. Russian workers are used to build the power of the USSR Ltd.

Of course, to say that what exists in Russia is a form of capitalism is not to say that it is identical with what exists in Britain. It is a special form—what Cliff calls 'state capitalism'. It is a society whose structure is dominated by a bureaucratic state. But the basic processes that determine how that society works are the same as those in the West. It is a capitalist drive that puts life into these different forms and which ties them together with Western forms, just as that same capitalist drive ties together the very different forms in, say, Britain, Brazil,
Training or taming?

The Tories' proposed Youth Training Scheme has produced howls of outrage from Labour and trade union leaders. But, Gareth Jenkins argues, they accept much of the thinking behind the scheme.

The government will do anything, it seems, to fiddle the unemployment figures. It has already removed 30,000 people who are 60 or over, by persuading them to take extra social security in return for not registering as unemployed. Now it wants to remove some 300,000 at the bottom end of the age scale.

Norman Tebbit, minister for employment, intends to bring in a new Youth Training Scheme in 1983, lasting one year and covering all 16-year-old school leavers. It will replace the much criticised Youth Opportunity Programme (already covering 50 per cent of school leavers) and reflects many of the ideas put forward by the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) last year in its consultative document, *A New Training Initiative*. This massive expansion will, it is claimed, remedy some of the defects of the existing scheme: long enough to provide proper training, it will combine planned work experience with a minimum of three months off-the-job training or further education.

But there has been an outcry over the way in which the government plans to operate the scheme. In effect, the new one-year training scheme will become compulsory since no school leaver will be able to draw full money until September of the following year. Trainees will be paid an allowance - but no more than approximately £15 a week. This compares with the present YOP trainee allowance of £23.50 (about up to £25). hardly a princely sum as it is. Thus, at a stroke, the government will manage to cut the unemployment figures and to make a considerable saving in benefit at the same time. It will also place a heavy burden on working class families as the total amount of real income is reduced.

Predictably, Labour politicians and trade union leaders have been outraged. 'Slave labour' was the comment from John MP; Allan Roberts, youngsters would 'riot and regard themselves as Hitler Youth', was the (peculiar) verdict relayed by Frank Allum, MP for Salford East, from one of his constituents. Even the Shadow Employment Secretary, right-winger Eric Varley, condemned the package as 'misery'; and Len Murray declared of the proposals that the government had managed 'to rob them of their real purpose and value by contaminating them with mean-minded prejudice'.

But, as this last quotation would suggest, financial considerations apart, there has been little critical comment on the proposals themselves. Len Murray, for example, claimed that the government had borrowed some new ideas from the MSC's proposals for reforming industrial training, and Eric Varley stated that the Labour Party welcomed an extension of educational training for the young. 'The MSC has brought forward imaginative and far-reaching proposals.' Apparently, if the government were only to increase the suggested allowance then Labour would be happy.

But are the ideas behind the proposals that welcome? In the words of the White Paper, the aim will be:

'To equip unemployed young people to adapt successfully to the demands of employment; to have a fuller appreciation of the world of industry, business and technology in which they will be working, and to develop basic and recognised skills which employers will require in the future.'

These bland terms, which few Labour and union leaders would dispute, are in fact geared to the government's vision of the labour market for the mid- to late 80s. That is of a labour force constantly adapting to changing technology (the microchip, for instance), and only a proportion of it at work at any one time. That in turn necessitates breaking down the resistance created by the retention
The nuts and bolts of the anti-union laws

Norman Tebbit's new anti-union proposals are likely to be law by next summer. Mark George shows how, together with the Employment Act of 1980, they take the legal position of unions back to the beginning of the century.

When the present government came to power, one of its major proposals was for radical reform of the law relating to trade unions. They intended to remove rights and immunities which had been hard won in the rise of the unions in the 19th century, and effectively to smash the power of the unions to take effective action. With a vicious economic policy to implement, the Tories wanted to be sure the unions were in no condition to cause a repeat of the defeat of the 1970-4 Tory government at the hands of the trade unions.

Part One of this scheme, the 1980 Employment Act is already law. Now Tebbit's proposals are likely to be law by next summer. Taken together, the 1980 Employment Act and the new proposals represent the most serious challenge to the unions since the 1971 Industrial Relations Act. Indeed, major parts of that hated Act have been resurrected. As a result, the unions will be in a worse legal position than they have been since the beginning of this century.

The 1980 Act has already introduced important changes. Millions of workers will no longer be able to sue for unfair dismissal and those that can will find that they have to prove that the dismissal was unfair. Women wanting to return to work after a pregnancy will now be caught out by more complicated notice provisions and if they do return, may have to make do with an alternative job to the one they had.

As part of the attack on union organisations the 1980 Employment Act has reinforced the rights of workers who do not want to join a union. Section 23 of the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978 protected workers from pressure by employers to join non-independent unions, ie unions controlled by the employer. By deleting the reference to 'non-independent' unions, the section now provides a scab's charter by making it unlawful to pressure anyone to join any union. Under the 1980 Act the union can be ordered to contribute to the compensation paid to a scab who is dismissed for refusing to join a union, but only if the employer makes such a request. Under Tebbit's proposals, the scab can require the union to be ordered to pay the compensation. The amount of compensation payable has also been greatly increased.

The 1980 Act also undermines the closed shop by creating new categories of workers who, if sacked for not being union members, will be held to be unfairly dismissed. These include those who object to union membership because of 'deeply held personal convictions'. The Act also requires new closed shops to be approved by at least 80 percent of the workers — but if a worker still does...
not join the union and is sacked, he can still claim unfair dismissal. Tebbit proposes to extend this to existing closed shops so that dismissal for non-membership of a union in a closed shop would be unfair if there had not been a recent ballot showing 80-85 per cent in support of it.

Until the 1980 Employment Act the position on picketing was still roughly the same as it had been since 1906 — it was lawful for persons, in contemplation or furtherance of a trade dispute, to attend at or near a place where another person works for the purpose of peacefully obtaining or communicating information or persuading a person to work or abstain from working. Even this immunity for pickets was limited enough. It was subject to judges deciding what amounted to furthering a trade dispute and on the number of pickets allowed. It did not prevent police from arresting pickets for a variety of public order offences.

The 1980 Act has introduced fundamental changes. The immunity now extends only to those who attend at or near their own workplace. picketing on another person's work is again deemed an attendants with whom they actually represent. Anyone else attending a picket can be sued for damages. So picketing of another plant, even of the same employer, becomes unlawful — as, for example, the picketing by Laurence Scott workers of their parent company in Doncaster. The effect on union recognition struggles, in particular, could be devastating. These rely on outside help. Now solidarity action by thousands of workers like that at Grunwick or the picketing of Garners Steak Houses would be unlawful, except for those actually working there.

**Excuse for coping-out**

Tebbit proposes that for the first time since 1906 a trade union should itself be liable for damages for any act which is outside the limits of lawful industrial action — ie secondary picketing and other solidarity action, with fines up to £250,000 for the larger unions.

Vicious they may be, but the Tories are no fools. They remember the bitter resentment caused by unions under the 1971 Industrial Relations Act and how that Act brought the unions into direct conflict with the courts. More important than the fines, the Tories see their proposals as a means of ensuring that the unions will themselves curb unlawful action by providing that the union will not be liable unless the National Executive is found to have been guilty of official or failed to condemn it. This provides the perfect cop-out for the Duffs and Chapples to sell out their members by refusing official support for industrial action and ordering a return to work and a ban on picketing.

Directly linked to this is the further limitation of what amounts to lawful industrial action. The 1980 Employment Act has already extended the forms of secondary action to prevent action being taken against any but the immediate suppliers or customers of an employer with whom there is a trade dispute. Now, even this will be unlawful. By restricting trade disputes to a dispute between an employer and his own employees, action against an employer who is not involved in a dispute with his own employees will be unlawful. Such action most often occurs where unionised workers put pressure on another employer to recognise a union. Again, the consequences for basic solidarity action are catastrophic.

Also banned will be action in support of disputes occurring outside Great Britain such as the blacking of products meant for South Africa or Chile. Similarly, political strikes will also be illegal. This would cover TUC Days of Action as well as action by local authority workers against cuts in council services.

Tebbit’s free-wheeling axe is also aimed at ‘union labour only’ agreements, such as are operated by many local authorities. The Tories claim that such agreements unfairly restrict the ‘freedom’ of workers not to belong to a union. In reality they want to smash union power so that poorer conditions and pay can be imposed. And just in case anyone gets any ideas about fighting this ban, the government also intends removing the immunity from being sued for damages from any person who organises or threatens industrial action to persuade an employer to agree to a union labour only clause in a contract. Finally, just to tie things up completely, action against an employer to prevent him fulfilling a contract because not all employees are in a union would also be unlawful.

At present, dismissed strikers can claim compensation if they can prove discrimination. Re-enacted by the last Labour government, this provision was intended to protect militants from being victimised. Now the government proposes, that after giving notice as short as perhaps four days to return to work, the employer will be lawfully entitled to dismiss anyone remaining on strike, thus making victimisation easy and lawful.

The total lack of any official fightback against the 1980 Act has made the Tories confident that they can get away with it again. The detrimental effect of these measures cannot be over-emphasised, making unlawful a whole range of industrial action and giving union executives every excuse to sell out those workers who do take on the law.

Just how confident the Tories and their ruling class allies are is illustrated by the recent case of Ted Elsey, assistant secretary of the Inland Revenue Staff Federation. During last year's civil servants' strike, he followed around senior management who were scabbing on the strike. Under the Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act 1875 this is an offence. Even though his conviction only amounted to being 'admonished', the fact that such antiquated legislation could be used at all is indicative of things to come. In fact, apart from the Shrewsbury pickets, this Act has not been used for decades and the section under which Ted was charged dates not since 1855.

None of this would be so bad if the working class was in anything like the condition to fight that it was in the early seventies. Despite the present weakness, however, a fightback has to be built and those workers who are prepared to defy the law must be supported. The difficulty of that task is matched only by its urgency.
The rusting chain of Central America

The bitter war being fought in El Salvador is only one link in a chain of struggle in Central America. Mike Gonzalez explains.

Honduras has a new president—Suazo Cordoba. In world terms it may seem an insignificant event; yet in the delicate balance of Central American politics, it does have important implications.

The new president immediately declared his lifelong anti-communism, his undying opposition to 'exotic political imports'. And well before the election day, his Liberal Party had made a secret agreement with the army not to limit its power in any way.

Honduras, with its $30 million people and a per capita income around $600 per year, is a key element in Reagans Central American strategy. Under US guidance, Honduras may seem to move towards a 'guided democracy' in the months to come. Yet in a region locked in a war of classes, Honduras will not be allowed to move away from the military form of governance it has had almost continuously since 1963.

Honduras may give an appearance of democracy, but its commitment to the joint struggle against 'subversion' in Central America cannot be—and is not—in question.

During the last year, Honduran forces, have been involved in a number of joint operations with the Salvadoran army against the guerrillas of the FMLN-FDR. Last year, it was the Honduran army that drove hundreds of peasants back across the frontier river Lempa; the peasants were then savagely murdered by the army of El Salvador.

And in last autumn the bombing of a refugee camp inside Honduras brought forth only formal protests. In fact, news of the massacre might never have reached the press had not Bianca Jagger and the president of the World Council of Churches happened to be visiting the camp at the time.

Honduras is only one link in a rusting chain. Around its borders a mass struggle is developing. No election can resolve it, though there are forces at work desperately trying to channel it back into a parliamentary direction (see below).

In El Salvador, Reagan had hoped that $25 million of additional aid would ensure a quick victory. It did not.

The failure to crush the guerrillas in El Salvador, has opened a new political space throughout the region.

In Guatemala the level of guerrilla struggle has risen dramatically over the last few months. In the mid-seventies a number of organisations (especially the Guerrilla Army of the Poor—the EGP) began to work with the Indian committees. The result is that today, for the first time, the Indians (who make up 57% of the total population) are actively involved in military activity. Only 22 provinces are in state of war, and the main guerrilla organisations have, at least publicly, recognised that future success depends on developing urban organisations of a mass kind. It remains enormously difficult, however, to build such organisations in a country which has lived for thirty years under a regime of such brutality.

In 1954, the moderate reformist government of Jacob Arbenz was overthrown by force of arms with direct US backing. The gradual modernisation which Arbenz had promised was stopped before it began, and a continuous regime of terror since then ensured that Guatemala remained a country of cheap labour and cheap holidays, where great natural wealth fed the industries of the north.

Guatemala continued to receive more economic aid than any other Central American country. And when Carter held back some military aid in the short-lived 'human rights' campaign of 1979-9, Guatemala simply spent $89 million on arms purchases from Israel and South Africa. At the same time, Guatemalan businessman began to make hefty contributions to Reagan's election campaign.

In Honduras itself land occupations through 1980 have been followed by workers' demonstrations and land takeovers by 500 peasants in the week before the election. Costa Rica, so long called the Switzerland of Central America, faces a profound economic crisis which has brought unprecedented workers demonstrations against unemployment and the rising cost of living. Characteristically Ms Kirkpatrick, US ambassador to the UN, on a recent visit, advised the government to reform the army that Costa Rica abolished in 1948.

Closer still to Reagan's heart, there have been massive demonstrations in Puerto Rico and the Borinquen Liberation Front has started guerrilla attacks on economic targets.

The general response of the US government has become less and less clear in recent weeks. George Bush, the vice president, visited the Dominican Republic in October to warn them of the coming struggle against Cuba. Haig, has made increasingly threatening statements about direct intervention against both Cuba and Nicaragua. And a two-month long joint US-NATO exercise, which ended in mid-October was clearly a preparation for a direct attack against Grenada.
The clearest statement came, as usual, from Henry Kissinger. Addressing the Chilean Chamber of Commerce in Santiago, he called for all-out war in Central America as the only solution.

In fact, the training of anti-Sandinista forces has continued apace. US military advisors are now working to reconstruct the Central American Defence Force first established in the early seventies, to coordinate the war of classes in El Salvador and Guatemala. The official position is in fact that its first detachment—the Atlacatl Brigade—has already lost half its members in El Salvador.

Yet despite this, and rising quantities of military aid, Reagan has seemed reluctant to back Haig’s hard line. He has hesitated, for example, to provide his Guatemalan friends with the promised amounts of military material. Obviously his hesitation stems from doubts about whether the US should enter another protracted imperialist war when its is obvious there can be no quick, decisive victory.

On the other hand, Reagan’s economic strategy for the region demands such a victory. The plan has already been previewed in Jamaica, where the uncritically pro-US Edward Seaga defeated Manley in the elections. Seaga immediately announced the creation of a new state agency whose job would be to attract private foreign investment and tourism back to Jamaica. The island would also become an open market for American goods and technology (particularly in the energy field) and for stockpiled raw materials. The other part of the programme, according to Reagan’s new policy on economic aid, would be a general withdrawal from public sector spending—be it welfare, housing, education, or subsidies for essential food.

The ‘Jamaican model’, however, requires certain preconditions—above all, the ability to impose policies on the working class, even when such policies mean rising unemployment and a further collapse in an already intolerably low standard of living.

For the future of the economies of Central America and the Caribbean are to be even more deeply integrated into the US economy—hence recent proposals to form a North American Common Market (Canada, the US, and Mexico) and the Caribbean Basin Project. But this demands the destruction of the working class’ movement and, as in the past, its reduction to a state of terror and demobilisation. As the struggle intensifies and spreads, that task becomes more and more difficult and costly in political terms.

The Mexican connection

There has been before the UN General Council a motion from Mexico and France calling for a political solution to the crisis in El Salvador. It is not as selfless as it sounds.

Mexico and France both have an economic interest in the area, and Mexico particularly has a political concern too. In the first place, Mexico is supplying both oil and financial credits to El Salvador. For Mexican capital, both public and state, it is a profitable arrangement, provided that stability is soon restored and the debts repaid. But as long as the economic crisis remains, it is risky investment.

Secondly, the political echoes of the developing struggle in Central America are coming too close for comfort to Mexico’s own potentially explosive society. Recently, Mexico returned a number of Guatemalan refugees, most of whom were later found dead and horribly mutilated. On the other hand, Mexico is also anxious to retain some political independence from the US and continue to present itself to the world as a champion of human rights.

The hope presumably is that in El Salvador a political solution will bring the FDR to power (and similar bourgeoisie-democratic—or most probably Christian Democrat-regimes elsewhere) and separate it from the mass organisations of the FMLN. Economic stability will then return with a certain level of economic development.

This might have been possible while the world expanded economically. But in the midst of a general crisis of the world economic system such expansion is impossible. From Britain to El Salvador the solution put forward by each section of the capitalist class is the same: rationalisation on a world scale, structural unemployment and a general depression of the standard of living.

That is what is being put to the test in El Salvador and that is why it is so close to the working class in Britain. If capitalism has an international view of how to resolve the crisis, then our response must equally be internationalist, recognising the common struggle of all workers, wherever that class war is being conducted.
‘The wheel has turned full circle’

In the two years since white rule ended a wave of strikes has hit both Zimbabwe and neighbouring Zambia. John Rogers describes the strikes and their political consequences.

The image of the ‘white man’s burden’, the stamp of his ‘civilising mission’, lingers long in the two southern African territories which used to be known in the colonial era as Zimbabwe and Northern Rhodesia. While in the past, the black labour force provided the basis of the economy and industry, in the 1980s black Zimbabweans and Africans have seized land abandoned by inefficient white farmers.

In industry, the old legacy of division and alienation, the covert and overt attacks on black workers and their trade unions, have been shattered by the strikes.

Zambia’s 27 different unions have had their membership inside the last committee of the government since 1964. The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) has been dissolved and its bodies have been closed down by the government. The strike of 1980 by the ZCTU represents an extraordinary high density of three quarter trade union membership among 400,000 Zambians in paid employment. In Zimbabwe the 300,000 members of the Congress represent one in five of workers. But two years ago only 77,000 had found it worthwhile being registered under Smith’s Industrial Conciliation Act (ICA) as trade union members.

The consolidation of Zimbabwean unionism and the mushrooming of new Zimbabwean workers’ organisations during 1980/81 resulted from a complex tangle of wage demands that compensated for inflation, principally in maize, leading on to political strikes because of victimisation.

Between March and June 1980, Zimbabwean workers geared the end of Smith’s rule with strikes over wages, shorter working weeks, the dismissal of racist or authoritarian supervisors and foremen, bonus schemes, shift allowances, safety precautions at work and an end to compulsory pensions schemes which they saw as of no benefit. In all 120,000 working days were sacrificed by Zimbabwean workers, compared to 64,000 during 1964, the previous record year for strikes. Within a year, the 9,000 striking cane cutters on British owned sugar estates to take just one group of the 1980 strikers, had formed the nucleus of the 16,000 strong new Agricultural and Plantation Workers’ Union.

Mugabe’s reaction to the 1980 strikes had been one of furious condemnation of workers for taking things into their own hands. Wankie coal miners working for Anglo-American were, along with the cane cutters, one of the few groups of Zimbabwean workers who had repeatedly struck in defiance of the Smith regime. Yet they were singled out during 1980 by Mugabe. Troops were used to drive them back to work, literally at a time when striking gold miners in Anglo’s South African coal mines were being bated back to work by police. The leadership of the Zimbabwe Mine Workers Union were unmercifully suppressed in the eyes of the Wankie miners by their support for Mugabe.

Mugabe used Smith’s old Industrial and Conciliation Act as his ‘legal’ justification for repression of strikes. Kaunda, faced with 120,000 strikes and go-slows involving a tenth of the labour force and 100,000 hours between June 1979 and 1980, had tried without success to use his Industrial Relations Act of 1967.

Both laws had been drafted with the help of British TUC advisors acting through the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU). Both had an elaborate arbitration framework, making it illegal for workers to strike for several months while their grievances are examined. Both were defied by the 1980/1 strikers. Between mid-1980 and mid-1981, Kaunda was helpless to prevent 84 illegal strikes involving 46,000 workers and 200,000 working days.

When laws have failed to quell strike actions (Wankie miners were out again in November 1980 despite the repression of their June 1980 action) Mugabe and Kaunda have fallen back on appeals to self-sacrifice. Both ‘nations’ are land-looked and dependent on South African railways and ports for the majority of their imports. Strikes by nurses and teachers in Zimbabwe during October 1981 and strikes led by copper miners in Zambia during January and June 1981 illustrate that workers are refusing to take the brunt of the economic struggle that South Africa wields.

For three days running in October 1981 teachers and nurses lobbied their respective ministers to protest about this and demand immediate settlement of outstanding pay demands. On the third day the demonstrations were so large that the government lost its nerve. The strike had spread to include 12 cities and towns. In Salisbury baton wielding police arrested 500 nurses from Harare Hospital and 250 primary and secondary tea-
Iran: the chaos behind the repression

Hassan Tabrizi is an Iranian socialist who recently left Tehran. During a brief stay in a European capital, he spoke to Socialist Review.

What is the real extent of Khomeini's support in Iran?
I believe that no more than 15 per cent of the population, perhaps even less, are genuine supporters of the regime. That's about the same proportion as supported the Shah. The Shah's class — the wealthy, the top army people, those who ran the apparatus of state, all those depending on their privilege for their income — constitute some 10 percent to 15 per cent of the population. Similarly, those dependent upon today's regime for their income and the regime's apparatus of state. The core of real believers in the Imam (Khomeini) make up a quite small fraction of the population.

There is of course an important difference between the Shah's and Khomeini's supporters. Khomeini's people are willing to die for the Imam, and indeed they have. Most of them are organisers together as part of the regime's attempt to build a new 'state machine', giving them a greater significance than their numbers would suggest.

The Shah's state collapsed. The army, the police, the courts and so on were paralysed. Now they have been partly reconstituted by Khomeini's regime. This attempt at a state apparatus is manned by the ruling group — the Islamic Republic Party — and its supporters.

The hard core are to be found in the Pasdaran (the Revolutionary Guards) and amongst the Hezbollah (the IRP street thugs). Most of these are lumpen proletarians without any class instincts. They have been successfully integrated by the regime into the class of the opposition, the Imam and fighting against America.

Then in the factories and offices and schools there are the Islamic Societies — the Ahwazan Islam. They organise IRP supporters in the workplaces. They discriminate workers and schoolkids, watch them out of dissent and organised opposition, making sure that people pay, and so on.

Together these people constitute the real part of the population that really supports the government. They sometimes create the illusion of more widespread support for Khomeini, but it is always an illusion. The real base of support is very small.

How can you be sure about that? What about all the people turning out for the funerals and demonstrations last year? Even on the television here it seemed that millions were involved, and they quite clearly supported the regime.

The real numbers supporting Khomeini have diminished rapidly over the past two years and especially over the past six months. While those on the demonstrations were once genuinely counted in millions, things are very different today.

Some of us living in Tehran who are interested in such matters have become experts at the numbers game. We can, I assure you, make very accurate assessments of the size of demonstrations, and all the official claims are widely inflated.

After the funeral procession for Rejai and Bahonar the press agencies had the numbers up to one million. I am certain that the real figure was more than 400,000. The 200,000 are the core of Khomeini's support and around Tehran. They are bussed and trucked in from all over especially for the event.

There are other examples. On September 22, the government tried to organise a 'massive' demonstration of schoolkids against the constitution, but it was faced with the Mujahedin. The kids were really pressured into turning out, but they were able to mobilise only 10,000 to 15,000 — that's nothing in Iran.

On both these occasions people stayed at home. Many are afraid to go out, but on the occasion of the funeral demonstration, many more did not show up because they were really quite satisfied with the assassinations.

Just how is the economy and the administration being run at the moment?
There is chaos. The basic problem is that neither Khomeini nor any other of the leading figures have any notion of the sort of economy or society they are trying to create. Remember that they have spent their lives thinking about and talking about fundamentalist Islam, about the earliest years of Islamic society — in the seventh century. Imposes vague and abstract notions on the highly-developed society of Iran in the 1980s and you have chaos.

Khomeini knew that he wanted to destroy the Shah's dictatorship, but that is all he knew. Faced with the problem of taking political control he has had to try and use what has remained from the Shah's system, but that of course is itself partially destroyed, and is in the process of further decay.

I would use this analogy — Khomeini has moved into the Shah's palace, wrecking it as he does so. Now he has decided to live in it. The result is chaos. There is the appearance of order, with Khomeini's administration, the Majlis (parliament), the courts and so on, going about their business and the old apparatus of state, the ministries of this and that, the financial institutions etc., built in the Shah's time, trying to cope in a rather pathetically the overall result — a mess.

Under these circumstances many top administrators and civil servants have just stopped trying. Many of them are in open revolt — the Central Bank for example, hardly bother any longer. There is a stream of people dropping out altogether, with others being purged as 'rebels', and the
result is a rapid turnover of people in key positions. It is just not possible to run the country under these conditions.

Some, of course, do benefit from what's happening. Many young opportunistic technocrats and administrators, who are basically untrained, have risen rapidly. These people move up the various hierarchies of the ministries, planting boards and so on, on the basis of their uncreditable commitment to the regime. Of course, the more they proliferate in influential positions, the more they gunk up the works.

This process is encouraged by the fact that under Khominei, while power has been centralised at the very top, elsewhere it has been broken up in lots of little bits. In the fight for the bits and pieces of influence the process of depopulation of the economy and the administration is further speeded up.

Beneath it, by far the most far-thinking of the religious leaders, seemed to understand what was happening. He tried to prevent the process spreading. When he was assassinated there was no one left who understood the need for a coherent approach to government. The present leadership are a pretty pathetic bunch who are mostly held in contempt by those administrators who have remained in office.

Let me give a concrete example of what I mean by "clown". Some of the mullahs have tried to cut down on the waves of executions, realising that the brutality of it all was doing the government serious damage. They couldn't stop it. Shortly after Khominei announced that all killing must stop — which he is not prepared to do — the fact that there is no systematic chain of command, no coherent state structure, means that the revolutionary guards simply go on killing. Many people would be prepared to offer at least qualified support to the regime, but they are not even permitted to do that. The purges and killings go on and on.

What about the state of the economy and the way it affects ordinary people? I would put inflation at 60 per cent to 70 per cent for basic goods. The black market has shot up recently and now the average ratio of black market to official prices is about 2:1. Queuing is getting very bad. In Tehran we have been getting eggs only once a fortnight — then families are permitted only to buy 15 eggs. Oil production is no more than 400,000 barrels per day, leaving Iran with a trade deficit of nearly $1 billion per month.

The state of the country's financial reserves means that no letters of credit are being issued for food imports. In November the usual supplies of frozen chicken from France and meat supplies from New Zealand did not arrive — the government was refusing to endorse payment.

I do believe there will be demonstrations at some stage during the winter over food supplies and prices. People are frustrated and very angry.

Under these circumstances how long can the regime survive? I think there are two ways of looking at it. First, the question of whether they can survive for 10 months. Their intense economic pressure, and with growing, and very large, most people. But second, if they survive the next period, there is a good chance they will hang on for a couple of years, with the economic decay becoming progressively worse.

If people feel as frustrated as you suggest, and so few genuinely support Khominei, why have the opposition not made more rapid gains? Ma'soud Rajavi, leader of the Mujahedin, claims that 20 per cent of the population support his organisation. I believe that estimate is about correct. Millions more passively support the idea of opposition to the regime, but are too scared or uncertain to participate in active opposition.

Here, of course, the left face their biggest difficulty. The Mujahedin — they for the present dominate all organised opposition to the regime — delighted people when they came out fighting in the streets, and in the summer, when it was the Mujahedin pulled off the assassinations. The effect of the Mujahedin confrontation with the Revolutionary Guards in the streets was absolutely electric when it first happened, and it had a very serious effect on the guard's morale. Most of them, for example, will not longer wear uniforms near their homes. They are under great pressure and there have been many defections. The guards are down to perhaps 4,000-5,000 in Tehran, though there are 10,000 in the militia, and thousands more at the front.

The Mujahedin have directed almost all their fire — literally — against these people. They have lost 500-600 in street clashes, and 6,000-8,000 in executions. They claim to have a guerrilla cadre of 10,000 to 12,000 and another 60,000 in their militia. Again, I believe them. But over the past two months they have largely withdrawn from open confrontations, and cut down on the bombings. In part this is due to the fact that the cost to them in open fighting has been very, very great, but I think they also see little in the way of results if judged by the involvement of larger numbers of people in active opposition.

In the autumn the Mujahedin declared "the month of blood" against Khominei when they said he would fall. He didn't. They called for extensive strikes. They didn't get them. The Mujahedin have not been able to mobilise beyond their own numbers, and the fact is that though there is widespread sympathy, there is no organised working-class support they are able to draw on.

There is no point in merely negatively criticising the Mujahedin who, alone among the opposition foresaw that the current persecution might be a significant event prepared for it. But like the true left in Iran those calling themselves Marxists like the Fedayeen (Minority), Peykar and the groups, the Mujahedin missed the opportunity of building in the working class when there was a real explosion of workers' activity in the period after the fall of the Shah. At that time factories were occupied, there were active workers' committees, and so on. At the same time there was a real political vacuum.

But there was no tradition in Iran which could have directed the left into that movement. The idea of building a Leninist-type party was simply absent — except in the rhetoric. Now we pay the price.

It is believed by some in Iran that the Mujahedin are now prepared to kill Khominei. The argument goes that in the past such an assassination would simply have consolidated support for the regime. Now, it is said, that Khominei has been properly exposed, that the Islamic Republic has been shown up as a chaotic mess that cannot even feed the people, and is efficient only at killing helpless prisoners and 'suspects', if the Iranian going, then what remains will collapse. This may be correct, but there is no alternative leadership. This is the problem with taking a minimalist approach.

But at least the Mujahedin are principled and consistent. The Tudeh (Communist Party) and the Fedayeen (Majority) are both integrated into the regime's "apparatus". They specialise in shopping supporters of the leftist organisations in exchange for positions in the media, administration etc., so that they can continue the struggle against "the main enemy" — America.

It is tough enough existing with the idea that we do have to build a workers' party in Iran. These policies in the attempt to give a "left face" to a regime which is quite murderous and violently anti-socialist help to make the conditions in Iran that much more difficult.
Alan Sillitoe: Passion without prescription

Alan Sillitoe's first published novel (after five rejections) in 1958, 'Saturday Night and Sunday Morning' received a fanfare of publicity. Along with people like Braine, Stan Barstow and Sheila Delaney, writing against a backdrop of the 'rediscovered' industrial north, Sillitoe remodeled the contours of British literary culture. Terence Rigby's essay 'Working Class' gave way to the voices of a new generation of writers who sought to bring the drudgery of everyday capitalist production into the limelight. Without a doubt, the unprecedented success of the novel had a significant impact on the literary landscape of the time.

At the centre of Saturday Night and Sunday Morning, the life of a working-class family, particularly the lives of the men and their families. The Friday night, the Faustian pact is made: 'Work or nothing.' The plight of the workers in the textile industry is depicted in vivid detail. The novel's depiction of the lives of the men and their families is a testament to Sillitoe's ability to capture the essence of the working-class experience.

The theme of social alienation is developed in the novel, particularly in the character of Arthur Seaton. The novel's exploration of the struggle against the system is a reflection of the larger societal issues of the time. The novel's depiction of the struggles of the working class against the capitalist system is a testament to Sillitoe's ability to capture the essence of the working-class experience.

A meaningful political consciousness is never really attained by Arthur, too consistently seduced by the easily regulated piece-work and the subdued transvestite. The novel's depiction of the struggle against the system is a reflection of the larger societal issues of the time. The novel's exploration of the struggles of the working class against the capitalist system is a testament to Sillitoe's ability to capture the essence of the working-class experience.

In Sillitoe's celebrated short story, The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner, the protagonist, Colin Smith, reflects on his life of crime, his hatred of authority, his father's death from leukaemia and his mother's suicide. He is also an insurance salesman and has to sell insurance policies to the working class. As he glides across country on his daily permissible run of freedom, he sketches out a plan for maintaining his integrity against a crafty governor keen to convey the idea that his system is progressive so long as the inmates cooperate. For Sports Day the governor insists on a race, and Smith wins glory for his institution. Although streets ahead of his rivals, Smith throws the race in a magnificent act of defiance, denying the governor both his ambition and his policy of taming society's rebels by engulfing them into a whole trudging system.

Generally, Sillitoe's characters in the early works blend into rebel spirit, but not in deed. They sense the need for social change, but lack the political commitment. A number of the Nottingham stories present revolutionary rhetoric (as with Liz Akin's gut feelings, in The Ragman's Daughter' collection, that the local factory strike hadn't gone far enough). The later novels, however, develop a more purposeful cutting edge, reflected in the greater maturity of the written style. A new richness of language enables Sillitoe to create immensely powerful portrayals of characters who, while intensely conscious of their class, strive towards a goal to transform the total social fabric and by definition, themselves.

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Frank Dawsley's trek across the Algerian desert is more than a man's hell in the search for purpose and liberation. It is about the FNL and their dogged fight in the Algerian war of independence against the French. And in the telling it is the story of the oppressed peoples in collective struggle everywhere. Small bands of revolutionaries smuggle arms and ammunition, and fight a desperate movement in combat with an imperialist army which controls the skies with helicopters and chemical weapons. Arthur Seaton's Nottingham would seem light years away. Yet Sillitoe does not let the reader forget the inner conflicts a revolutionary carries around him. Dawsley lives the tension of uncommitted revolutionary action and the recurring image of the women and children left behind.

Tree of Fire also served Dawsley's life to that of Handley, his artist friend—a picture of restless energy on canvas exploding beyond the conventions of a bourgeois society that shamefacedly exploits its talents for profit. The book, however, is flawed by a finiteness and unevenness. Raw Material suffers from this, but then, just as the reader begins to despair of the endless philosophizing about truth and the writer, the mix of documentation and fiction springs to life. The pages pulsate with the flesh and blood of identifiable people amidst the storm of their lives. Grandfather Burton, proud, Victorian, cruel and charmed, maintains the mutual devotion of his wife and daughters through grade fear. The cumulative force of grinding poverty blackens out human kindness. It knits itself into Burton's spare, sinewy frame.

Raw Material also reaches great heights in Sillitoe's treatment of the Somme in 1916. The subject of war and its horrors is often treated in fictional writing. Talking of the million young lives squandered to pre-empt the 'danger' of revolution, he notes 'If Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Falmouth, the British class war was fought out on the Western Front with real shells and bullets.' And Edgar Burton tastes the reality. From a hole in the ground he could see them:

...lying asleep in clumps and rows, some without legs and arms, all sinews ashen and shattered. Another man is wounded by a shrapnel bullet entering his stomach. He tries to spit out his shoulder-blades but they won't come loose, so he fails.'

At last year's Cheltenham Literature Festival a number of people walked out during Sillitoe's reading of extracts from this work. Clearly, it was too raw for them.

The problem, however, that socialists would find in his work is that it fails to follow the logic of his creative inspiration. Although Sillitoe's essays, for example, Mountains and Caverns are always worth reading for the insights they yield on social injustice and politics, in the end a picture of pessimism pervades their pages. The interview with that he has given to journals and newspapers reinforces this judgement.

There lies a continuing ambiguity in his steadfast belief in the predominance of individual personality over collective endeavor. The writer's revolutionary standing as an independent social critic. But human beings, he argues can only hope for reforms rather than revolution, inevitably dragged down by the conservatism of 'human nature'. In a Times Literary Supplement article he specifically attacks Marxism, because both Marxists and advertisers have this in common to them to ordinary people are 'the masses' and not individuals. Which simply repeats the many misreadings of Marxism, and demonstrates a blindness to Marx's, 1844 Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts', which consistently show how the individual personality can flower but not within capitalism.

Sillitoe in the end refuses to see the inequality and the savage conflicts as products of a particular type of system. He rather explains them away with the catch-all phrase of 'the tragic condition of existence' or ploughs his way through a series of contradictions. For instance, his fierce attack on nationalism in Mountains and Caverns is countered elsewhere by a staunch pro-Zionism. One more case of the libertarian writer strong on passion but soft on prescription.

Harry Cowan
The one that won

The last five years organised workers on Clydeside have taken a prolonged hammering. To any socialist, with even an eye on the workplace, the period has been one long catalogue of treachery, defeat and abject surrender.

Sadly, 1981 turned out to be no different. It was a year that started badly with the crushing defeat at Linwood and the loss of 6,000 jobs without a fight.

Even when strong groups of workers did fight back over the last 12 months — like the lagger who occupied at Bestobell, or the miners who struck against the closure of Bedlay pit, or more recently the skilled production workers who fought at Rolls Royce — the outcome was either total defeat or shoddy compromise.

Yet there was one surprising and significant exception to the general trend — an exception that shone like a bright beacon in a very dark night.

That was Lee Jeans, the now famous seven month sit-in at a Greenock jeans factory, which ended in a moral victory for the workforce and gave a boost to all those who supported the occupation.

Many Socialist Review readers will have been involved in raising support for the struggle. But the experience of those seven months is worth examining in some depth — especially since the outcome is considered to be one of the very few victories that we won last year.

Lee Jeans (nowwear as it is known today) is a small factory in Greenock, a big shipbuilding town 20 miles down the Clyde from Glasgow. Before the sit-in, the plant was owned by a US multinational clothing firm, Vanity Fair, who owned 40 factories nationwide.

VF’s history is a typically sorrid one. They opened the Greenock factory in the mid-1970s and pocketed huge government grants for doing so. By the end of 1978, they had moved to a new site from Greenock to Ireland, where the government handouts were even higher, and where the workforce were reckoned to be more docile. The writing was on the wall for Greenock, and in February 1981 the company decided to close the plant, transfer production to Ireland, and throw 240 workers onto the dole.

The company never really expected trouble. Greenock was a union closed-shop, but the union concern — the NUTGW — was rated a pushover. More importantly, the workforce, nearly all women and the majority of them teenagers, had no experience of struggle, no tradition or organisation.

Yet VF experienced what they thought would be only a temporary setback. When they announced the closure in February the women, unpredictably, occupied the factory. At first management kept their nerve, judging the spontaneous occupation to be a forelock gesture, doomed to failure.

But from the start the women and men fought and organised as if their lives depended on it. In Greenock, unemployment was creeping up to 20 per cent and the women, particularly the younger ones, knew they could have no future outside the factory.

Precisely because they knew they were weak and isolated, the women were prepared to accept help from any quarter. Outside assistance was offered and received from the start. Primarily through local shipyard stewards, a sympathetic TGWU full-timer, and the Right to Work Campaign, the news of the Lee Jeans occupation was spread in the first few days.

Thousands of ‘official’ collection sheets were distributed. Local shop stewards set up a trade union support committee and the Right to Work Campaign organised delegations from the occupation and took them around all factories and workplaces in the Clydeside area. It was also able to bring senior stewards from the recently successful Gardiners occupation into the sit-in, and they explained the steps needed for victory.

Throughout the first six weeks, the women’s union, the NUTGW, refused to make the strike official or to pay strike money. The union’s leaders were scared that the sit-in would bring the union into conflict with the law. But support continued to flood in from rank and file trade unionists. All the major shipyards and engineering plants began to organise weekly collections for the sit-in. The leaders of the NUTGW were forced, reluctantly, to support the dispute.

Suddenly, Lee Jeans was becoming the symbol for a dispirited movement, and morale in the occupation rocketed as the response from the outside grew. Despite the sacrifices and the disruption to personal life the women were growing more determined.

Belatedly, the bigwigs of the movement started to rally round. The Scottish TUC, who had been slow off the mark, responded to the groundswell of rank and file support.

The Lee Jeans struggle became so popular that the STUC put out the red carpet at their annual conference in Rothesay (strikebreakers are rarely prominent at STUC gatherings, but this strike had won a certain amount of respectability — even the popular press was championing the women at Lee Jeans). For many people it was a bit of a novelty, but every little bit of support helped.

When the management attempted to evict the women and use the law, local shipyard workers turned out in force — and there was no eviction.

But along with the official blessing, came the strings of the dodgy advice. Midway through the sit-in it was becoming clear that more than moral and financial support would be needed.

The collections, the ovations, even the visit of Michael Foot to the sit-in — all these were useful. But it was the RTWC and the Socialist Worker who argued that the key to actually winning the dispute and saving jobs, lay in blacking VF. That would mean stopping the movements of goods from the Irish factories and cutting off their source of revenue — particularly in the lucrative Scandinavian market.

The RTWC organised nationwide pickets
of VF shops and retail outlets, to draw attention to the fight, but argued that winning the active support of rank and file dockers was the crucial next step.

Conflicting advice came from the NUTGW and from the STUC. They were reluctant to campaign for blacking, and instead set up meetings with all and sundry to discuss the half-baked idea of a workers' campaign. For a while the dispute was side-tracked by the very people who should have been organising a blacking campaign.

Eventually the women approached dockers' shop stewards and blacking was set in motion. But at this stage the NUTGW ended official backing for the strike, and strike pay was stopped. Undeterred, the women fought on.

In the late summer the deadlock was broken. A consortium including the Dickie Dirks Jeans Empire and a former manager from VF offered to buy the plant from VF and restart production — employing all those still involved in the sit-in. Their offer had built up and the blacking on VF's goods were having an effect on the company. Under this pressure they agreed to sell to the consortium.

Seven months after the sit-in began, a new management re-opened the factory, employing the 140 workers still sitting in.

The outcome at Greenock was not a total victory. It took a bitter, seven month occupation to save just over half the jobs. Perhaps, 10 years ago, that might have been considered a defeat. But things have changed. We are in a period of cut-backs and mass unemployment, with as yet no real resistance, and no working class generalisation. The inaction and downright opposition of our own trade union leaders makes things that much harder.

But the Lee Jeans sit-in shows that jobs can be saved if workers have the will to fight and understand the need to win solidarity from other workers.

The sit-in also tells us that when workers do resist, they learn to overcome their own weaknesses and conquer their own backwardness in the process of the struggle.

During the sit-in, women who had never spoken in public before, talked at mass meetings, trades council, shop stewards' committees and demonstrations about the need for a fightback. For seven months they defied the law of the land.

Only last month, a trade union delegation from a waterfront factory visited a women's factory occupation in Norway giving support and advice to other workers in struggle. That could never have happened a year ago.

But the impact of Lee Jeans was felt not just by those directly involved in the sit-in. At least a few of the many male trade unionists who gave money to the sit-in every week, were forced to see women in a new light.

Today, the 140 workers at Interwear may be relieved that they still have a job to go to. But their problems are far from over. Their only guarantee for the future is to build up and maintain a strong shop floor union organisation to defend their jobs, wages and conditions, inside the re-opened factory.

Scotts: Hard lessons of our eight month fight

The eight months long fight for the right to work by the Laurence Scott workers in Openshaw, Manchester is a testament to the determination, and solidarity of the workforce. Despite many setbacks the men and women involved have held together and fought together. Such solidarity, no matter whether the dispute is ultimately won or lost, will remain as an answer to those who say workers will never stand together, will never stick together.

But to say just that would be a disservice to the strikers and to the movement. The Scots workers have had to fight in a political climate as hard and cold as last month's weather. Sold out by their union leadership, evicted from their factory, now under threat from the Tories' Employment Act, they have had to try and find a way to fight through all these difficulties. It is not surprising that a few mistakes have been made from which others will learn.

Spreading the strike

The Scots dispute began in April 1981. The background was simple—a dawn raid takeover by Mining Supplies of the Laurence Scott Electromotors group in October 1980. Three months after initial promises of jobs for all, the closure of the Manchester factory was announced.

The workforce, mainly skilled, producing motors for the mining industry and for the Admiralty, were stunned. Many entire families, fathers and sons, brothers and sisters, worked and had worked at the factory for over 40 years. Their shock was turned to bitterness by the knowledge that they had been taken for a ride by Arthur Snipe, managing director of Mining Supplies and that their particular factory had been profitable for the previous three years.

The works was to have finally closed in July 1981. After a re-examination of all procedures by April 21st the workforce decided, not unanimously, but with a clear majority, to occupy.

In many ways both the stewards committee and the workforce were taken by surprise by their own decision. Occupation was not a new tactic—Laurence Scott had been the first to occupy in the Manchester sit-ins of 1972, but then it had been part of a national campaign. Now they found themselves alone.

Within the first week of the dispute a party of stewards visited Gardners for advice on how they had conducted their sit-in. However as the Gardener workers were conscious, fighting redundancies and fighting total closure, were very different propositions.

Unlike Gardners, inside Scots there was little tradition of political organisation. While trade union solidarity was good—delegations had been to the Automat dispute on a regular basis, collections were always taken for disputes—the stewards were not active outside of the workplace, either in the Broad Left, in the district committee or elsewhere.

Initially, the expectations of the stewards committee were very high. The general downturn inside the movement had passed them by—they expected support to be quite easily obtained, and more dangerously, although conscious of Boyd and Duffy's role in the Derek Robinson affair, they did not seriously consider that on such a principle issue the union would dare let them down.

As a result the first weeks of the dispute were essentially passive. Delegations went out around Manchester and some began to go further afield. But the main dynamic was taken up by approaches through John Tocher, AUEW Divisional Organiser, and the stewards committee to the Yorkshire miners.

However these moves through official channels led simply into a bureaucratic bog. No clear statement on blacking Mining Supplies products could be obtained from Scargill or from anyone else. Scargill's position was that before the miners could take action against Mining Supplies, the otherScotts plants in Norvich and Mining Supplies itself would have to be involved in the dispute. In other words Scargill's undertaking came down to saying that if all the Mining Supplies companies were out and produced nothing, he would black what they produced.

Even worse, the approaches to Scargill resulted in a resolution going to the NUM nationally. Once this occurred the AUEW National Executive with Boyd and Duffy started to move in on the dispute, of course underlying the dispute there lay an issue of far more concern to the AUEW leadership than a fight for jobs—the spectre of the Employment Act. Any blacking of Mining Supplies factories would also involve secondary action.

The AUEW executive had a time bomb ticking in their hands—they wanted the dispute out of the way.

Unfortunately, inside the factory these bureaucratic manoeuvres simply diverted attention from the workers themselves taking action. The idea of picketing Mining Supplies in Doncaster, had been frequently raised but the then-convenor, Bob Petcherton, had been extremely reluctant to so
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down that road.

As time dragged on, and little materialised, more and more of the stewards could see they were making little progress. Finally, an action committee was set up to discuss what could be done. A fortnight’s programme of action was decided on and agreed to by the stewards’ committee, leading up to putting a packet on Mining Supplies in Doncaster.

Delegations were sent out to Norwich, Doncaster and suppliers of Mining Supplies, British Oxygen, the Doncaster trades council, the AUEW district committee, and of course, the Mining Supplies stewards were all informed of the decision to picket and asked for support. The picket was not designed to get the workforce out—it was clear there was no possibility of that—but to stop supplies coming in or out, especially the oxygen.

Very rapidly, things started to move.

August to November were depressing months for the Scots workers. On the same day that the agreement was signed with Duffy, Arthur Snipe’s lawyers had been in court for a possession order to evict the Scots workers. The order was only given after the executive council had had time to withdraw all support from the dispute. The order was acted upon only after the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions had withdrawn their support nationally. It was carried out by fifty thugs carrying pickaxe handles and clubs at 3 am (it later emerged that these same thugs had been used to evict students at Manchester University and workers from Meccano.)

The period following became a long series of fine speeches and no action. MP after MP expressed the sympathy for the Scots workers, Tony Benn even came down to the picket line, leading trade unionists gave their verbal support, but all the time behind

Although unofficial, proved far more successful than had been anticipated. The Doncaster miners’ panel made a decision to black all Mining Supplies products. British Oxygen were refusing to cross the picket line and a clear momentum was building up in Scots favour. At this point the Scots workers hesitated.

The reason for the hesitation was the taking out of an injunction by Snipe, naming six individuals under the Employment Act. After taking legal advice, the six named stewards signed affidavits stating they would not go to the picket line in Doncaster. Court proceedings were delayed for a fortnight. During this period the national stewards committee undecided on what attitude to take finally towards the injunction. Having gained time to make this decision, they found that the ground was rapidly disappearing from under their feet.

The AUEW national committee decided to support Boyd and Duffy. The national Cofet secretary telephoned Gormley asking him to use his offices to inform all miners that the Scots dispute was unofficial—with the clear implication that it should not be supported.

The use of the Employment Act sent shivers up the spines of the national TGWU officials. Further pressure was undoubtedly put on the TGWU by Boyd, as a result the BOC drivers, unable to obtain any instructions from their only officials in the T&G, decided to cross the picket line. A majority of other drivers followed suit, and the picket was rapidly becoming ineffective.

Meanwhile, the Yorkshire area committee did not follow the Doncaster panel’s decision to black Mining Supplies products, but merely restated their position that lorries crossing the picket line would be blacked.

Hence by mid-December the momentum was clearly building up against the Scots workers. This, coupled with blizzard conditions made the withdrawal of the picket inevitable. The stewards decided to withdraw on Tuesday 15th December—and defraying the injunction without any picket line to defend became academic.

Unfortunately, the Scots workers battle with the courts might not be over. It is still possible that Snipe, wanting his pound of flesh, will pursue those named on the injunction for any losses incurred as a result of the Doncaster packet. Either way, if that occurs, a campaign will be required in their defence.

Thus after eight months Scots workers find themselves back in Manchester, continuing to picket the Openshaws factory. There is little value in speculating what will be the eventual outcome—the important thing now is to learn from the entire experience.

One thing is fundamental: strikes cannot be fought in isolation. The failure depends as much on what has happened before the dispute has occurred and the general state of working class organisation as on the moves that are made in the course of the actual struggle.

Militancy today is not enough to save jobs, nor is mere technique. Consistent political work in the factories and at the community—whether in or out of disputes is a necessity to have any chance of winning when the struggle actually occurs.
Staffa: Giving in with victory in sight

The Staffa dispute in East London lasted ten weeks. After three weeks of occupation the strikers were evicted by three hundred policemen invading the factory. Thereafter, picket lines and delegations to all parts of the country, seeking financial support and blacking, kept up the pressure. In the end, though, just before Christmas, the workers accepted a new deal from management: the jobs would eventually go when Staffa moved to Plymouth. But the terms offered by the employers are a distinct improvement on the original.

The outcome wasn't a victory. On the other hand, this first-ever London occupation over jobs, wasn't exactly a crushing defeat either. What features ought we to look at and learn from in the current period?

The first point to note is that although nobody would put the East London industrial estates in the leadership of working-class struggle in Britain, the dispute didn't come out of nowhere. Staffa's there has been a good tradition of wage militancy, with initially the CP, and then the SWP playing an important role. But a management offensive first drove out the CP AUEW convenor and then victimised his replacement with the introduction of a phoney redundancy scheme on a last in first out basis which in fact succeeded in getting rid of the convenor and a good proportion of the shop stewards' committee.

This should have weakened the organisation and resolve of the Staffa workforce. But the irony is that the very success of the management offensive derived from the union leadership's new generation of younger militants not held back by tradition, who were eager to have a go.

That also meant an openness to ideas. The victimised ex-convenor maintained regular contact with militants from Staffa's (not just the shop stewards), so that when the move to Plymouth came up a good deal of discussion and exchange of experience had gone on, which was useful preparation for a struggle against management.

The relationship between the shop stewards and the workforce was also an important factor. On the manual side roughly half the workforce is West Indian and Asian. The tradition of trade union organisation and involvement is stronger among the Asians, and they, in particular, because of their involvement in anti-racist organisation in the community, could be pulled round struggle in the factory. The young white militants, who constituted the leadership, were able to break down barriers and ensure involvement.

...and police scabs at Staffa.

The decision to occupy didn't come out of the blue. Extensive discussion took place at three mass meetings before the occupation, at one of which, Tom MacAfee, the Gardiner enthusiast, spoke about their experience. The decision to occupy was taken at a mass meeting and was raised by the AUEW convenor, Dave Green, who sensed the mood was right, without the shop stewards' committee taking a formal position on the question. So the Staffa workers were fully involved from the very beginning, and that, together with the well-organised system of raising money and sending out delegations, was their strength. As another shop steward, Chris Newson, says:

'The action of occupation was really taken as a last resort. But now we know that it was the only effective direct action we could have taken. We did toy with the idea of strikes and selective stoppages. With an all-out strike, management are still in control at the centre of things, they can still get the lorries in and out, and keep the company ticking over. An occupation hits them where it hurts. Once we had occupied the immediate thing was finding our way around, setting up committees, and organising publicity. Communication is one of the most important things, publicising what you are doing and getting support.'

'As the occupation progressed we got more and more self-sufficient. Which is just as well as we really had to go it alone. We had no coverage in the national press at all. We had meetings with the GLC who promised to put pressure on the company, but nothing came of it. Our local MP Brian McGhee was disgraceful. But we found out the company had got to him first. The same with the AUEW — it took us weeks to get official recognition. At the end of the day we had to take action in our own hands and go it alone.

'Ve have learnt a lot of lessons:
1) You must make sure that you have got the workforce behind you, not just their vote but their commitment.
2) It is essential to get everybody doing something, keeping them involved.
3) Never run a strike away from the picket line. You have to take the committee to the picket line so that you can see to be doing things.

'Another thing is involving the wives or husbands of the strikers and the local community.'

However, there were also built-in weaknesses that showed through in the end. The struggle was led by an alliance between two minorities, which formed a majority able to silence those willing to accept the original management offer of £1000 pay-off per worker. One consequence is that they could win the battle to retain jobs; the other, that better redundancy terms could be secured. Both believed in militant struggle and that was the unity that enabled them to dominate the right, who never wanted a fight and remained discredited.

There was also a difference between the two unions involved. Nearly half the total workforce were staff and organised by ASTMS. Their organisation and leadership were weaker than the AUEW's and they were dominated by the officials. On legal advice they left the occupation to picket on the outside — a division that undoubtedly helped the police in occupation-busting. Clearly a united struggle is necessary, but it should be on the highest level rather than the lowest, common denominator. The AUEW were right to insist on maintaining the occupation. On the whole ASTMS were fighting for better terms, rather than jobs first and foremost.

The interesting point by way of experience of the struggle is that those involved in the delegations to other factories became convinced that jobs could be maintained. During the ten week dispute the original handful convinced of this grew to a sizeable minority.

But the crunch came with the increased terms finally offered by management. The acceptance was not due to a domination by right-wing, scabby elements. It was rather that the money offered won out over the jobs. Facilitated by the soft-line over the hard-line socialists (in the final vote some 40 out of 200 remained committed to continuing struggle). The alliance between the two minorities split. People vacillated.

The acceptance should not be seen as a defeat. The improved terms were the result of the blacking campaign. There is no doubt that the bosses were scared and anxious to settle on terms relatively favourable to the workforce: a guarantee of work for everyone for six months — with the possibility of negotiating that to a year; an immediate seven per cent pay increase for everyone; phased redundancies during the move to Plymouth, with enhanced redundancy payments roughly worth £2000 per worker (a very considerable improvement over the original offer).

There is also a guarantee of staff organisation. The AUEW and ASTMS convenors will be the last to be made redundant unless requested otherwise. There are obvious dangers in that, of course, which are
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fully recognised by the stewards, of becoming incorporated. On the other hand, negotiations and a continuing struggle can also be ensured.

The final point, in respect of weakness, is the damage caused by Labour Party ideas. The liaison committee with MPs, which involved continually dragging people up and down to parliament, and the LGC's suggestion of putting up money for a co-operative, both held out the illusion of a solution other than through struggle. MPs didn't contribute to the raising of financial support or the blacking campaign and the net effect of Labour Party involvement was a tendency to produce demoralisation, with workers thinking, 'how can we win if these people can't help us.'

Probably Staffa workers were within two weeks of getting the company to stay in Leyton. Management were very insistent on getting the blacking lifted, which suggests that it was biting hard. So, although the workers went back without a victory they didn't return smashed. In particular, the guarantee of work over a period of time and the maintenance of shop steward organisation are important checks on management power. They give the workforce a breathing space to look round for whatever alternative employment exists and keep confidence intact.

The terms of the deal also prove — and it's an important lesson in the present period when few outright victories are likely — that the level of struggle influences the nature of the outcome. If you don't fight you can be sure of getting very little. If you do there's a chance of finishing up with something better, even if not everything you hoped for. There is also the experience learnt and stored up for future use. As Chris Newsom says: 'Hopefully people will look to the Staffa strike as a lead for their own disputes. Even though we lost we did show that it can be done if you stick at it. If we had stayed there until after Christmas we would have won.' At a stage we had even managed to get the miners blacking.

In the final analysis the tactic of occupying the best one we have got. It means you can control from within, at the heart of the struggle. For the first time we were in control of the company. Occupy, keep them out, the longer you keep them out, the stronger you get.'

and voted to 'resist the closure by any means necessary', and the mass meeting supported that decision. An Action Committee was set up and a £1 levy imposed on the workforce. "

But even then there were signs that the shopfloor was not really prepared to go all out to save the plant. Put like this: 'Every Single one noted in Socialist Challenge that the £1 collections were disappointing and that the stewards tend to go with the mood of the section rather than lead and change it.' Rumours began to circulate that the committee had rejected improved redundancy terms and layoff money were prepared to pay an extra six or eight weeks pay. A mass meeting was held on June 17th to try to dispel the rumours. The workforce again voted to resist, this time almost unanimously.

Throughout the response of the trade union leadership was to say that it would support actions by the Solihull workforce, never undertake a lead itself. This only compounded the problem of lack of confidence in the rank and file, who effectively felt that they were on their own.

But the major setback occurred on 30 June, when a mass meeting rejected by two-to-one the proposals to ban work on a new paint process and to picket the plant to prevent movement of equipment during the holidays. The Action Committee were divided after the meeting, some urging that we try to build on the one third angry vote, others that it is all over. On the shopfloor, some workers were furious that the decision of the mass meeting was not being accepted as final and the closure terms finalised.

The final act came with the meeting of the management and shopfloor officials nationally on July 6th. The company returned to back down, and Granville Howley, national secretary of the automotive group of the TGWU, could only say to SD1, "We'll back you but you have to provide the troops.'

A mass meetings two days later confirmed what was expected — two thirds voted against continuing resistance to the closure.

The Solihull experience must be recognisable to many people who have been trying to fight job loss over the last couple of years. Firstly, that the fight for jobs cannot be separated from the fight over conditions and organisation. The disputes suffered over speed-ups, pay, and discipline paved the way for both the lack of confidence to fight, and the desire to get out, even if the alternative is the dole.

Secondly, that the role of the officials becomes more important when the rank and file lack the confidence to go it alone.

In that situation the officials have consistently failed to respond. They have shed crocodile tears over the job loss and done deals over the redundancy pay, instead of giving a lead. They have sidedetracked the fights that have happened or sold them out altogether as at Laurence Scotts.

How Rover fell at the last hurdle

The SDI plant was a very modern one, opened in 1976, and with a record of high productivity. At the first announcement of 1400 redundancies or transfers to other plants in the summer of 1979 the SDI stewards unanimously decided to oppose the management's proposals and to fight for job-sharing and a shorter working week with no loss of pay. But at the mass meeting the following week, the stewards were turned over, although they were unanimously supported in opposing compulsory redundancies and unilaterally imposed working hours.

Following the meeting, the foremen handed out details of the new manning levels. Raghib Ahsan, a worker at the plant since 1976 has described what happened next in a very useful article:

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In his article, Ahsan also spells out what the attacks on organisation and the speed-ups meant — automation deskilled the jobs almost totally, staggered breaks from the line means that people had little opportunity to discuss what was happening with the rest of their section; the stress of trying to "work back" or beat the line to earn more breaks led to intense fatigue, nervous breakdowns, tensions in the family.

Small but telling indications of the success of the management tough line were that workers no longer clocked in people who were late, and that whereas usually at Christmas management found it impossible to run the tracks on the afternoon of the last day before the holidays, last year they got a full day's production. Under these conditions, it was hardly surprising that many people, including militants and stewards, wanted to get out, even if only to the dole queue. And many applying for redundancy were aware that they wouldn't get another job.

Nevertheless, action was taken — for half a day in support of Derek Robinson, and in April 1980 over BL's decision to impose its '92 page document' on conditions.

In both cases, defeat followed. The lack of shopfloor confidence in the ability to win was met not by leadership nationally, but by outright pressure to accept on the part of the AUEW, and delaying tactics and collapse in the face of BL management by the TGWU.

The leadership again backed down in the face of threats of closure over the 1980 pay claim, despite a two-to-one vote for industrial action. When management pressed for compulsory redundancies, a SDI mass meeting voted to resist this by occupying the plant. Then new speed-ups were announced and there was a stoppage throughout SDI. But the threat of closure was used by the convenor to get the workers back in. The increasing speed-ups led to more volunteers for redundancy.

This was the background when management announced the closure of the plant in May last year.

A fight did begin. The shop stewards met
Organising the TUC way

Mass unemployment has posed a major new challenge to the trade union movement. Hundreds of thousands of working people are being forced out of the unions as a direct result of redundancies. At the same time a whole generation of young people face the real possibility that they might not be able to enter permanent employment, and therefore participate in trade union activities.

The dramatic fall in trade union membership accompanied by the equally serious decline in union funds has been too severe even for the union bureaucracy to swallow. In a number of unions the problem has become acute. In the last year APEX have lost 25,000 members (16 per cent of the entire union), the ISTC have been decimated with the loss of another 30,000 members, the AUEW have lost 150,000 and even the giant TGWU have seen no less than a quarter of a million members disappear.

Meanwhile the existence of a growing body of unemployed who have either not been organised or become separated from their former organisation is being recognised by a growing concern on the part of the union leaderships. 1981 saw a significant shift in approach as the TUC General Council found itself compelled to at least organise some gestures of opposition to the growing dole queues. The problem of the organisation of the unemployed became a constant theme in the course of their deliberations. Last year’s wave of riots across Britain and major cities underscored the long-term consequences of neglecting the task.

There is no doubt that the TUC were becoming somewhat embarrassed at today’s persistent Right to Work Marches and what they had become as ‘left extremist influence’. However national union officials recognised that they could not stand aloof indefinitely from organising the unemployed, for the very possibility of such an action would have been woefully inadequate. Let’s examine their three main initiatives.

Firstly, a number of unions have begun to reconsider their attitude towards what form of trade union services and organisation should be provided for the unemployed. The TUC in particular, have encouraged unions to retain their unemployed members so as to avoid them becoming isolated and cut off from the rest of the organised movement.

However a recent survey by Labour Research revealed just how far the unions have moved on the issue. While forty-four of the largest unions permit existing members of the union who become unemployed to retain membership, twenty-four have rules which explicitly prevent the recruitment of the unemployed generally. This is because membership is limited to those ‘working in’, ‘engaged in’ or ‘employed in’ the particular industry.

Twelve other unions have rules which are either silent on the topic or specifically state that the unemployed may be recruited only if they are ‘engaged in’ their trade. The TUC has members in training to join and remain members with limited rights if unemployed. And five permit the unemployed to join with full rights and reduced contributions (although for three of the five this is effectively linked with training).

The denial of rights for unemployed members is staggering. In the ISTC unemployed members cannot vote. In the NUM the unemployed cannot vote in ballots for national positions. In the NUR only employed members may be elected.

More amazingly a reduced level of contributions paid by the unemployed in many unions is dependent upon their length of membership (usually fifty-two weeks). If this membership has not been completed the unemployed has to pay full contributions.

Under such circumstances the Right to Work campaign resolution demanding a National Unemployed Workers Union following full trade union rights and dual membership with a union controlled by the unemployed themselves is something we should continue to campaign for as vigorously as possible. Although snubbed by the union bureaucracy, support for a NUWU from an important minority of delegates at last year’s FBU, TSSA, CPSA and NUEP union conferences is an indication of the concern felt by many rank and file trade unionists.

A second and further belated TUC initiative has been its active encouragement of the growing numbers of unemployed centres that have been set up — providing a meeting place and advice service for the unemployed. National union executives have enthusiastically backed the centres. Yet they have proved to have been a soft option — receiving little commitment of effort, resources or funds. Worse, they have been allowed to turn into recreation centres that have merely institutionalised unemployment inside four walls — and have no useful function as all in fighting the Tory jobs’ blitz. Significantly, the number of unemployed taking advantage of the centres is minuscule.

It has been left to Right to Work supporters to campaign for the unemployed centres to be turned into vital organising bases of the jobless to go out to local disputes, helping on picket lines — and above all linking the battle for the right to work with those fighting for jobs inside the trade unions.

Yet perhaps the most spectacular and certainly most promising development over the last twelve months has been the attempts by sections of the union leaderships to organise national unemployed protest marches, like the People’s March for Jobs and the Jobs Express Train.

There is no doubt that the People’s March was a tremendous success. The 500 marchers were enthusiastically greeted by token workplace stoppages and large demonstrations in a number of towns and the 150,000 strong rally in London proved to be the biggest protest against unemployment seen since the thirties.

Over the last few years the Right to Work Campaign has vividly demonstrated that unemployed marches are indispensable for involving the unemployed in activity and dramatising the tragedy of being out of work. Yet the RTWC simultaneously argued that marches alone cannot stop the jobs rot. Only the employed have the power to strike and force the employers and Tories to concede the right to work. It was an unfashionable ray of files miners’ strike in February last year that forced the Tories to do a mini-U-Turn over proposed pit closures.

The unemployed, of course, cannot threaten strikes. But by organising and demonstrating the unemployed can help campaign for national action from trade unionists. Right to Work marches have provided an important mechanism for relating the energy of the unemployed to the isolated militants in the workplaces.

Unfortunately the movement the People’s March generated did not consciously connect with the struggle in the workplaces against redundancies. In fact many union leaders supporting marches is an alternative to fighting redundancies.

Trade union history books should be engraved for life with the case of Brian Mathers, TGWU Midlands Regional Secretary who had the nerve to welcome the People’s March into Birmingham having just sacked his industrial workers. In fact Brian Mathers encapsulates the whole problem with the TUC approach to the unemployed.

Global unemployment figures are made up of hundreds of little defeats like this in which workers accept the sack often because their own version of Brian Mathers stood in the way of militant solidarity that could have saved jobs. 1981 was littered with such defeats, like those at Holman Machell, Radio Basildon, Bestobells, Plansee, Chlororide, Gencotec, Staffa.

At the moment workers are afraid of striking, taking action to stem the job’s massacre. Not just because there are three million people without jobs, but also because they fear lack of support. They feel isolated. And its that isolation the Tories want to increase. That makes it vital to attempt to generate the maximum support for those workers who do decide to fight back. Battles like those at Laurence Scott, Lee Jersey may seem like small fry compared to the tens of thousands who greeted the People’s March — but they are the stuff out of which a genuine fight for jobs is made.

The TUC’s Jobs Express highlighted in even more grotesque relief the failure to relate unemployed youth to workers in struggle. The result was predictable. Despite official backing from the unions
and the financial resources of the TUC at their disposal, an embarrassing rally of about 5,000 greeted its arrival in London. To add insult to injury two days later 15,000 public sector workers came out on strike and marched through London protesting at the threat to jobs posed by Heseltine’s spending cuts.

Ironically, the TUC has always accused the Right to Work Campaign of splitting the young unemployed from the trade union movement. In fact Right to Work Marches have done quite the opposite — taking marchers to visit factories, stand on picket lines, collect money for workers fighting for their jobs, demonstrating how much greater could be the impact of a fighting movement of the unemployed, backed by the TUC, that sought solidarity with workers, particularly those in dispute.

It would contribute to shifting the mood of resignation and acceptance of unemployment so prevalent today, without the mood of the moment. It would vividly display that there was a real alternative to Thatcherism, that the enthusiasm of the unemployed with the muscle of the employed could be moulded into a militant industrial struggle against the Tories.

Yet, quite obviously that is precisely what the TUC does not want. Their reaction to Norman Tebbit’s threat to cut all benefits for those refusing training places and the pathetic offer of a £15 a week allow

ance. Yet Tebbit’s proposals were drawn up substantially from recommendations on youth unemployment made by the Manpower Services Commission unanimously supported by both the CBI and the TUC.

At the heart of the problem is a profound prejudice in the entire TUC approach to relating to the unemployed. We are in favour of the unity of the unemployed and the employed precisely because it’s only those in work who have the industrial muscle to stop redundancies. Furthermore that workers’ power is also the mechanism for constructing a mass movement that cannot only kick out the Tories, but can ultimately transform society itself.

The participation of the trade union bureaucracy in supporting jobs’ protests however inadequate is to be welcomed. It can only help strengthen the forces of resistance to the Tories on the ground. We should utilise further TUC initiatives to join in with them with all those in the localities concerned to reverse the jobs’ offensive. However we should retain an independent Right to Work presence that differentiates our distinctive political approach. Both are inextricably linked.

We need to argue forcefully the whole gambit of our ideas on how to really organise the unemployed to fight for better housing, our attitude towards the Alternative Economic Strategy — at the same time as seeking to involve as large numbers as possible in activity against the Tories.

**THE MOVEMENT**

**Life in the colleges but death at the conference**

For more than two months the student movement has been at a very low ebb. In many colleges it has been difficult even to get quorate union meetings.

But suddenly — and rather surprisingly since the issue is hardly a new one — the cuts in higher education spending have emerged as something students are prepared to fight over once more. John Rees and Jane Ure Smith look at what has been happening.

So far the fightback is clearly not of the same order as the occupations over teacher-training cutbacks in 1976 or those of 1977, and to a lesser extent again in 1979, when scores of colleges were occupied in protest against increased student attendant fees. It nonetheless looks like a beginning.

Midway through the term both the Polytechnics of Central London and University College Cardiff went into occupation against the cuts. Both worked hard to spread the fightback, sending delegations to speak at other student union meetings, and in the case of Cardiff, winning support from local workers who joined them on the picket line. But the net result so far has been a number of one-day and two-day token occupations in the run up to NUS conference and promises of action next term.

On the one hand there’s a great deal of enthusiasm for direct action — at NUS conference 90 colleges agreed an emergency action against cuts taking action and urging more. On the other hand there is a lack of experience since nothing has really happened amongst students for the best part of two years, and more importantly, a lack of confidence on the part of the most active students that they can win support for an occupation in their colleges. At FCL, various militants from other colleges hung around the occupation — some for the full three and a half weeks — because they saw no hope of building a fight back on their own patch.

The situation in the colleges basically still reflects the low level of struggle outside, where factories like Lee Jeans and Staffa, Gardner’s and Laurence Scott have fought tenacious battles in defence of jobs essentially in isolation. But the prospect of a more generalised fightback amongst students — albeit in a patchy and fragmented way — exists next term because the policies of the student movement are far more volatile than the politics of the workplace.

NUS winter conference was in stark contrast to the mood of some colleges taking some kind of action against the cuts. It was without doubt one of the most right wing conferences that the NUS has had. The causes go back some years.

For most of the 1970s the union was dominated by the Broad Left, an electoral alliance of the Communist Party and effectively the National Organisation of Labour Students (NOLS), plus some independents. By 1979 however the strength of the BL was ebbing and, extending the logic of the Broad Democratic Alliance, the then-president of NUS, Trevor Phillips, launched the Left Alliance. This was basically the old BL plus the Liberals.

The new group was always unstable, having been formed on the membership from above first by NUS president Trevor Phillips and later by his successor, CP member David Aaronovitch. By the end of 1980, and coinciding with the rising tide of Bennism, NOLS decided that the Left Alliance had become too right wing for them to stomach. (The defection of ex-NUS president Sue Sliman from the CP to the SDP surprised no-one; the Left Alliance’s politics had prefigured the SDP for two years prior to the latter’s formation.)

**Leading with the right**

NOLS break from the Left Alliance was initially a success. At Christmas conference 1980 Aaronovitch and Andy Pearmain (the two leading CP executive members, though Pearmain has since left the party) received a very rough ride, culminating in the recall of Aaronovitch’s responsibility for Government Economic Policy, a major area of the union’s work.

At the following Easter conference Aaronovitch only retained the presidency against the NOLS challenge by 16 votes — votes from the Federation of Conservative Students. That margin of 16 votes repeated itself for all the full-time executive positions where a NOLS candidate ran against the Left Alliance.

The main reason for the viciously right wing nature of this year’s Christmas conference was that NOLS presence disappeared without trace. They had the same number of delegates as before, the largest of any group on conference floor, but their intervention in the debates and in the fringe meetings was practically non-existent.

Left reformist thinking revolves around the idea that success amounts to presenting a left wing manifesto and left wing candidates to the voters. Last Easter’s NUS conference proved — however narrowly — that it isn’t the case amongst students. The Labour Party conference conference, again narrowly, proved that it isn’t the case in the Labour Party, while the SDP have proved it isn’t the case nationally. The right — Foot and Healey — have accurately judged the present mood of the electorate and adjusted to it. And since even the most left wing Labour Party members are still electorally bound to adapt to that, and consequently the stuff has been knocked out of NOLS.

The truth is that however much the Labour Left talks about rank and file or extra-parliamentary activity this is not
where the heart and soul of their policies lies. After all, if all that you are interested in is extra-parliamentary activity, why remain in the Labour Party, when the SWP does it better. Even if you are taken in by the ‘mass party of the working class’ line, the very least you could do is join one of the entrist sects. But significant numbers of the Labour left are unlikely to do either, since in practice their activism is always subordinated to their electoralism. That is why they are in the Labour Party in the first place and that is why electoral defeat has had such a catastrophic effect on their morale and allows the political initiative to pass to the hands of the right wing.

None of this should cause glee amongst revolutionaries. The collapse of the left reformists is a serious set-back for the whole of the left.

At NUS the collapse of NOLS sealed the fate of the already weak Socialists Student Alliance (SSA) — set up by the International Marxist Group (IMG) as a centrist grouping in order to recruit left reformists. In the end, of course, the left reformists recruited the IMG who have now joined NOLS. Shortly after conference they tried to dissolve the SSA. Unfortunately the SSA politely declined the offer leaving an embarrassed IMG to pull out alone.

Those who voted to maintain the SSA however did not do so because they oppose the drift towards the right and the Labour Party. They did so because in the best traditions of ‘Beyond the Fragments’ they don’t want to be part of any political party at all.

These developments let us throw up on the political map between the Socialist Worker Student Organisation (SWSO) on the left and the Left Alliance on the right leading the wet Tories, the Liberals and the SDP.

The SDP shouldn’t worry: an article in Marxism Today last October provides the answer:

‘...it is likely that many SDP activists — including ex-Tories — will want to contest next summer’s elections for sabbatical posts as Left Alliance candidates...’

In fact the successful SDP group at the London School of Economics debated whether they should call themselves the Left Alliance when they first set up shop.

It was the collapse of NOLS at the recent NUS conference which allowed this motley crew on the right to lead a minor witch-hunt against SWSO. Nevertheless SWSO members managed to intervene consistently and to organise a fringe meeting of 600 people at which Owen Carron, Belfast Sands’ successor as MP for Fermanagh and South Tyrone, spoke. Ten people joined SWSO during the weekend.

The prospect for a fight back against the cuts next term are marginally boosted by the fact that the NUS Executive is calling for a week of action against the merely four per cent offer on student grants. They are calling for strikes rather than occupations, and then only by first and second year students. But given the mood amongst a large section of students it may be enough to ignite a spark bigger than we’ve seen in a year or more.

**NUS winter conference was in stark contrast to the mood in those colleges taking some kind of action against the cuts**

It is a measure of how right wing the Left Alliance is that the SDP seems to be having difficulty gaining a foothold in student politics. This is because the Left Alliance already occupies the political space they would like to stand in, not only in the sense that the Left Alliance has now shrunk to contain only the CP and the SDP’s national allies, the Liberals, but also because the Left Alliance at conference rely on the support of the moderate swamp which would be the SDP’s natural constituency.
Holocaust handbooks

The huge growth of CND during the last year has inevitably inspired the publication of whole range of new books on the subject. Peter Binns takes a look at four of the most important and accessible of these, all recently published in paperback.

Overkill — The story of modern weapons.
John Cox
Pelican £1.75.
Nuclear Nightmares — An investigation into possible wars.
Nigel Calder
Penguin £1.50.
A Lambs to the Slaughter — the facts about nuclear war.
P. Rogers, M. Dando & P. Van den Dungen
Arrow £1.75.
The Politics of Nuclear Disarmament.
Martin Ryle
Pluto £2.50.

John Cox’s Overkill was first published in 1977. The current expanded edition is a real classic as a handbook for those who want the military and scientific background explained. It is well informed about the weapons systems themselves and their history, about rearmament East and West and about Britain’s bomb. This is a book that should be read by every socialist.

At a technical level there are only a few minor criticisms to be raised. The book is already somewhat out of date on the American MX missile, it fails to do justice to the huge increases in accuracy and fire-power of the new generation of US nuclear warheads (like the mark 12a and W78 re-entry vehicles, whose ‘lethality’ can be five times and more greater than the present best), and it wrongly asserts that Israel and South Africa have refrained from testing nuclear weapons.

More important is a confusion about cruise missiles. They are too slow, he tells us, to be used as ‘first strike’ weapons; they take two or three hours to reach their target, and in that time the Russians could already have launched their own missiles. But this assumption will have to be revised, which they can only get from military satellites. Yet it is a comparatively easy task to ‘blind’ the electronic sensors of these satellites — it has happened accidentally recently when a large oil storage fire in Siberia put American satellites out of action for some time. Due to their ground-keeping performance, unlike the much faster ballistic missiles they will not appear on the long range radar until it is too late. ‘Deadly warning’.

Notwithstanding these points and the rather woolly final part which deals with CND, Overkill remains the handbook on nuclear weapons. It is however closely challenged by Lambs to the Slaughter, a handbook which has been produced by researchers at Bradford University’s peace studies department. The real strength of this book is military rather than scientific. Its military history is excellent, it shows how the SALT I agreement did not reduce but encouraged new weapons systems, and it contains a very good assessment of current military strengths. In two areas it is outstanding — radiation and the Trident missile. It shows more clearly than anything else I have come across the world-wide catastrophe that would result from radiation from even a modern-sized East-West confrontation. And there is a specially chilling section on the real role of the submarine-launched Trident missile, which they convincingly argue is as ‘depressed trajectory’ first strike weapon.

Lambs to the Slaughter is clearly and powerfully written, and for someone who is not frightened away by blocks of statistics and modern science it is probably a better handbook than Overkill. In the same highly readable vein is Nigel Calder’s Nuclear Nightmares, which is also a very powerful work. It is specially so because it is written by a man who is not actually a supporter of unilateral nuclear disarmament. What he has done is to spell out the variety of the routes to nuclear war and the chances of each one of them happening. The strength of this work is in the fact that it takes what our leaders and generals say seriously, and then shows how the nuclear nightmares follow logically from that. For an exposure of the contradictions involved in our rulers’ official policy it is as good a work as you could find.

The politics that lie behind these three useful books, of course, leave much to be desired. But they do not stand in the way of their very real achievements. And Overkill at least concludes on the need to build CND even if it does not give us much clue about how this is to be done. Lambs to the Slaughter on the other hand is far too optimistic. If we do not act now, right, or just plainly silly. We are told that the cause of the war drive in the modern world is not class society or capitalism in deep crisis, but rather the nasty way technology has advanced due to the lack of moral fibre amongst some scientists. To get rid of the bomb we must ‘propose solutions which are not consequent on an ineffective reordering of the world political system’.

For their part the authors concretise this in terms of a proposal to set up an incredibly complex three-tier multilateral treaty, the aim being ‘the phasing out of all strategic nuclear weapons through the medium of these treaties’. The contradictions here are really quite striking. Having completely demolished the myth that East and West have been at all sincere in their multilateral manoeuvres hitherto, the authors suddenly bring out yet another multilateral proposal for them to manoeuvre with — as though the problem is that of the ignorance of the negotiators rather than the goodwill of the superpowers themselves.

None of this, however, is more than a minor irritation to be found in the book. Lambs to the Slaughter is such an excellent handbook that it can be overlooked in assessing its achievement as a whole. The same however cannot be said for the final work, Ryle’s The Politics of Nuclear Disarmament. I must admit, when I read it I was shocked to see quite how wretched it was in a number of important ways.

First of all there is the influence of EP Thompson. Ryle has picked up none of his good points (the scathing attacks on the establishment, the pungent rhetoric and so on), but most of the bad points. The worst of these is Euro-chauvinism. We are told, ‘Undoubtedly Europe — Europe of the Enlightenment, and of the democracies and the states which have followed it, is the Europe which has exported its civilisation along with its barbarism to so much of the world — now finds itself faced with a historic peril’. This is due to ‘the especially close relationship which binds us, as client state, to the American superpower’.

‘Europe is in peril, not because of the superpowers, but because of the hostility of the superpowers’.

This is nonsense. For a start the carve up of Europe in 1945 was not managed by Stalin and Roosevelt on their own. Churchill — as became very clear from his diaries — played just as important a role. And Britain is not now the unwilling victim of US hegemonism but eagerly encourages America’s every move. The same is true for the other major European participants. In fact the historic decision in 1979 to install cruise and Pershing 2 missiles which brought about the massive growth in CND was in fact forced upon America by Germany, Britain and other European members of NATO.

It is also very important in terms of its political consequences. For what this implies is that the threat of nuclear destruction is to do with outside political events, not the class struggle at home. The strategy for fighting the bomb must therefore exclude the class struggle.

Not surprisingly this is connected with some pretty right wing views elsewhere. Ryle tells us that ‘militarism and disarmament (if it could be achieved) would be preferable to unilateralism. In other words a carve-up of the spoils of the world between the national ruling classes is to be commended — so long as they go about it peacefully. So long as they ‘only’ oppress their own populations at home rather than other ruling classes overseas. We should support them — and this from someone who claims to be a socialist.

We could go on but it would be pointless. Suffice to say that Ryle thinks that ‘an armed disarmed Britain need not seek at once to leave NATO, for NATO might then become a forum for disarmament’, and that CND’s ‘first breakthrough must be in the “peace movement”’. There is no mention of the class struggle in Britain today and how CND could affect it except a one-sentence support of the ‘Jobs not Bombs’ slogan. There is no discussion of the history of CND last time round, what went wrong, and therefore what there is to be learnt from that. In fact the whole book is just a rambling collection of political verbiage, wretchedly superficial in its disregard for history and in its philistine insensitivity to workers’ problems and struggles.
Don't knock the ostrich

The Forward March of Labour Halted

Eric Hobsbawm. Edited by Martin Jacques
Verso Editions £2.95

In 1978 Eric Hobsbawm used the occasion of the annual Marx Memorial Lecture to deliver a pertinent to the Communist Party on workers' participation as the crisis facing the left in Britain. It was subsequently published in Marxism Today and as the inner party struggle progressed, the 'political' wings of the CP developed both sides used the essay as a platform for their respective analyses.

The results have been published in 1983 in a number of different forms. The crisis of the CP, and most of them are too. If Hobsbawm made his former statement in order to provoke a serious attempt at a reassessment of where the party stands, this is a disquieting point. In the post-war period, he must be a bitterly disappointed man.

Hobsbawm's basic argument is that there is a need for a serious re-examination of the CP's main problem. His book 'The Crisis of the Left' contains a series of articles and essays on the CP's present position and on the need for a more radical approach to the whole problem of the CP's present position and on the need for a more radical approach to the whole problem.

In the original essay Hobsbawm's views no way forward or attempts to solve the crisis. His analysis is a summary of Marxist thought about the crisis and it is necessary to analyse the CP's present position and on the need for a more radical approach to the whole problem.

The comrades were not too long in rising to the bait. The first essay was a full-blooded and decisive piece by Ken Gill, who pointed out the contradictions in Hobsbawm's analysis and asked the question 'What are the advances made in the past twenty years?'

fresh air feminism

Tea and Tranquilisers

Diane Harwood
Virago £2.95

Diane Harwood is now a board member of the Employment Central Workers Union, a trade union that has been fighting for better conditions for women workers for years. She is also a committed social activist.

Her fictional diaries, Jane Bennett, is married to David and her two small girls. She loves David dearly, but wonders gently why he doesn't even think to help around the house. At the weekend: 

"Hi, honey," she said when he arose, 
poor pet he needs his rest, but a 
ing for his right arm would serve as well as the bed."

We follow Jane's life through a year—a year of changes, no money, no time, but it all seems worth it in the end.

SOLIDARITY WITH

RUSSIA: HOW THE REVOLUTION WAS LOST

by Alain Gibbons
Repression is not the only result of the struggle for socialism, as the Western media would like us to believe—long as we understand where things went wrong. 50p

BUREAUCRACY AND

REVOLUTION IN EASTERN EUROPE

by Chris Harman
Essential background reading. Covers previous risings in Poland, as well as Hungary 1956 and Czechoslovakia 1968.

THE GREAT LIE: Why the so-called 'socialist' countries are not socialist.

A pamphlet by Abbie Bakan

STATE CAPITALISM IN RUSSIA

by Tony Cliff

THE CLASSIC ANALYSIS OF THE NATURE OF COMMUNIST RUSSIA. SPECIAL OFFER: £1 plus 25p postage.
We all need a breath of fresh air and this book is the sharpest, wittiest, most original breeze yet through the mountains of dreary moans; we generally think of as feminist literature.

Susun Pearce

**Distortion?**


She attacks me for not looking at a factory where women and men work together. Anyone remotely familiar with the figures knows that women-only jobs, workplaces and even industries are typical not exceptional features of women's employment.

Moreover, she misses entirely the dynamic of the book, which is about the contradictory nature of consciousness, the amnesia of the movement, indeed, the double-ended nature of much so-called 'backwardsness'.

Throughout her review, Lindsey misrepresents me and misquotes me. Nowhere do I use 'patriarchal analysis'. I make it very clear that the roots of female oppression lie with class society, and that I follow the tradition of Engels, not noted for his radical feminism.

My book is about the relationship between class and gender. Lindsey asserts I reduce working class women to men's concerns and women's consciousness. Utterly untrue. What I actually do is look at the everyday experience of class and wage labour for men and women—especially the need for rank and file control—and also, what is distinctive for women. She concludes, 'The implication seems to be that women workers are confused by the outside world, particularly their role as wives and mothers, but male workers are not'.

Nonsense. For me, I emphasise the complex relationship between family and workplace, and the extent to which all wage labour is depersonalised and that the family affects men in that it ties them to exploitation as breadwinners. Because Lindsey sees class and gender in wokertight compartments, she is unable to understand the relationship between them that my book attempts to describe.

What I do argue in the book, is that it does make a significant difference to your life whether you happen to be a working class man or a working class woman—something I always thought so obvious, it seemed hardly worth writing a book about.

Throughout, I stress the struggle for rank and file control at work; but I also bring out the particular ideological and practical difficulties women face and also their particular potential strengths. Finding rank and file control, in spreading class struggle, we have to face up to the reality of differences in experience and consciousness, and to the roots of divisions within the class.

Anna Pollert

**Reply**

Anna seems remarkably upset by a review which described her book as 'a refreshing change from most sociological studies'. I seem somehow to have touched a nerve.

The point is that you cannot draw conclusions about the special features of working women's consciousness, unless you compare women workers with male workers in similar grades and jobs, even if a lot of women work in women-only jobs and workplaces (and, of course, it is quite possible to work in factories, teaching, the clerical grades of the civil service, banking, teaching, etc., etc., to work in mixed grades and jobs). If you don't do this, you can easily fall into the trap of seeing gender as equally important in determining consciousness as class. From there it is only a short journey to the 'separate struggles' approach of both radical and social feminists, with women of all classes being able to unite in the struggle against oppression regardless of what happens in the other, class, struggle.

In the real world, the conscious- ness of particular workers have a product of a whole range of factors, of which gender is only one—and not necessarily the most important. A male steelworker can have a lot more in common with a female textile worker that a female social worker does—and a female cleaner can have a lot more in common with a male car worker than a male school teacher does. None of Anna's talk about it 'making a difference if you are a man or a woman' alters that.

Lindsey German
The politics of the golden mean

Leninism and Western Socialism
Roy Medvedev
Verso £2.95

Russian Marxist dissident, scrupulous socialist critic of his native Russia...turns his attention abroad to consider the prospects for socialism in the West. He is convinced that the lessons of the Russian experience be understood by socialists abroad. Thus the book. Sounds exciting, doesn't it? Unfortunately, it isn't, in fact it's extremely uninteresting.

The main reason for this is Roy Medvedev's politics. Personally he is, no doubt, very courageous—anyone who speaks out in Russia needs plenty of guts—but politically he is exceptionally timid. He is a dissident, yes, but a very moderate and cautious dissident. He believes that the Soviet Union is fundamentally socialist, despite its bureaucratic superstructure, and that all is necessary and/or possible is a process of reform in which the ruling bureaucracy gradually democratizes itself. Moreover he believes that a process is taking place at the moment and that it has been proceeding 'steadily over the last twenty years' (p. 193).

Normally it would be necessary to take this perspective by scrutinizing political analysts abroad. Today however we need only point to the streets of Poland where the incompatibility of Stalinist state capitalism and democratic reform is being written in the blood of Polish trade unionists. Poland is Eastern Europe's China—a decisive test of the reformist project adhered to by Medvedev.

On the basis of this perspective what Medvedev has produced is simply a blanket endorsement of Khrushchevism, particularly its moderate rightist form. One of the striking things about this book is that politically it adds absolutely nothing to what has been said by Santiago Carrillo, Enrique Berlenguer and the rest. Communists must stop talking about the dictatorship of the proletariat, Soviets were fine in 1917 but things are different now, new and a democratic future, new a democratic reality, new democracy and so on. Seven or eight years ago it would have been just as wrong but it might at least have sounded new, today it's all very old hat.

In fact not only its policies but also its structure that makes this book so disappointing. Medvedev is a historian and his approach is to give a perfunctory history of each of the major periods in the political development of the proletariat, Soviets, majority and minority revolution, socialism in one country, and the Communist-Social Democratic split. This result is an unhappy compromise, neither good history nor good political analysis. In fact given the title and length of the book it is remarkable how little concrete analysis of contemporary Western Europe it contains. Nothing on the current crisis of capitalism, nothing on any of the major class battles in Europe (1968, 1970, 1974-5 etc) and so abstract generalisations and quotations from Social Democratic and Communist leaders. On the question of Communist Socialist unions—the principle 'message' of the book—Medvedev sees this as a matter of constructing an ideological compromise formula somewhat beyond the two traditions. The Social Democrats move a little to the left, the Communists a little to the right and they meet in the middle. It is this which illustrates Medvedev's basic weakness. Fundamentally he is a believer in the politics of the golden mean—the truth lies somewhere between the extremes—the ultimate credo of the 'moderate'. On the one hand there are those who deplore that Russia is socialist at all, on the other hand there are those who say it is communist. Between the two there is a little bit socialist and a little bit non-socialist. On the one hand we have the International Trotskyists who deplore the corruption on the other hand we have the Stalinist whom was for socialism in one country—solution; well there's Lenin who was for world revolution and for socialism in one country (according to Medvedev). On the one hand we have the communists, on the other hand we have the Social Democrats—solution: a union of Cominterns? no, new political face and Socialists with more radical, more decisive bodies.

The only trouble is that it is the logic of the class struggle to undermine and destroy the new and in this so patiently constructed by Medvedev. With most Russian dissidents one feels that it is because they are from Russia that they deplore the new Russian socialists. They are rebelling against the orthodoxy of the society. With Medvedev it is the reverse. It is only because he is Russian that he claims to be a Marxist. In Britain, on the other hand, he would be at best a Labour MP. In short, not worth a river, unless a specialist interest requires you to read it.

John Molyneux

Third world capitalism

Class, State and Power in the Third World
James Petras et al
Zed Press, 1981: £11.50

A book by James Petras usually merits attention. Petras is a North American Marxist specializing in Latin America. He is a prolific writer and his work often offers interesting analytical insights on class struggle in the region and the role of imperialism. After the Nicaraguan revolution he published one of the few critical assessments of the revolution in Monthly Review, producing such books as Sandinista Leadership was likely to subordinate 'the mass struggle to the diplomatic needs of reconstruction'.

But the latest volume, half of which is devoted to socialist revolutions in the Third World and their class components with examples drawn particularly from Latin America, is disappointing. Petras' main concern is to reassess the role of the working class in third world revolutionary movements. But his conclusion, that the working class seems to have been given a false sense of their participation in these movements has not led to the emergence of workers states in Latin America. Petras argues that the working class always has to struggle against the 'deception' of the workers state. Petras's main concern is to reassess the role of the working class in third world revolutionary movements. But his conclusion, that the working class seems to have been given a false sense of their participation in these movements has not led to the emergence of workers states in Latin America. Petras argues that the working class always has to struggle against the 'deception' of the workers state. Petras's main concern is to reassess the role of the working class in third world revolutionary movements. But his conclusion, that the working class seems to have been given a false sense of their participation in these movements has not led to the emergence of workers states in Latin America. Petras argues that the working class always has to struggle against the 'deception' of the workers state.

Conspiracy to repress

Conspiracy Law, Class and Society
Robert Spencer
Lawrence & Wishart £7.99

This book uses conspiracy law in historical context and aims to develop an understanding of sources of present law. Traditional legal categorisation is abandoned. Instead, the book examines the period when conspiracy law was most active—pre-1920 and post-1960—and is examined by reference to the three involved groups—English cases, English statutes and English code. This enables for example the Angry Brigade and Persons Unknown trials to be compared with those of nineteenth and twentieth century radicals.

It appears that the accepted proposition in the Shrewsbury Three trial—that to be found guilty of conspiring the building workers did not even have to know each other—originated from the judiciary's mistrial at the judge in Pullard's case ex 1881. The overall conclusion is probably more cautious than the author's stated conclusions. Nevertheless the aim was to provide a historical context for conspiracy and this is achieved in an interesting and well written way.

Frances Smyth

Socialist Review 35
JANUARY 1919

All Europe seemed on the verge of revolution at the beginning of 1919. There were general strikes in Glasgow and Belfast, a guerrilla war was growing in the southern and western counties of Ireland, protesting soldiers were marching through Whitehall, the French navy was in mutiny, the factories of Turin and Milan were in ferment, demobilised peasant troops were organising land seizures in southern Italy, in a newly independent Hungary a weak bourgeois government was about to hand power to an imprisoned Communist, in Austria a left-socialist government depended for its survival on a million of armed workers, and in the lands of the former Russian Empire, Bolshevick-led soviets held state power.

But the centre of the revolutionary ferment lay in Germany, the world's second industrial power. The Kaiser's rule had collapsed early in November 1918, and workers' and soldiers' councils held power in every town and city from the Belgian border in the west to what is now the Russian town of Kaliningrad in the east. In Berlin, Hamburg, Bremen, Dusseldorf, Munich, Stuttgart, Frankfurt, Danzig, Chemnitz, Halie, there were repeated demonstrations by soldiers and armed workers protesting at hunger, unemployment and attempts to enforce military discipline.

In Berlin, the capital city, a revolutionary socialist, Emil Eichhorn, ran the police force, half staffed by revolutionary volunteers.

Yet all was not finished for the German ruling class. For, pressing over this revolutionary upsurge was a 'Council of People's Commissars' dominated by right-wing socialists who, as their leader Ebert put it, 'hated revolution like sin'. They had worked with the Kaiser's generals to support the World War, and now they were secretly working with them again to destroy the soldiers' and workers' councils. Together they began to build a new mercenary army, the Frei Korps, made up of officers from the old one.

In the first flush of the revolution, the right-wing socialists did not dare be open in their desire to turn the clock back. They knew they could only do as they wished if they got the support of the majority of workers and soldiers as well as of the generals. And so also in the government alongside of them were representatives of the left wing anti-war break away party, the Independent Socialists. This gave the whole government a leftist appearance and enabled it to persuade a national conference of workers and soldiers councils in mid-December to agree to the right socialists call to hand power over to a parliament to be elected a month later.

Now the right socialists and the generals felt powerful enough to turn against their own supporters. After fighting between right-wing and left-wing soldiers in Berlin on Christmas Day, the rightists forced the left-wingers to leave the government. And a week later they told the revolutionary police chief Eichhorn that he was sacked.

The news caused bitter anger among the capital's working class. On 5 January the biggest protest demonstration the city had ever seen took place — and it was an armed demonstration. It seemed to many people that a repetition of the November revolution of two months before was at hand.

This, for instance, was how many of the Independent Socialists, including the veteran parliamentarian, Georg Ledebour saw it. They had been enthusiastic a couple of weeks before for participation in the government because they thought in that way they could get a short cut to socialism. Now they thought they could do the same thing by using the revolutionary workers to replace the right wingers in the government by themselves.

The most experienced revolutionary in Berlin, Rosa Luxemburg, did not agree. She had argued repeatedly in the previous month that a new revolution could not be successful until the mass of workers understood the need for it, not only in Berlin but throughout the country. She warned that the Independent Socialist leaders, with their dream of instant power, were not to be trusted.

The trouble was that Rosa did not have a powerful revolutionary party to argue her position.

Her organisation, the Spartakus League, was only 3000 strong, with no presence in most of the Berlin factories. What was worse it had no tradition of a common discipline. This was shown on 6 January when its best known member beside Rosa, Karl Liebknecht, put his name alongside Ledebour's on a leaflet calling for an uprising to overthrow the government.

The right socialists and the generals were very worried. They allowed the left-wing workers and soldiers to seize a few buildings in the centre of the city, proclaimed that the Spartakists were out to establish a bloodthirsty dictatorship and moved their own forces in to the kill.

A tragic and unnecessary defeat followed. The mass of factory workers in the city were quite bemused by what was happening. They still wanted unity between the right and left socialists and did not understand the need for fighting. The left socialist parliamentarian, having called for the uprising in his mind and, right in the middle of it, tried to negotiate a truce with the government they had declared overthrown. If any of the government's troops had thought of changing sides, this would have convinced them otherwise; for it meant the old officers were to continue to be in charge.

The only people to take the organisation of the fighting seriously were the Spartakist leaders, who had opposed the whole thing. They felt, as Rosa Luxemburg explained, that they could not turn their back on the most militant section of workers, even when these made a mistake.

But the small forces of the Spartakus League could not possibly sustain an armed struggle when the Independents — nearly a hundred times their size — were abandoning the armed workers to their fate.

The government's forces were not large — perhaps five or six thousand strong, but they were able to crush all resistance.

A reign of terror followed for the working class activists of Berlin. People were dragged from their beds, thrown into prison, hauled before makeshift court martial. Among the many shot on sight was Karl Liebknecht. And Rosa Luxemburg, one of the greatest leaders in working class history, was clubs to death with a rifle butt and thrown into a canal.

The German revolution was not over. There were to be many more outbreaks of civil war, from one end of the country to another. And a mere eight weeks later there was to be fighting on an even larger scale in Berlin.

But lacking a revolutionary party, the class had gone into battle in January before it was ready and paid the price by losing many of the leaders who could have ensured its victory later. But the working class would have to pay the price eventually, when instead of socialist revolution Germany suffered Nazi counter-revolution.