Lebanon: Reagan gets his fingers burnt
An expensive diversion

Since the Falklands war nearly two years ago, the Tories have incurred enormous expense with their ‘Fortress Falklands’ policy. Duncan Blackie looks at the dilemma facing the Tories between patriotism and the purse strings.

It is nearly two years since theiasco of the Falklands war. In that time Thatcher has been able to turn the ridiculous venture into one of the main planks of Tory ideology—and sustain it.

The war of Thatcher’s face has been able to maintain a level of chauvinism for far longer than anyone originally expected. However, some of the contradictions of the exercise are now beginning to emerge. The ‘Fortress Falklands’ policy rests on two main pillars of support.

Firstly, that there can be no question of discussions over sovereignty of the islands. And secondly, that the government is prepared to spare no expense in the defence of them.

It is doubtful as to how long the media can keep the Falklands in the news. Even the most loyal of punters will get fed up with birth, marriage and death reports from a rock in the South Atlantic.

At some point Thatcher will have to weigh up the publicity value against the enormous outlay of maintaining the present policy.

The cost of the war itself is probably known to most people — working out at over a million pounds per head of population. But the expense of merely maintaining the British presence is also staggering.

There are still 4,000 troops on the islands, supplied at a massive cost from 8,000 miles away. A new airport is being built for an estimated £240m. A number of other unexpected bills have been deposited at the government’s door lately.

The return flight that Heston made from the Falklands at the end of January cost £90,000. More amusingly, as the result of numerous inept bureaucratic slip-ups, 54 prefabricated houses have been installed at a cost of £133,000 each. (The kits cost £18,000 each from their Swedish manufacturers).

Somehow, back in 1982, the contract for the luxury homes went to a small, loss-making firm, James Browster. One of the directors was Sir Michael Hadow, a former foreign office official and ambassador to Argentina.

At one fell swoop half of the government’s “post-war rehabilitation fund” has been used up. The planned rents will be £30 to £60 per month. (The average Falklands wage is about half that in Britain.)

Dead sheep

Heston decided that the locals should show a bit of initiative, in the true tradition of British enterprise. They should “generate money for themselves” by making local produce available to the troops, to diversify the present diet of imported food.

The first such attempt was a failure. Soldiers were presented with 18 carcasses, of mutton of course, and all but four of them were found to contravene EEC standards. Until the Tories decided to extend the EEC into the South Atlantic two years ago no-one was really bothered, but now they could have even more problems on their hands.

Thatcher’s back door, her possible way out of the mess, was left open to another, in December last year.

Paul Alfonso was elected president of Argentina. Thatcher sent him a message of support on 10 December hoping to show that the Government had not quarrelled with the new administration, only with the old generals.

She needn’t have worried her head. The Argentine government had decided to direct its non-interventionist rhetoric in another direction. It said that they would no longer assist the US in crushing left-wing movements in Central America.

They maintain a position of offering a formal end to hostilities in return for: 1 The removal of the 150-mile exclusion zone; 2 Demilitarisation of the islands and, 3 negotiations over future sovereignty.

The role of the Labour leadership in all of this has been abysmal. Healey has kept up his “husker” image by making political capital out of the “luxury homes” fiasco. However, he hasn’t questioned the basis of British rule in the Falklands for one moment but just claims that he would manage it more efficiently.

Kinnock stumped even lower. He said there was no need to hurry to solve the Falklands’ problem and went on to praise the Tories on its “mature and temperate response” to the Argentinian suggestion. Kinnock even said that the issue of sovereignty over the Falklands was now a “dated virility symbol”, appropriate to the Generals, but not to a sober statesman like Alfonso. He neglected to say whether it remains a virility symbol to Britain.

It seems that the government is now looking for a middle way between economic expediency and public prestige. It turns out that in the two months since Alfonso was elected to power secret negotiations have been taking place between Britain and Argentina.

Howe has put forward some specific ideas, mainly aimed at the resumption of trade with Argentina. The cost of the garrison is bad enough for him, without having to chase off foreign markets to British capital. These include the lifting of import/export licences and the resumption of air travel between Britain, the Falklands and Argentina.

Howe’s strategy is to establish a normal pattern of relations to outlast the Argentine plan of going to the UN. Whether Thatcher manages to back out relatively unscathed, or becomes embroiled indefinitely, either with heavy costs or a backlash at home, this episode still further illustrates the reason for the whole adventure.

Foreign investment and low government expenditure are important for British capitalism, but so is a working class diverted from its real struggles and up to now the Falklands has proved to be the best diversion of all.
After the day of action

The day of action in defence of trade union rights at GCHQ took almost everybody by surprise. It was much better supported than the government, the TUC, and ourselves, expected. It proved that on a concrete issue of opposition to the Tories there still exists a substantial body of working class opinion that is ready to fight.

Yet within two days of the protest, the government was apparently within reach of victory, having whittled down the number of those refusing to sign the union ban to around 300. The trade unions, it seems, have managed to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory. Whatever happens now, union organisation at GCHQ has taken a major hammering.

It is worth while going over some of the issues involved, since they illustrate very clearly some of the problems with the movement.

There is no doubt that the government miscalculated with its initial announcement of the ban. So feeble were their arguments about some alleged threat to national security, over which it had taken them some two years to make up their minds to act, that even a large number of their own close supporters, always keen to attack unions, thought that it would be too risky to try it on at this moment.

The 'opposition' from Tory wets, and indeed even from right-wing Tories, had little to do with their own principled defence of free trade unionism. It was more a question of worrying that a tactical victory here could be bought at too high a strategic cost. It would be a bit awkward, for example, to continue to denounce Jaruzelski from Tory platforms after this performance.

No one on the trade union side, not even the most decrupt and right-wing bureaucrats, has dismissed this attack as unimportant. They have all seen the issue of the right to trade union membership as a question of principle. The trade union bureaucracy as a whole has shown here that it recognises that it must insist on being able to recruit.

Almost everything else, however, they have been quite ready to negotiate away. The allegation that there has been a conflict of interest between trade union membership and national security has been the one that they have bent over backwards to deny and the 'no disruption' offer has been the deal that they have been keenest to sell.

Even if the government's miscalculation now forces them to make a small concession and negotiate with the unions, the starting point of any such negotiations will be the

Socialist Review March 1984
campaign over GCHQ the leaders of various unions have no doubt been guided by a variety of considerations—some to do with their political positions and others based on tactical assessments of the situation. Underlying all of these divergences, however, there has been a striking similarity. All union leaders have seen the importance of defending the right to organise and all have been wary of going too far and starting a genuine struggle against the state.

In this they have been provided with an excellent illustration of a position argued by this journal over the last few months: the activities of the trade union leaders have largely been based upon the perception of them as a trade union bureaucracy because they are a social layer which depends for their existence on the existence of trade unions even the right wing of them has been forced to defend trade union organisation. But because their own reason for existence is the continuation of the bargaining process with the employer, none of them has been prepared to challenge the basic definition laid down by the employer: the national interest has remained a holy cow to which they have all genuflected.

The apparent exception to all this was the call for a day of action. It came from, of all people, Len Murray, just four days before the action, as a result of a highly unsatisfactory meeting with Thatcher.

Frameork

First of all, it is important to be quite clear that, even at its first utterance, Murray's call was never a strident appeal for militant action. He restricted himself to drawing the members of other unions for, as he put it: 'just and proper action in defence of a freedom intrinsic to democracy that is and must be our paramount concern.'

The extent of Murray's call for action was, even then, determined by the framework of bureaucracy. Murray insisted that the TUC could not call for strike action since this was a matter that concerned the executives of individual unions.

Nevertheless, this did represent a shift of position in a campaign which had, up till then, been dominated by keeping very quiet about the prospect of solidarity action. One popular explanation is that Murray felt personally outraged by the way in which Thatcher clashed his representations and accused trade union members of at least potential disloyalty.

Such a view is mistaken. No doubt Murray was outraged when Thatcher granted the General Secretary of the TUC just eight minutes of an audience on such an important issue. No doubt Murray was indignant at being accused of being a potential subversive. No doubt his indignation was both genuine and deeply felt. But there is a more important factor underlying his actions.

Behind Murray's purely personal pique lies the recognition of the fact that if the bureaucracy of the unions is to be taken seriously by the ruling class and its representatives then from time to time it needs to show that it commands real social forces and thus is worth taking seriously.

The TUC has, of course, done rather well
at the negative side of this social role over the last few years: few could doubt that it has an important part to play in setting, or rather selling out, disputes. There is a long run of disputes, including most prominently ASLEF, the health workers and Warrington, in which the TUC has demonstrated its ability to hold the line.

But this negative side is not the sole aspect of the bureaucracy's claim to be taken seriously. It also needs to prove that it can mobilise people and that therefore it is worth placing. And it also needs to demonstrate to its own members that it is doing something, that it is rather more than a paper tiger.

Thatcher's cavalier treatment of Murray and company was a reflection of the fact that she, and the ruling class, no longer believe that it is vital to take every little move of the bureaucracy that seriously. Even if the time is not ripe to dispense with their services, they certainly do not need to be taken that seriously, reasons Thatcher.

Murray's little left turn is his response to that. It is his attempt to show that the trade union bureaucracy can still make life difficult for the Tories and thereby should be awarded rather more respect. Personal piqûre is at best the vehicle for a reaction which springs from the social position of the bureaucracy. If the ruling class will not negotiate with us, thinks Murray, then they will have to learn that we are important people: let us show them that we represent real forces.

Even this limited left stumble bears all the marks of bureaucracy. Murray's call came out of the blue, after several weeks of public debate during which no effort had been made by any section of the bureaucracy to go out and lay the groundwork for industrial action by other sections of workers.

But stumble or not, there is no doubt that the call was taken up with enthusiasm by large numbers of workers. Not only was there a large stoppage in the civil service and solidarity action from parts of the public sector, but even some private engineering factories which have been silent since the early seventies were out.

In a number of places it was the rank and file that took the lead. Some stewards committees that had only narrowly and hesitantly voted to put strike action to a mass meeting found their recommendations endorsed overwhelmingly. In other places, calls for a demonstration turned into votes for strike action.

Positive

On the other hand, the stoppage was patchy. For example, in the mines, where the NUM leadership have often talked about the need for action to defend trade union rights, there seems to have been very little strike action.

The balance of the day, however, was very positive. It did what many previous days of action, most notably the disastrous 14 May 1980, failed to do: it gave workers a sense of their own strength and built their confidence.

It meant that there is now the possibility of strike action should the government dismiss people for refusing to surrender their union cards.

The fact that the government have the possibility of recovering from this setback is entirely due to the way in which the rest of the campaign has been conducted. The stress on not endangering national security meant from the beginning that the workers at GCHQ were placed in a passive role. Any collective action they might take would be bound to endanger security.

Consequently, the initiative inside GCHQ has rested with the management and the government. They have been able to approach the workers as isolated individuals and put very heavy pressure on them to sign. Because these workers were not engaged in any form of collective action, it was relatively easy for management to lean on them one by one. Just as the build-up outside of GCHQ was going on, there was a build-up of management pressure inside the place.

The factors of the possibility of the sack and loss of earnings loom large in any dispute. Inside GCHQ they loomed even larger and there was not even the sense of collective strength which comes from a dispute to counter them. The people who did stand out against the threats deserve our admiration.

Whether the brave resisters are quickly sacked and thus provide the focus for a bigger wave of protest or whether the government works slowly towards some sort of deal is, unfortunately, entirely in the hands of the government.

The sharper minds in the government must see the advantages of delay, but this whole episode shows how prone to miscalculation and error the government is.

Since the election there have been a number of upsets for the government and these have had the effect of shaking Tory confidence. It remains the case, however,
that these have been unfounded errors by the Tories and thus have not proved fatal for their strategy.

In general, there are two sorts of pressure that force governments to make mistakes and serious miscalculations. The fall of Ted Heath illustrated both. Under pressure from the miners he announced a three day week in an attempt to isolate them from other workers. He failed because the overall level of class struggle was such that it seemed to other workers that what was going on was the fault of the government rather than the miners.

Having failed to defeat the miners quickly, Heath then came under new pressure, this time from the ruling class, who effectively told him: 'settle or get out'. The combination of these two pressures was enough to force him to call and lose an election.

It is obvious that the situation today is quite different. The Thatcher government is not under either or both of those sorts of pressures. The errors and mistakes have a much more accidental quality than that.

In reality, they are not entirely unforced. There are divisions of opinion inside the ruling class as to what should be done next. These differences, as for example the future of the Falklands adventure or the extent to which it is possible and desirable to control local government expenditure directly are important and real in terms of the balance of parliamentary debate. But they are hardly significant in terms of the class war.

**Failures**

To the extent that the ruling class is exerting pressure on the Thatcher government it is united: it wants them to make sure the real wages of employed workers are kept under control. From the standpoint of the ruling class, this is one of the great failures of the Thatcher government. The wages of employed workers, particularly in private industry, have actually risen over the last few years. In contrast, they fell quite sharply under the last Labour government.

What is certainly not the case is that this pressure might lead to a substantial change of direction, of the sort needing a new pressure on the Tory government. And there is no evidence that Tory MPs or whoever, expressing concern about Thatcher’s plans for GCHQ, exerts any pressure on the government to change their minds.

In fact, the Labour Party refused to vote on the issue of GCHQ in the House of Commons debate on the explicit grounds that, if it came to a vote, those Tory MPs who expressed 'disquiet' would rally round the government and save its face by giving it a massive majority.

The only thing which has come at all near forcing a change of line on the government is the stubborn persistence of the workers at GCHQ and strike action outside. The Tory opposition to Thatcher’s plans does not go so far as endangering the interests of their government, let alone the real interests of the ruling class. And to buy the half-hearted support of these people, the organisation and mobilisation of workers has been neglected. That is the real price that is paid for a few speeches from 'progressive' capitalists.

---

**Chesterfield**

The other current mistake caused by thinking that there is considerable pressure on the government is that of overestimating the strength of our own side. This sort of illusion is currently being bolstered by the little electoral revival the opinion polls show the Labour Party to be experiencing, and by the Benn campaign in Chesterfield.

The fact that Benn won in Chesterfield means that overestimates of a revival are a particularly lethal illusion, assiduously fostered by papers like Socialist Action.

Whatever the reality, there is no doubt that the Benn victory has been seen as a major triumph for the left. It therefore does have some effect on reality. It has given a new confidence to the Bennites, and indeed to wider layers of activists. But we also have to stand against the wider belief that the result represented a turning point of historic dimensions in the class war.

The Chesterfield election measured votes and not the relative strength of classes in struggle. A parliamentary vote is essentially a passive permission for somebody else to act on your behalf. It is very different from a commitment to change the world yourself.

And the Chesterfield result cannot be taken as indicative of any sort of left victory. The Benn campaign was in no way a left activity. The key speakers included not only the likes of Kinnock, new friend of Ronald Reagan, but also Roy Hattersley and others on the unreconstructed right.

The campaign was conducted by the new, united, repeatable, reliable Labour Party, and not the fiery monster of the joint imaginings of the Daily Mail and the erstwhile Bennites.

A clear appreciation of the actual balance of class forces is important if we are to have any serious discussion of steps that can be taken to strengthen the working class movement. This issue has become particularly crucial given the holding of the Broad Left Organising Committee’s conference at the end of this month.
The main political force organising the conference is the Militant Tendency. We look at their political positions in rather more detail later in this issue of the Review. The conference, however, will not be exclusively made up of supporters of that newspaper and it undoubtedly reflects an important current of opinion inside the labour movement today. What happens at the Bloc conference is therefore of substantial moment for developing a fightback against the Tories.

Although some of the people involved in the conference will have a perspective simply of winning positions in the trade union bureaucracy, the dominant view is likely to be a little more sophisticated than that. The Militant and those around them will argue that it is necessary to combine an approach which has a focus on the rank and file with one which seeks to win elected positions in the trade union bureaucracy.

At one level there is nothing wrong with this sort of approach. Changing society involves changing the trade union movement from its top to bottom and no social revolution will take place in Britain without very substantial changes in the leadership of the trade unions. The real problem is one of priorities.

If you start from the belief that the British working class movement has a high level of organisation and combative and is moving inexorably to the left under the pressure of the capitalist crisis, then clearly the issue is one of winning control of the unions in order to bring the leadership in line with the sentiments of the membership. You might still argue for rebuilding at the base, but in reality you hold the opinion that much of that work has already been done by the objective development of the crisis.

If you start from the belief that the British working class movement has been on the retreat for the last few years and that its organisation and confidence has been eroded by the pressures of unemployment and trade unionism, then you have a radically different perspective.

**Guide**

Although you might still believe that it will, in the future, be necessary to win the leadership of the national union organisations, you will concentrate your efforts for the time being on the groundwork of rebuilding the rank and file base that can make union leadership a serious proposition.

Stated as abstract propositions these two perspectives might not seem to diverge too much, but they are not simply abstract views of the world. They are also ideas which guide what people do in the reality of the class struggle. The perspective of believing that the working class is on the offensive has to be implemented in the real world. In that real world the emphasis on winning leadership positions which follows from the general political analysis will tend to dominate.

It will tend to dominate not because the people who hold it are naturally corrupt office-seekers who want nothing more than a chance to get a nice office and a chance to sell out the working class, but because of the nature of the current situation.

The very weakness and lack of organisational capacity in the movement means that determined activists despite their political positions, are under enormous pressure simply to keep the union organisation together and thus to run for higher and higher office.

So in practice the wrong assessment of the political situation in the working class leads to a pressure to win election for office. And once those offices are won, then the lack of an active and combative rank and file creates further problems.

A union official whose members are constantly in action, always threatening to turn him or her out of the comfortable office, always pressuring the official in this way and that, is under different stresses to one that occupies the same union office in a period of membership passivity.

In the current period, to become a union bureaucrat means that the only consistent pressures you are likely to be under are those to accommodate and collaborate. And because social being determines social consciousness such a bureaucrat (even if) starts to bend and accommodate.

The political adaptations, the shift to the right, which we can trace in the careers of the left union leaders from Hugh Scanlon to Kevin Ruddy, are the result of those pressures, not the cause. So the idea that the situation can be substantially improved by electing even purer trade union leaders is as much a myth as the notion that if only purer MPs get elected then the Labour Party would not sell out once in government.

To the extent that the Bloc conference discusses these differences in perspectives seriously, it will be a very important step in the rebuilding of the movement.

All of the events of the last few months since the conference was called confirm that there is a serious need to rebuild. From major confrontations like GCHQ and Warrington through the union repeat on the political levy to the failure of 'left' trade union leaders in less well-publicised disputes like the current bakery strike in Liverpool, point to the weakness of the movement.

**Bolshevik**

Rebuilding can only start from a recognition of the need for principle inflexibility both in terms of a focus on the rank and file and on the impossibility of achieving any serious gains in the system. But that principle position needs to be combined with sufficient tactical flexibility to permit a response to developments in the class struggle.

The movement will not be constructed simply by speeches about the strategy of the Bolshevik party in 1908. That is a vital part of organising and building the revolutionary organisation that must be at the heart of the rebuilding, but it is not that rebuilding itself. The problem is to relate those general concerns about changing the world to the concrete concerns of large numbers of workers.

That, essentially, calls for agitation around real struggles.
Militant's short cut to socialism

Militant are heavily involved in the Broad Left conference taking place this month. Ralph Darlington looks at their strategy for industry, and how it fits in to their general politics.

One aspect of the politics of the Militant is their vision of constant left advance inside the Labour Party. As Liverpool councillor Derek Hatton informs us: 'The working people of this country are ready to reclaim the Labour Party for socialist politics.'

The downturn and its actual impact inside the Labour Party have highlighted Militant's flight from reality. The Benn bandwagon of three years ago, whatever the internal constitutional changes enacted, did not stand a chance against the combined pressure of electoralism and the sabotage of the trade union bureaucrats.

The recent spectacle of Roy Hattersley and Tom Benn, traditional representatives of the party's right and left, burying all their differences in a united bid to win the Chesterfield by-election for Labour has shown how far there has been a shift to the right inside the party.

This is something Militant consistently refuse to come to terms with. Every week in their newspaper they continue to argue that the party has been changed beyond all recognition, is moving inexorably to the left, and is the force for social change.

Ripple

Labour's devastating electoral defeat last June, we were informed, was because genuine socialist policies hadn't been projected to the electorate. Shortly afterwards, the election of the so-called dream ticket of Neil Kinnock and Roy Hattersley was greeted with the Militant front page headline 'Labour Must Unite'. They refused to acknowledge that it indicated any change at all in Labour's 'radical measures'. 'Moreover, any attempt to roll back these policy gains will meet with ferocious opposition from Labour's rank and file.' The recent expulsion of six Militant supporters from the Labour Party in Blackburn hardly created a ripple anywhere.

The last few months have accelerated Militant's own swing rightwards. They are under constant pressure to adapt to the environment they have chosen to operate within and blunt their politics.

When the Labour Co-ordinating Committee ditched their left wing policy credentials to back Kinnock's new look party, Militant remained silent. Similarly, they have studiously avoided any criticism of Tony Benn's willingness to woo traditional Labour voters with policies of moderation in Chesterfield.

Any such move would further jeopardise their already badly shaken position with the party leadership. Left wing criticism of Benn's new allies on Labour's right wing would not go down very well in the party at the moment. Worse, it might alienate potential voters.

The pressure to adapt to the right is a fundamental part of electoral politics. As a result, as Benn moves closer to Kinnock, Militant are forced to move behind him or risk sharp and potentially fatal conflict with the party. Militant end up acting as a left cover for Benn and thus for Kinnock.

Likewise, their industrial strategy is further evidence of notions of left advance camouflaging an actual rightward shift.

The electoral gains of the Left in unions like the POEU and NUR are offered as evidence of the forward march of Labour. Militant's newspaper regularly denounces those socialists who argue there is a downturn in the working class movement as 'the Jeremiahs and pessimists of the labour movement'.

Militant never offer an examination of the real balance of class forces in Britain. Upturn, downturn, ebbs and flows in struggle, all are absent. There is no analysis of the relative strengths of shop steward organisation or the role of trade union bureaucrats. Instead we are regularly offered a glib, superficial world view that sees the working class constantly on the offensive against the Tories.

To appreciate quite how extreme this can be we need to consider their own highly optimistic perspectives for the 1980s:

'The victory of the Conservatives in the May election (1979) marks a decisive change in the history of Britain. It will prove to be as decisive as the election of the Tories in 1924. But it will have even more profound consequences.

'A Tory government is seen as the traditional enemy by the working class - as the direct representative of big business. It can therefore expect no cooperation from the mass of the working class. The present Tory government, far more than the Baldwin government of 1924, is preparing the way for an explosion of hatred against it and against the ruling class.

'The level of struggles opening up will dwarf even that of 1970-74. It is by no means certain that the Tories will succeed in maintaining themselves in power for a whole term of office. Even if the Tory government survives it will only be for one parliamentary term.'

The centrepiece of their industrial strategy over the last few years has been the building of new Broad Lefts in the unions. Militant have filled the vacuum left by the declining Communist Party. Many of their leading members in the Broad Lefts now occupy positions in the lower echelons of the trade union bureaucracy.

Whatever Militant may say, the Broad Lefts are not organised with the explicit purpose of intervening to assist workers' struggles. Instead, they are essentially electoral machines whose ultimate goal is to move right wing officials and replace them with left wingers. For Militant, the real divide is between right and left, not rank and file and the official union leadership.

Yet it is because today's new Broad Lefts are being built not in the fairyland world Militant imagine but amidst the real downturn in class struggle that they have become even more susceptible to orientation on the union apparatus. The actual shift to the right inside the working class movement over recent years has succeeded in making Militant's efforts at leadership demoralising for workers in struggle.

Illusion

One example of how Militant's refusal to be uncompromising in relation to the union bureaucracy can lead to disaster was in the POEU, a union dominated by a new Broad Left. The union's campaign against privatisation ended in utter defeat. Yet the POEU Broad Left and Militant's strategy won for the Broad Left directly contributed to the defeat.

Throughout the dispute Militant fostered the illusion that mere control of a union executive meant major left advance. In practice they worked against the development of independent rank and file initiative to win the dispute by endlessly campaigning for their members' loyalties to be extended to the Broad Left. They even opposed all-out strike action, encouraging the view that selective strikes were sufficient to stop the Tories.

In reality the POEU Broad Left executive members acted exactly in the same way as the old 'right' officials they had recently replaced. They demoralised and then sold out their membership in classic style. Militant's role was indistinguishable from the Broad Lefts.

The pressure on Militant members to move right can be vicious. Take the CPSA. Last year when virtually every DHSS office in Liverpool walked out on strike in protest at job losses, it was leading Broad Left and Militant supporters like Kevin Roddy who immediately got them back to work and restricted the strike to just two offices. Militant members argued against any escalation.

Perhaps the most glaring recent example of the consequences of Militant's industrial strategy is the capitulation of union positions in the Bakers Union, headed by Militant supporter and union general secretary Joe Marino. Militant have not bothered to build up a Broad Left grouping in the union.
Some of Militant's editorial board

Marino is presumably adequate proof of how left wing the executive is. Yet their conduct over the jobs strike by 400 workers at the Allied Scotts Bakery in Liverpool has been outrageous.

It began when Marino and his executive refused to openly defy the courts by backing the strikers' continued occupation of the bakery. Instead they were advised to relinquish control of vital machinery and equipment back to the management. It was to be a fatal blow. Shortly afterwards Scotts introduced a no-strike agreement as a further condition of a return to work.

They finally threw down a 90-day closure notice. Throughout the dispute, Marino and the executive hesitated in spreading the strike. When a group of flying pickets visited a bakery in Newport, South Wales that had been pumping bread into Merseyside, they were told to get back home.

It was only under intense pressure that Marino belatedly agreed to call a national ballot for strike action, six weeks into the strike. Yet the Liverpool strikers have discovered first hand that a left wing union leadership doesn't count for much if there isn't strong and confident organisation on the ground.

The aim of Militantism is getting a left Labour government elected to office. The key task for socialists is to concentrate on forcing the Labour Party to adopt socialist policies. In the pamphlet Militant: Where We Stand they state:

"The colossal pressure of the workers upon that government coupled with the presence of a powerful Marxist tendency rooted within the Labour Party to act as a catalyst for this pressure, a new Labour government could be compelled to go further than their leaders intended in carrying out radical measures in the interests of the working class...A new Labour government could be compelled to nationalise one or two industries including even profitable ones. In this atmosphere the programme and policies of Marxism will gain great popularity within the labour movement."

Militant acknowledge that so long as the levers of economic control, and therefore political power, remain in the hands of the ruling class, overwhelming pressure would be applied to ensure a reforming Labour government was brought to heel. They inform us:

"If a Labour government comes to power and remains within the framework of capitalism, reforms such as the 35-hour week, increased public expenditure etc cannot have a lasting character..."

Reformism is incapable of satisfying the demands of the working class, but succeeds in irritating the capitalists and providing them with an opportunity to crush the labour movement."

It's for this reason Militant have put forward their best known slogan, the nationalisation of the 200 top monopolies, including the banks and insurance companies. We are told this could be carried through in parliament by means of an Enabling Bill. As a result: "Real democratic workers' control and management of the economy could be implemented by a Labour government with a socialist plan of production."
Extra-parliamentary activity, strikes and so on, are essentially subordinate to what goes on inside the Labour Party and parliament. The real role of the new Broad Lefts in the unions is to deliver block votes for control of the party manifesto.

Secondly, the machinery offered by Militant to achieve socialism is fundamentally the same as that which has failed Labour repeatedly in the past. It is unashamedly a parliamentary road to socialism. The traditional trade unionists, like their supposed adversaries in assuming the state machine is neutral. They seem to think that people who run the state institutions are impartial civil servants willing to do the bidding of whatever party gets a majority in parliament.

By ‘workers’ control’ revolutionaries mean workers’ power, taking control of workplaces from below, smashing the old capitalist state machine and replacing it with new institutions of workers’ councils. All that has been ditched by Militant. Instead ‘workers’ control’ is merely state ownership of industry, to be inaugurated from above, and is there to strengthen the existing state apparatus not to destroy it, even after nationalizing the 200 top monopolies. Militant informs us that ‘within a generation it would mean the abolition of classes’. Not only is socialism possible through parliament—but parliament is the key organ which will reform capitalism out of existence into communism.

What Militant do not consider is that ruling class resistance does not have to happen immediately after a left wing government has been elected when it could most rely upon genuine working class support and loyalty from below. The more asute sections of the ruling class are more likely to wait until the balance of class forces has been shifted sufficiently in their favour and judged a suitable moment to act against it. It is quite possible for big business and their friends in the state apparatus to adopt a policy of co-operation with the left reformist government leaders, provided of course they and the trade union bureaucracy were prepared to extend a certain amount of co-operation in return. Such a strategy would be implemented with the long term perspective of gradually whittling away the strength and cohesion of the workers’ movement and its ability to resist a ruling class offensive at a later stage.

Amidst general economic crisis, with mounting unemployment and rampant inflation it may be possible to undermine the Labour government’s popularity and thereby prepare the ground for a full-blooded counter-attack upon it. Such a scenario is not an imaginary twist of possible events. There have been a number of left wing governments elected to power with mass popular support that have faced this dilemma, including those in Germany 1918, Spain 1936 and Chile 1973.

That is exactly what would happen to a left Labour government in Britain. It would be concerned to defend itself from economic and political sabotage. They key problem would be seen as maintaining the authority and legitimacy of parliament and its legislative programme. Its prime concern would be to re-establish the economy, to do nothing that would rock the boat and precipitate a fatal conflict. As a consequence it would regard workers’ control as anathema.

We can see a similar approach being adopted in microscopic form today by Militant-influenced Liverpool City Council. They not only refused to concede the residential social workers’ recent claim for reduced working hours but pointedly tried to dampen down the struggle escalating into strike action. As one Labour councillor pointed out: ‘If the escalation goes any further, as far as I’m concerned they are being irresponsible.’ Even Militant members actually found themselves opposed to any escalation, because their employer happens to be a ‘socialist council’.

**WORKPLACE**

Ironically, Militant always claim they would rely upon the strength of the trade unions to prevent any fatal moves against a Labour government by the ruling class. Similarly in Liverpool time and time again Militant councillors have stressed they cannot defy the Tories’ spending limits alone. They need trade unionists prepared to take industrial action, if necessary, to ensure left policies are not watered down.

Trade union strength is not something fixed regardless of conditions. The power of workers depends upon the level of organisation, confidence and political consciousness that exists in every workplace. That is something that can’t be relied upon to just develop spontaneously. Nor can it be turned on or off like a light switch.

The pre-condition for a powerful workers’ movement able to defend a Labour government or Liverpool City Council is a confidence in its own power generated from and sustained in dozens of earlier struggles to defend wages and conditions. Trade union organisation has to be built up independent of reliance on MPs and councilors and often in opposition to them.

Militant do not see economic struggles as something on which to build the political consciousness of workers, merely as an adjunct to reform from above. For Militant the fight for higher wages or shorter hours is economic, while the struggle to defend Liverpool City Council and its running:･ there is no such division. Success over the small issues builds confidence and helps the general political fight. In contrast Militant’s electoral strategy is likely to prevent the development of the kind of trade union muscle which they claim could back up the manoeuvring of MPs and councilors when the crunch comes.

In their private meetings their members would admit that far from a Labour government being pushed continually leftwards, it would instead flounder and end up betraying its own supporters.

**BOOKMARKS CLUB**

**Quarter Winter**

_The Bookmark Club is a socialist book club that brings its members the best political paperbacks at the lowest possible prices. All you have to do is join to take books from our massive selection for £6.50 or more at bookmark club prices (retail shop prices are given in brackets)._

1) _Explaining the Crisis_ £3.50 (95p) Chris Harman re-estates and defends Marx’s theory of crises and develops it to cope with today’s world economic crisis. (An earlier draft appeared in parts in International Socialism.)

2) _Capitalist Democracy in Britain_ £2.40 (2.95) Anarchist internal critique of how it works by Ralph Miliband.

3) _The Terrorists_ £1.55 (1.95) Detective Inspector McLaughlin investigates the activities of a group of American police from international terrorism and exposes their activities to a group of American police. The book is recommended by Maj J. H. and P. W. Lamb.

4) _Fascism and Big Business_ £3.60 (4.50) Daniel Guerin’s comprehensive Marxist study misses material from both Italy and Germany to show the class basis of fascism and their dynamics of its mass movement.

5) _Revolution in Seattle_ £5.00 (5.50) Veteran Seattle socialist and union activist Harvey O’Connor tells the fascinating story of the city’s workers movement from its beginnings to the 1920s.

6) _Women in Trade Unions_ £3.60 (4.50) Republished for the first time since it was written in 1970, Barbara Drake’s book is still an excellent study of the history and problems of women workers’ organisations in Britain.

7) _From Lenin to Stalin_ £2.40 (2.95) A moving and vivid account by eyewitness Victor Serge of how the Russian revolution was lost.

8) _One Day of Life_ £3.15 (3.95) Sir Arthur Schnitzler’s play was last performed in Argentina, where Maria Angueta was forced into exile for writing this novel. Through the eyes of one woman it begins to explain how Salvadoran peasants continue to fight back in the face of unremitting brutality.

9) _The Paris Commune_ £2.80 (3.50) By Lassigny. The classic history of the first time the workers took power by a popular assembly.

10) _The Second Congress of the Communist International (Two Volumes)_ £6.00 the set (7.00) The complete minutes. Full of lively discussion on aspects of revolutionary strategy and tactics from trade unions to the national question and much more.

Special selection for £6.50:

A) _Explaining the Crisis, Capitalist Democracy in Britain, The Terrorists._

To join complete the form below and send in with your remittance to: The Bookmark Club, 267 Seven Sisters Road, London N4 2DE.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Address</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

I enclose £ ........... (Minimum: £6.50, cheques payable to Bookmark Club)

Please tell me the following Winter Quarter titles: 

Please tick the following Winter Quarter titles: 

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 A
Similarly, despite a public preconce that Liverpool City Council is united in its battle with the Tories, they would secretly admit they are facing increasing pressure to step back from confrontation. Neil Kinnock and the Labour Party nationally are almost certainly not going to sanction a potentially bruising illegal battle over spending cuts. Kinnock said that councillors should stay in office to minimise the impact of cuts in jobs and services.

Furthermore, there is a bloc of right wing councillors who may well defect to the Liberals and Tories rather than vote in favour of an overspill budget. This would allow the 'soft left' councillors the chance to let themselves off the hook by abandoning the struggle before it really begins.

But on both the national scale and in Liverpool Militant refuse to honestly and openly discuss such obstacles and the necessary tactics to overcome them. As they put it: 'The bread masses will have to go through the experience of seeing the programme of Tribunism in action, of left revisionism, and its inadequacy to deal with capitalist crisis.'

In other words, the whole experience of a Labour government or Liverpool City Council being knocked off course would arouse a still undefeated working class movement. This would be reflected in a swing to the left inside the Labour Party with further influence for Militant and the prospect of more radical measures to follow. As Militant informs us: 'An inexorable process of turning and moving towards the left will take place in the labour movement as a whole, and will turn the Labour Party into a left reformist or even a centralist direction...the working class will find that industrial action is not enough to solve their problems, and that political action is necessary.'

'Once they take the road of political action, there is only one way they can go, and that is to try and change the organisation which was built by the trade unions to solve their problems and that will be to move into the Labour Party with the purpose of transforming it to meet their needs.'

'As under the hammer blow of events the Labour Party will move to a more and more radical position, the masses will stream in their tens and hundreds of thousands to active membership of the Labour Party.'

'Under these circumstances all the attempts to compromise and suppress the right wing of the Labour Party, particularly under the pressure of right wing trade union leaders will not succeed...there is not the slightest hope or future for the right wing. It is doomed in spite of all its frantic efforts to maintain its position, on the basis of decades of domination of the LP and the trades unions. The ideas of Marxism will gain enormous support.'

In other words, whatever happens, the job of Militant members is to stay inside the Labour Party, gain positions in the party apparatus and by building up a Marxist current gradually capture the party. Defeat in Liverpool will likewise only strengthen the influence of Marxism in the city.

However, this imaginary scenario of an unrelenting shift to the left is not necessarily what would happen at all. It's true the most politically advanced shopfloor workers could be radicalised and move towards revolutionary ideas. But the working class is only powerful when the vanguard of the class can lead the less confident, less experienced. That is not a foregone conclusion. It depends on a strategic approach that differs in every respect from Militant's.

The majority of the working class does not automatically and spontaneously move to the left, even when it begins to lose faith in reformist leaders. Much of it can drop into apathy or demoralisation. The failure of Mitterrand's experiment in France has not led Communist Party and Socialist Party members to attempt to organise workers' resistance to the new employers' offensive, sanctioned by the 'left' government. Instead, many have found themselves paralysed, divided and demoralised. The atmosphere has been exploited by the French Nazi National Front.

'The majority of the working class does not automatically and spontaneously move to the left, even when it begins to lose faith in reformist leaders'

It is also not the case that the reformist political organisations like the Labour Party would automatically swing to the left. In Chile the Communist Party and the Allende wing of the Socialist Party swung to the right after the final confrontation with the ruling class approached, trying to get an alliance with the Christian Democrats and falling over themselves to recognise the constitutional and non-political character of the armed forces. Similarly in France today the Socialist Party has swung rightwards to defend the government's austerity measures as unfortunate but necessary.

Of course it is possible for the election of the left Labour government coming into conflict with the ruling class to spark off a groundswell of rebellion among many of its erstwhile supporters who want to go much further than their reformist leaders will sanction. But such a social crisis will not have a successful outcome unless there is a powerful body of revolutionary socialists operating in every workplace offering an alternative to such disillusioned and newly radicalised workers.

That revolutionary socialist alternative cannot be simply an ideologically one. It has to be practical as well. There has to be a revolutionary organisation that supports every workers' struggle by providing the kind of leadership that can win them, however embarrassing to a Labour government. It has to be a revolutionary alternative that warns workers not to place their reliance on the 'left' MPs, trade union leaders or councillors but instead shows that in workers' self-activity there is an alternative to the hesitations and betrayals of reformism.

Militant claim that it is possible to build that alternative pole of attraction inside the Labour Party. Past experience teaches us otherwise. Militant spends its time in the Labour Party passing resolutions about what a Labour government should do in the future. It sees various manoeuvres within the party machinery as more important than workers' struggles taking place outside. What Militant do not do is to organise rank and file workers for a struggle against the left reformist leadership in the one place where workers can rely on their own strength: the workplaces.

The very nature of the Labour Party's structure maintains this separation of the political and industrial. For Militant offering a practical alternative inside the Labour Party in Liverpool means campaigning for trade unionists to support the Labour Party in Liverpool, not in proving the relevance of their politics in leading day by day struggles.

The problem of reliance on left reformists does not simply arise at the moment of profound social crisis. It begins long before that. In the crush approaching Liverpool City Council Militant have deliberately fostered illusions that the Labour Party, nationally and locally, will unite in backing their stand against the Tories. Derek Hatton has triumphantly declared: 'We are confident that we will have the full support of the Labour Party leadership. Mr Straw and Dr John Cunningham have indicated they don't think we have any alternative.'

Throughout the City Council campaign Militant have acted as cheerleaders for the Labour group, left and right. At a recent public meeting a Militant member said: 'Thank goodness we have got a socialist council that will stick to its commitments.' They have not produced one note of caution, let alone criticism of the Labour Party's tactics.

They have helped nurture amongst a layer of council shop stewards a sense of loyalty to the Council which has succeeded in disarming many workers from preparing for the kind of independent all-out strike action that would be the only guarantee that jobs and services are defended, regardless of how left wing the council.

Let us repeat: for revolutionary socialism to act as a pole of attraction it has to be both theoretical and practical. That means both political and organisational independence from left reformism. In fact the arguments as to whether socialists should stay in the Labour Party are very much a repeat of those held some 80 years ago. The example of Germany in 1918 provides compelling evidence that to put the test in a major social upheaval, the consequences of staying inside a reformist party lead to catastrophe.

Militant, originally revolutionaries entering the Labour Party to win revolutionists to the notion of an independent revolutionary socialist party, have themselves ended up as a left reformist tendency within it, accepting its entire parliamentary and electoralist approach.
The real lessons of UCS

Scott-Lithgow workers backed down from occupying against redundancy at the end of February. Dave Sherry looks at the background to this dispute and at the 'tradition of UCS' that the Scott-Lithgow stewards invoke.

For the last two years workers at the Scott Lithgow shipyard on the Clyde have been living under the threat of closure. Last month the Tories announced that British Shipbuilders were washing their hands of the yard, and that the workforce had two options: total closure and the loss of 4,000 jobs by March — or privatization of the rig-building operation with the retention of very few of the jobs.

Not so long ago the national shipbuilding unions had a formal policy of 'one out all out'. In other words, any attempt to impose compulsory redundancies would be opposed by an all out shipyard strike. However that particular pretence was abandoned when the CSUU officials capitulated over the 'survival plan for the industry' in January.

Deprived of one channel of officialdom the shop stewards merely turned to another, the avowedly left-wing STUC. Together, they announced that 'they would mount a UCS style campaign' to oppose the threat, and that they would 'appeal to all sections of the Scottish people for support'.

When the first wave of redundancies was announced in January, the shop stewards unveiled their campaign. At a mass meeting they came up with the idea of a 'work on'.

As workers were sacked they were asked to ignore their redundancy notices and report to the yard for work as usual. Stewards would clock them on and find them work to do. Their wages would be made up from a weekly levy of the rest of the workforce.

The most obvious criticism of the 'work on' is that shipyard workers are now paying other shipyard workers to work for their own employer — British Shipbuilders. But there are other, more practical problems with the whole strategy. As the lay-offs progress the situation will soon be reached where more workers are claiming from the levy than are actually paying into it. If the 'work on' continues, at the end of March all 4,000 will be claiming from the levy!

But fundamentally the 'work on' is self-defeating. Because it's neither an occupation nor a strike, the workers are continuing to work and complete the few remaining orders. Unbelievably, the stewards argue that this proves that the workers are responsible, rallying public opinion to their side. Shop stewards' convenor Duncan NeNeill says: 'We have a responsibility to our customers and to the yard. Because of that we will continue to work normally.' The stewards even agreed that completed orders could leave the yards.

This is suicide. By continuing to work normally the workers are working themselves out of a job. And by handing over completed orders, they are throwing away the only leverage they have on the government and British Shipbuilders.

At the beginning of this month the workforce looked dead and buried. The government felt cocky and tried to rush through a quick privatization deal with Trafalgar House, the giant engineering and shipping multi-national, which contributes thousands of pounds to Tory Party funds. The bones of the deal were that Trafalgar House would get the yard and facilities for nothing, plus a large public handout. It would then re-employ only 1,000 workers. But this time the Tories had gone too far, and the announcement of the deal sparked a mass and file rebellion. 4,000 workers struck without any lead from the senior stewards.

At the mass meeting the next day feeling was so high that the stewards were compelled to take a firmer stand. Overtime was banned and the workforce refused to release a boat for sea trials.

More significantly, the meeting voted for occupation if there were any further attempts to force through compulsory redundancies and privatization without the shop stewards' agreement.

While the walkout showed the workforce still have fight left in them, it didn't go far enough. The lack of organization and leadership at rank and file level means there is no credible alternative to the senior stewards.

The stewards are not opposed to privatization and job losses in principle — merely the manner in which privatization is to be achieved. And because that willingness to compromise lies at the heart of their whole approach, then it is the negotiating skill of the shop stewards and not the power of the rank and file that will be pitted against the might of British Shipbuilders and the Tory government. With the workers now safely back at the 'work on', the stewards see the occupation threat as a bargaining counter to be used on the negotiating table, and not the key instrument in an offensive struggle against the government's plans. A real opportunity to generate a fight has been squandered.

The tragedy is that the one day walk out did force the Tories to hold off on the initial deal. It did force Britain to extend the deadline on their rig contract. It proved that mass action can force the employer to make real concessions.

At every stage the shop stewards and their political mentors at the STUC have stubbornly refused to prepare the workforce for the crunch. Not only is that their strategy one that avoids confrontation, it is a recipe for demonising the workers, encouraging them not to fight compulsory redundancy but to
volunteer for it instead. Since the 'work on' started, hundreds have taken or applied for, voluntary redundancy.

This strategy wasn’t plucked out of the air. It has a long pedigree. Its main proponents are not the 'right wing' trade union leaders, but those on the left of the movement. Specifically, the STUC claims that 'traditional strike action will play into the government’s hands by alienating public opinion'. The 'work on' is a tactic that can win the hearts and minds of the Scottish people.'

The Communist Party in Scotland, under the leadership of miners' leader Mick McGahay claims the 'work on' gained the most genuine support through the calling of an all-Scottish Peoples Convention, representing every section of the Scottish People'.

It’s a strategy that tries to emulate the famous Upper Clyde Shipbuilders 'work in' of the early seventies where, as legend would have it, a great working class victory was won.

For many people today, UCS is just a name. For others it is a legend. But what really happened, and what are the lessons for today?

In June 1971 the Heath government announced that Upper Clyde Shipbuilders was bankrupt, and that in line with the non-lame ducks' policy, it wasn’t going to provide the funds to save it. Out of the 8,500 workers, 6,000 were to be sacked and at least three of the five yards closed. An additional 20,000 jobs that depended on the yards were now in peril. The previous year unemployment on Clydeside had risen by 40 percent.

**Troops**

There was no alternative but to fight. On 30 July, the shop stewards' co-ordinating committee announced 'they had taken over the yards' and were beginning a 'work in' to save the jobs.

It’s difficult now, to convey the feeling on Clydeside that summer. At the start of the 'work in' the government and the authorities were worried. David 'Hammer' McNee, then chief constable for Glasgow, had phoned Heath to warn him that the police couldn't guarantee order in the city if the yards were forcibly closed. Aware that the police in the area might not be able to contain a situation involving thousands of workers, the Tory cabinet actually postponed the closure announcement for two weeks to allow them to bring troops back from Northern Ireland.

So the government's liquidator was appointed he was told by local police chiefs: 'You can get you into the yards, but don't expect us to try and get the workers out.' They were not willing to take any action that might provoke a situation that they couldn't control.

The initial response to the work in was magnificent. Within a few days a call for solidarity action brought massive support. Two one-day general strikes occurred throughout the west of Scotland, and Glasow saw its biggest street demonstrations since the days of the 'Red Clyde' at the end of the first world war. Cash and telegrams of solidarity flooded in from all over the country. In virtually every organised workplace collections were taken for the 'work in'.

But this spontaneous movement was not just based on sympathy for the shipbuilders. It served to inspire other workers up and down the land into taking action themselves, making the summer of 1973 a crucial turning point in the fortunes of Heath’s government.

In the wake of the government’s announcement that unemployment need not be passively accepted. Inspired by UCS, workers at Plessey in the west of Scotland, Fisher-Bendix in Liverpool and at Atlas-Chalmers in north Wales all occupied their factories against redundancy.

Undoubtedly the UCS's campaign slogan 'The Right To Work' made a deep impact on workers faced with rising unemployment. But even during the course of the UCS 'work in', the rotten political ideas that have dominated the shop stewards' movement in shipbuilding for the past decade, were apparent. They came to dominate the struggle and led it into a shabby compromise.

When the 'work in' ended a year after it started, 2,600 jobs had been lost, UCS had been broken up, and new work practices and wage structures were introduced, all aimed at breaking down demarcation and increasing productivity. The stewards at the Govan yards agreed to a 120 percent increase in productivity with a smaller workforce. John Brown's of Clydebank, was taken over by the Texas-based Marathon Company. To clinch the deal, Jimmy Reid, leading CP steward, and the other stewards agreed to sell hard won conditions. They even signed a banning year 'no strike' clause. These concessions badly undermined shopfloor organisation in all the Clyde yards. The agreements were used as models elsewhere, and helped pave the way for the onslaught of the ensuing decade.

The UCS struggle which had begun so promisingly ended as a serious setback for the workforce involved. The outcome was not inevitable. It was a direct consequence of the policies and tactics employed by the leading shop stewards. Their emphasis, then and now, was on influencing the community and winning public opinion. That was the central core of the whole UCS campaign. As a result they dismissed any notion of militant struggle and self activity of the workers themselves.

It was their politics which led the stewards to call for a 'work in' rather than a real occupation. To the Communist Party's pamphlet on UCS written in 1972, makes this clear: 'The problem facing the leaders of the UCS workers was to devise a new technique of struggle which would achieve their objective — to prevent redundancies. That means in what would be a tough struggle. A strike could play into the hands of the employers when they were set on closure anyway. A sit-in would have been difficult to maintain for long enough. It would also have given the employers a good excuse to attack the workers by arguing that the sit-in made it impossible to fulfil any new contract and aggravated the already difficult situation. This could have helped the Tories to alienate public opinion from support of the UCS workers.'

It was Jimmy Reid who spelt out what this strategy would mean in practice. Addressing the Clydebank workforce at the start of their 'work in' he boasted: 'This is the first campaign of its kind in the history of trade unionism. We are not going to strike. We are not even hanging in as a strike. We are not strikers. We are responsible people and we will conduct ourselves with dignity and discipline. We want to work, we are not wildcats. There will be no hotheadism, there will be no vandalism ... there will be no be bawling.' Unfortunately it was neither a public opinion nor 'responsible people' like Jimmy Reid who frightened the chief constable of Glasgow and the Tory Cabinet. It was the possibility of militant action and the confrontation with 8,500 shipbuilders.

Sadly, that possibility was never allowed to materialise. Despite the mythology that surrounds UCS, it must be remembered that during the year-long 'work in' the yards were never occupied, production never halted, and over 2,000 workers took voluntary redundancy out of boredom or despair.

Reid even argued against the tactic of holding the completed boats until the jobs were safe although the majority of the workforce actually supported this tactic. Again his main concern was the need to protect the 'respectable' image.

'We've got to make sure that the government get no pretext for saying that these obscurantist saboteurs, the shop stewards and the workers, have blasted negotiations.'

**Confrontation**

In the middle of a national miners' strike, at a time when 13,000 Scottish vehicle workers were on strike in central Scotland, and the Tory government was in trouble, the UCS stewards were carefully avoiding any further confrontation with the public as well as public support. For these 'left wing' leaders, negotiation and not class struggle was the way to deal with the employers. Inevitably that approach meant that the workforce were treated like a stable army.

While the famous leaders spoke, travelled, negotiated and even appeared on TV, the workers were only required to work. Occasionally they would attend mass meetings that were themselves more part of a publicity campaign than a democratic workers' assembly that would argue out and decide on tactics.

This allowed the government to avoid the confrontation that it feared so much. Heath had decided that at no stage in the crisis would the government precipitate a showdown. He was considerably aided by the shop stewards' refusal to increase the tempo of the struggle. In truth, neither side wanted a confrontation and the efforts of each to avoid one, both complemented and reinforced the circumstances by which it was prevented.

The 'work in' gave its leadership the appearance of being militant, without actually having to lead a fight. The alternative, a militant occupation, linked to a campaign for mass industrial action outside, was...
definitely on. In 1972 the miners took on the Tories and hammered them. If they'd waited on public opinion winning them a wage rise, they'd be waiting yet.

The truth about the 'work in' and the attitude of its own leadership was revealed by the Morning Star when it reported during the 'work in':

'All UCS workers are determined to do their best for their yard. Now it really is teamwork. The feeling that you're letting the side down is one experienced by the very few latecomers — yes, even time-keeping has clocked new records of precision. It is summed up by the fact that the traditional lunchtime pint is downed minutes before the horn goes.'

The occupation of a factory is a tactic of class struggle and not an experiment in workers' control. Fantastic confusion has arisen about this matter since the UCS 'work in'. That leads to the kind of nonsense quoted in the article above being repeated time and time again.

In a hostile sea of capitalism it is impossible for real workers' control to exist in the isolated island of one factory. The very dependence of such a factory upon its outside suppliers destroys such an attempt even before it can get off the ground.

**Dissipated**

There was certainly no workers' control in UCS. The 'work in' never disputed the right of management to manage. The superficial appearance of defiance never challenged the government liquidator's authority. In fact the liquidator, Robert Smith, has himself argued that the effect of the 'work in' was greatly exaggerated and misunderstood.

'There has been a widespread misconception of the nature and extent of the "work in", often misquoted as a precedent for quite different industrial action of a totally obstructive or "sit in" nature. In any organisation negative or obstructive control can be exercised by any group of people on whom the operation depends, and it is generally to the credit of the shop stewards' coordinating committee that they have exercised their potential for negative control with considerable restraint, and have been ready to see that the practical needs of the situation demanded the cooperation of all the interested parties.'

Praise indeed from the Tory government's butcher!

The 'work in' was deliberately designed to take the political heat out of the situation. As a consequence the bulk of the massive amount of cash raised for the 'fighting fund' was diverted into providing a free labour force for the liquidator and not for any fighting. Most damning of all was the fact that the 'work in' actually dissipated the spirit of those involved in it. At the start of the 'work in' in July 1971, 69 percent of those made redundant were taking part. By December this figure had fallen to 27 percent and by the end in June 1972, less than 14 percent were involved. Precisely because the workforce was presented as a staging army, it became an army that dwindled away.

Workers facing redundancy, like the thousands at Scott-Lithgow today, should take a cold hard look at UCS before they adopt this 'unique form of struggle'.

Instead of mobilising a mass struggle against unemployment and the UCS closures, the Communist Party-dominated shop stewards' committee directed their efforts towards a publicity campaign, with respectability as the keynote.

The campaign included 'A Scottish People's Convention' with church leaders on the platform. There was no demand for nationalisation. Most important of all, there was no attempt to direct the tremendous support they had received into a challenge to the Tory government.

It's hardly surprising that the employing class should pay such wonderful tributes to the 'statesmanship' of the UCS leaders.

The class collaborationist tactics which proved so dangerous in 1972 — a period when masses of workers were moving onto the offensive — have proved disastrous in the years that have followed. As far as shipbuilding is concerned, the UCS sell-out marks the beginning of a long decline.

Since British Shipbuilders was nationalised in 1977 the total workforce has been axed by 33 percent. Of course, much of the credit for this 'achievement' has to go to the last Labour government, and the nationalist union leaders who've bent over backwards to appease both Labour and Tory administrations. Their acquiescence in the latest 'survival plan' is nothing new.

But the UCS legend, and the leaders who helped create it, also have a lot to answer for. In 1977 Jimmy Aikle, still the convenor at Govan, recommended that the Govan workers should stick to their brothers on Tyneside. He argued that Govan should accept an order transferred from Swan-Hunters, after the workers there had refused to accept the conditions that had been attached to the work being done in their yards. It proved conclusively that the rot had set in, and that fierce competition and scabbing had replaced the solidarity shown to the UCS workers in 1971.

**Charade**

A heavy price is being paid for the glaring weaknesses that have been allowed to develop in the Clyde shop stewards' organisation. The political weakness so apparent during the UCS 'work in' has been magnified under the more rigorous conditions of the downturn. These weaknesses are now much more decisive. That's why the Scott-Lithgow 'work on', an attempt to emulate UCS, is only a pale shadow of its dodgy predecessor. And if the Scott-Lithgow shop stewards continue with their charade, then the whole workforce is headed for a terrible defeat.

That defeat can still be avoided but only if the 'UCS style campaign' is quickly booted out of play. The shop stewards' liaison with a 'Scottish People's Convention' bringing together church groups, councils, community associations and political charlatans of every hue, is simply a revamp of the old UCS formula. It's a formula that not only can't win but one that actually prevents workers themselves from putting up an effective fight.

It's a short cut for those who've abandoned all faith in the ability of workers to fight at all.
Burning Reagan's fingers

The sight of US marines scuttling out of the Lebanon has pleased all socialists. The collapse of Reagan's 'peace keeping' plans is indeed a major setback for efforts to keep the region safe for imperialism. In the following three articles we look at the background to the events in the region.

The latest wave of fighting in Lebanon's long-running civil war has destroyed the US equipped army, led to the withdrawal of British and US 'peacekeeping' forces from Beirut, and rendered Phalangist President Gemayel's hold on power extremely fragile.

The constitution of the Lebanon, decreed by the French when they decolonised, guaranteed state power to the Maronite Christians. The justification for this was that, according to a dubious census, they constituted 51 percent of the population. They have, naturally enough, made sure there has never been another head-count—it is generally recognised that Muslims now constitute the majority of the population.

Pressure for political equality from the Muslim population and the creation of an armed neo-fascist Christian force, the Phalange militia, to stop them, led to the present civil war which exploded in 1973. The occasion which began the hostilities was the murder of a bus load of Palestinian refugees by the neo-fascists.

**Civil war**

The Palestinian presence in the area was the result of 'Black September', when the Jordanian state killed thousands and drove the rest across the border into the Lebanon. Once there, they found themselves allied with the mainly Muslim leftist forces.

The alliance of Palestinians and the Muslim left was very successful in the early phase of the civil war. They gained control of two thirds of the country, although neither group seems to have had any idea that they could use their military strength to take over the state. All they did was to open the road to Syria, which ended the fighting by sending the SARK, its stooge army of Palestinians, into the Lebanon, ostensibly to aid the left.

In the event, worried by the prospect that a leftist victory in Lebanon would lead to a rebellion at home, the Syrian-controlled forces turned on the left and, with US and Israeli support, tried to break the PLO. Despite the large scale slaughter of Palestinians, the Syrians were unable to win a decisive military victory and agreed to a Saudi-inspired plan that granted equal representations for Muslims and Christians, but with the balance held by a president who was always to be a Christian.

The Phalangists, as the main Christian and right-wing force, had been getting weapons and money from Israel for years. Now this was stepped up as the Israeli

US and Israeli plans for a stable Phalangist-led regime in the Lebanon are in ruins. Russ Escritt looks at the background and prospects.

...moved towards direct intervention in the country.

The second Israeli invasion, in 1982, had as its aim the crushing of the PLO military apparatus and driving them out of the Lebanon. In this it was largely successful. The PLO was quickly defeated and the majority of its fighters forced to withdraw to other Arab countries, none of which have a common border with Israel, and none of whose leaders have the slightest intention of translating their rhetoric into action against Israel.

The other aim of the invasion was less successful. The Israelis aimed to install the Phalangists in complete control of the Lebanese state and force the Syrians out of the north of the country. Their chosen puppet was Bashir Gemayel who quickly became president. However, he was soon assassinated and was replaced by his brother Amin. His government contained prominent Muslim politicians and seemed to enjoy some support.

In reality, his government was only stable while the Israeli army controlled Beirut. Once they withdrew, the civil war broke out again. It was at this point, a year ago, that the alleged 'peace keeping' force drawn from various interested imperialist parties, entered the arena.

In theory this was a force aimed at un-

partially holding the ring. It rapidly became clear that its real role was to help the Phalan-
gists to rebuild their control. The US, for example, quickly began shelling Muslim positions.

The other external pressure on the situation is provided by the Syrians. It was they who backed the faction of the PLO led by Abu Musa which blamed Yasser Arafat for the military disasters, accusing him of being more interested in UN negotiations than in fighting Israel. Although they succeeded in driving him out of the Lebanon, the move has in fact backfired on both Abu Musa and the Syrians. Arafat has been able to rebuild his popularity with the Palestinian rank and file, particularly on the West Bank.

Syria's second string has been its backing of the Shi'ite Muslim Amal militia which has led the fighting against Gemayel in the last weeks.

The current crisis was precipitated when Chauffie Al Waqqas, prime minister since 1980 and a Muslim, resigned. It was starkly obvious that the Gemayel government was an instrument of the Phalange. So widespread was that belief that, attacked by the United Muslim forces, the Lebanese army, lovingly rebuilt by the US and containing soldiers from all communities, fell apart almost at once. The 57 percent of soldiers of Muslim origin could see little point in dying to save a sectarian Christian regime.

The imminent fall of Gemayel is without doubt a defeat for the US and their clients, the Israelis. It is not, however, the start of a new era in the Lebanon. All the signs are that the outside parties involved will agree to some sort of deal.

One of the demands of the Muslim forces is for the tearing up of the 'May 17 Agreement', a deal Gemayel made with Israel which allows them to continue to occupy the south of the country until the Syrians leave the north. Another major demand is for the resignation of Gemayel for ordering the indiscriminate shelling of Muslim areas and the subsequent slaughter of many civilians. The signs are that the Syrians are already pushing for a compromise, perhaps involving Gemayel remaining as president but with a new set of Muslim ministers.

Although the Syrians back the Shi'ites as a means of thwarting US and Israeli plans in the area, the last thing they want is for their allies to win and set up their own radical-sounding little state, since that would have unpredictable effects amongst the

*Socialist Review* March 1984

15
Inside Israel

With the invasion of Lebanon putting added strains on the economy of Israel, Sue Cockerill and Neil Rogall look at the nature of the state of Israel.

The words 'soaring inflation' and 'huge foreign debts' immediately bring countries like Brazil, Argentina and Mexico to mind. But a country whose annual inflation rate recently topped the thousand percent mark, and whose debts are, per head, seven times as big as Brazil's, is not in Latin America. It is Israel.

Israel's role as policeman in the Middle East cannot be separated from its economy. Well publicised successes of Israeli industry and agriculture are totally dependent on outside investments. Nor is it ordinary investment (which only occurs if profits are big enough). This inflow of funds is largely in the form of grants or very favourable loans. Without this Israel would go bankrupt.

Israel owes foreign creditors $5,500 per man, woman and child. On top of this the state receives huge 'grants' of two-and-a-half to three billion dollars a year, half from the USA. Per head, these grants amount to more than three times India's total income per head. This makes the idea of Israel as a model for other 'Third World' countries a sick joke.

These facts alone speak volumes about Israel's role. America spends almost a third of its total foreign aid on Israel. They get plenty in return. Israel's military machine— which swallows a quarter of its national income — is more than a match for any Middle Eastern state which might threaten US interests in the area.

Advisors

Israel is not the only watchdog for the US in the region, and the Israeli ruling class is not merely an American poodle. But the idea that the US is trying to restrain Israel from its 'excesses' is belied by the fact that the cash keeps flowing in. Besides the Middle East, Israel serves US interests elsewhere providing a channel for arms and technology and 'advisors' to US clients in Central America, Somalia's Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala, as well as African regimes are all examples of Israeli intervention.

No wonder Israel's debt doesn't receive the same attention as Mexico's. While the banks and the IMF demand a high price for bailing out Latin American debtors, the Americans keep on pumping up the dollars for Israel. Nevertheless, the economic chaos caused by rampant inflation has prompted the government to try to cut part of the indexation of wages which has up to now ensured that Jewish workers' incomes have kept up with inflation. These efforts led to mass public sector strikes in protest.

The most bizarre aspect of the strikes was the doctor's hunger strike, which involved doctors collapsing and having to be treated by each other.

Israel's finance minister wants to introduce austerity measures to cut inflation and increase exports. This plan would be a mild dose of the IMF 'medicine' being forced down the throats of Latin American workers, involving cuts in public spending and subsidies on essential goods and services. The aim is to cut real wages, to become internationally more competitive.

The economic chaos plus the increasing discontent over the aftermath of the so-called 'peace for Galilee' invasion of Lebanon is likely to mean a change of government. The opposition Labour Alignment doesn't really want to take over yet, because it cannot solve the problems. But it seems possible that there will be another Labour government before too long. It is
worth stressing therefore that such a change will not mean any 'progressive' policies.

The media, here and in America, are very fond of the myth that it is only since Begin and the Likud coalition came to power that there has been an ugly face to the Zionist project. Such a belief also coexisted with the old reformist left (including Tony Benn). This is completely false.

The Labour Party isn’t really a party of labour at all, but the party of the Labour bureaucracy which was the core of the ruling class until the 1970s. ‘Left’ Zionism is no less than Likud — it was responsible for perpetuating the ongoing state and the occupation of the Palestinian territories. The Kibbutzim which are also seen by many as socialist institutions were founded on land from which Palestinian peasants had been evicted. In very few places has Israel really made the desert bloom. In fact Kibbutzim play only a tiny role in Israel’s economy, and while they don’t allow Arabs to join, are increasingly dependent on hired Arab labour.

Subsidy

Israel has been compared favourably with the ‘feudal’ Arab regimes around it, as a democratic state, with progressive social policies, etc. The level of economic and social development was fundamentally dependent on its imperialist role. Israel could not have existed, let alone become prosperous, without continual subsidy. That subsidy was forthcoming precisely because Israel was able to discriminate against the Arab states whose interests conflicted with and threatened US domination of the region.

The wars of 1948, 1956, 1967 and 1973 are presented as ‘just’ wars to protect Israel from outside aggression. We are asked to believe that the territories occupied in those wars would have been handed back to the Arab states in return for guaranteed security. In the first place, this ignores the fact that Israel was founded as a state on land occupied by the Palestinians who were driven off. Secondly, the Labour governments moved just as quickly as Begin to establish settlements in occupied areas. Even the Biblical literalism which is deployed in Begin and Shamir, with their talk of ‘Judea and Samaria’, turns out to be a precise echo of such ‘socialist’ heroes as Golda Meir.

At present it suits Western ruling classes to suggest that the massacres and expansionism seen in Lebanon are an aberration from the history of Israel, rather than a logical consequence of the Zionist state and its role in the region. They explain Begin and Shamir’s regrettable popularity by talking about their base among the Sephardic Jews — people who have come to Israel from the Arab countries rather than Europe or America.

In reality the Sephardim or Oriental Jews, vote for Likud not because of a lack of political sophistication or nationalism, but because Labour didn’t deliver the goods to them. The Oriental Jews were not involved in the Zionist project — they weren’t participants in the colonisation and only tricked into it in the 1950s. They were evicted there by propaganda by the Ashkenazi state promising fantastic material benefits.

When they arrived there was no land of milk and honey for them. Instead they found the harsh work of the agricultural settlements and development around the borders of the country. While they are better off than the Palestinian workers they have suffered low wages, unemployment and racial discrimination. The support for Likud is comparable to the racism and reaction of poor Southern whites in the USA. At other times in Israel’s history there have been elements in the sephardic communities who turned to radical politics — the Israeli Black Panthers of the early 1970s for example.

The problem with the Israeli workers are wedded to the Zionist state as the guarantor of their relative privileges, discontent with Labour manifested itself in support for right-wing Zionism, not a class alternative.

There have been several strike waves in Israel’s history, including the one of the last two years or so. Many of these strikes have been militant, not to say violent. The tactics of the El Al airline workers in blocking the airport runways in protest against job losses in 1982 was a memorable example. But when it comes to the cutbacks, workers will not challenge the basis of the state. There are no organisations of the working class which are independent of the state.

Even the army is unable to lift the economy

The Histadrut, which we have to refer to as a trade union for want of a better description, was founded as an exclusively Jewish, not exclusively working class body. Its general secretary at the time, Lavon, spelled this out in 1960 when he said: “It is not a workers’ trade union.” On the contrary, it is a major employer, owning a bank, insurance company and a chain of supermarkets. It is part of the Zionist state, controlling a sizeable chunk of the economy. It has been a major recipient of the funds channelled from abroad through the state. Workers automatically become members since it is via the Histadrut that the health insurance scheme is organised. Many workers do not experience it in its ‘trade union’ role at all.

Many Arab workers are also forced to join the Histadrut, but since they aren’t entitled to the medical and welfare benefits, they get absolutely nothing out of it at all.

Though the Histadrut can oppose this or that government policy, especially Likud’s rather than Labour’s, it has spent most of its existence crushing strikes, not calling them. It cannot be an organisation for independent working class action.

The Israeli working class is engaged in producing a surplus. As such its class interests lie in fighting the Israeli ruling class. But also it is a partner with that ruling class in sharing the benefits of Israel’s imperialist role. The position of the working class was summed up over ten years ago in an article called The Class Nature of Israeli society.

‘As long as Zionism is politically and ideologically dominant, there is no chance whatsoever of the Israeli working class becoming a revolutionary class. The experience of fifty years does not contain a single example of them being mobilised on material or trade union issues to challenge the Israeli regime itself. On the contrary, Israeli workers nearly always put their national loyalties before their class loyalties’.

Israel is increasingly dependent on Arab labour, both from within its ‘official’ borders, and on the basis of ‘pass law’ type labour from the West Bank. It is said that before 7am Israel is an Arab country. Arabs do many of the dirty jobs which Israelis don’t want to do.

The 1967 military and political expansion created a huge demand for Jewish labour in the armaments industry, the army and in administering the ‘occupied territories’. The result was that Arab workers began to form a key part of the labour force of the Zionist state which until then had consisted of Oriental Jews. They work essentially for the private sector and constitute a reserve army of labour.

Construction

According to government statistics — which underestimate the real figure — 110,000 Arabs resident in Israel are part of the workforce. It is much more difficult to assess the number of Palestinian workers who commute daily into Israel. The number seems to be between 100,000 and 120,000. In total Palestinians form about a fifth of the Israeli workforce, concentrated in the productive core of the economy: manufacturing, construction and agriculture. Nearly 80 percent work in these sectors compared with under 40 percent of Jews. That means about 30 percent of the labour force in productive industry is now Palestinian — a vast turn around from the Zionist intention of a closed Jewish society where Arab labour was despised.

But on their own, these workers cannot overthrow the Zionist state.

The importance is that they are organising and have shown their willingness to strike against the Israeli state. Together with workers in the Arab countries in the region they represent the only force capable of smashing the imperialist strands holding the Arab regimes. Regimes which have paid lip-service to that struggle while brutally repressing their own workers and the Palestinians.

Looked at in isolation, there would be no chance of the Zionist state being overthrown by working class action. Looked at in terms of the region as a whole, where the Arab working class is growing in numbers and strength, it is clear where the future lies.
The Zionist threat

Noam Chomsky has just written a major new work on Zionism and the plight of the Palestinians. John Rose gives a critical assessment of the book, and of Chomsky's politics.

Noam Chomsky's The Fateful Triangle, the United States, Israel and the Palestinians (Pluto Press. At £6.95 it's good value, it's a very big book). It is a very important attempt at an encyclopaedic summary of the evolution of the Zionist state in the aftermath of the Lebanese invasion. Its account of that invasion is both comprehensive and gripping. And the book is worth reading just for that although much of the material will be familiar to Socialist Review readers.

The collusion of the US government with the invasion and the stupendous increases in US financial and military aid that went with it; the acquiescence of the Labour opposition in Britain; the clear objective to break the PLO in Lebanon as a precondition for tightening Israeli rule on the West Bank; the defeat of the US government, which promised the PLO that Palestinian citizens would be protected after the PLO's forced departure from Beirut; the frightening degree of support for Begin and Sharon whose popularity in Israel soared as the numbers of dead and mutilated Arab bodies soared in Lebanon; the courageous yet utterly powerless Israeli peace movement (the 400,000 strong demo wasn't the tip of the iceberg, it was the iceberg!) which still hasn't toppled the Likud Government.

Pagrom

The Kahane Commission of Inquiry's whitewash of the slaughter at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps and the macabre similarity of Sabra and Shatila with the Czar's Easter pagrom of Jews at Kishinev in Russia in 1903; the growing number of Israeli Rabbits who preach that events are confirming the Jews' 'true sanctification of God's Name in the world'; the former leader of the American New Left Tom Hayden (and Jayne Fonda) and the liberal left in the US generally who supported the invasion...

All of this and a great deal more—is thoroughly argued and minutely documented.

Yet at the same time, Chomsky's book is positively absurd in its fanciful and apocalyptic gloom. For he argues that the Americans have created a Frankenstein in Israel which is now virtually out of control. That although Israel was originally funded by the US to protect its oil supplies (a recently declassified government document from 1958 stated that opposition to radical Arab nationalism depends on the US supporting Israel as the only strong pro-

West power' in the region), Chomsky argues that Israel is now so strong (the world's fourth largest military power according to the Institute of Strategic Studies) that it can dictate terms to its former master. It's a case of the mad dog that drags his unwilling owner down paths he doesn't want to go.

Israel gets its way with its paymaster (Israel is America's most heavily-subsidised client) by threatening military destruction in the Middle East— including bombing oil fields. Chomsky gives several examples of this and concludes ominously that this explains Dr Kissinger's oft-quoted remarks about the dangers of 'harassing' Israel into 'emotional and psychic collapse'.

Israel is now so dangerous, says Chomsky, that it has become the single most likely cause of World War Three, a fact about which, he dryly complains, he has been unable to persuade the Western anti-missile movement to take seriously enough. He also provides evidence for Israeli medium term thinking for the total domination of the Middle East based upon updating the method of rule of the old Turkish Ottoman Empire.

This would mean undermining all the Arab states (which, anyway, were only the constructions of British and French imperialism) and replacing them with a cluster of religious-ethnic semi-feudal groups constantly in conflict with each other and hence subordinate to Zionism.

This is not so far-fetched. Israel already arms both sides in the battles in the Caucaus mountains between the Christians and the Druze. And Zionism has already proved its capacity to politicise and make fanatical all the religious currents in the region.

Only America can stop Israel, argues Chomsky, and so far she shows no sign of doing so.

To understand how Chomsky arrived at this position we need to return to the debate that raged in the 1970s about the solution to the Palestinian problem. For it was then, as Chomsky correctly reports ad nauseam, that what he calls an 'International consensus' had been established for a settlement.

This consensus accepted by Europe, the USSR, the Arab states and the PLO saw Israel withdrawing to its pre-1967 borders in return for recognition by the Arabs and it came to include a mini Palestinian state on the West Bank between Israel and Jordan. Yet every time an attempt was made to apply the principles of the 'consensus' it was blown out by Israel and the USA.

A most striking example of this, argues Chomsky, was the fete of the Sadat Peace Plan in 1971. According to Chomsky this was sabotaged by Kissinger who boasts in his memoirs about outsmarting the State Department.

The absurdity of reducing the failure of 'peace' in the Middle East to personalities (even one like Dr Kissinger) reaches full flight of fantasy when Chomsky offers a review of Kissinger's memoirs by James E. Akins (a former US ambassador in Saudi Arabia) for our serious consideration:

'The truly tragic consequence of Watergate is that President Nixon was not in a strong enough position to generate his secretary of state... He allowed Kissinger to frustrate his own Mid-East designs. Had it not been for Watergate... it is probable that Nixon would have achieved a just and lasting peace in the area.'

Gosh, how the Palestinians must have been wishing that Nixon was in a stronger position in the early 1970s.

Imposed

Obviously Chomsky's despair springs from his realisation that America could not or would not impose its will on the 'fateful

Young Palestinians—future victims or future fighters?
triangle'. This seems to defy all rational logic for Chomsky. It also betrays a hidden elitism which suggests that 'enlightenment for the Middle East — the international consensus — could only be imposed from the outside by the West. But quite apart from that, the argument is flawed. Why should America have gone to the trouble of a showdown with Israel in the 1970s for the sake of the 'international consensus'?

After all, its global power had been severely weakened following its defeat in Vietnam. So why turn on its most trusted ally in the Middle East? If Israel could keep the Palestinians on their knees, why should America interfere?

Of course it could maintain a public posture of ambiguity. Nixon, and the others who followed him could always say that they would like to see justice for the Palestinians and they could always privately curse Israel when they were courting the oil sheiks. For Israel could not lightly be bullied into accepting a West Bank state (although America has and had the power to do so if she wished). Chomsky knows this too well. His book is studded with examples of Israeli's persistent strategy of destroying all vestiges of Palestinian nationalism whether by crushing any signs of Palestinian cultural renaissance or by simply killing Palestinians. As one of the founding fathers of Zionism, Ben Gurion, put it:

'There is no conflict between Jewish and Palestinian nationalism because the Jewish Nation is not in Palestine and the Palestinians are not a nation.'

And Chomsky himself writes:

'As long as any trace of an organised and Palestinian presence remains anywhere nearby, the legitimacy of the Israeli national rebirth may somehow appear to be in question.'

He goes on to quote Moron Benvenisti, a former Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem and author of several studies of the tightening grip of Jewish settlement control of the West Bank:

'We cannot stand a symmetry of claims. Israelis have a profound feeling that once they accept the symmetry that the other side is also a legitimate national movement, then their own feeling about their own right and legitimacy will be diminished.

'This leads to the final point about the West Bank state and the Palestinian attitude to it which Chomsky frankly skips over. Because the fact is that the West Bank state would not have fulfilled Palestinian aspirations for national liberation, ie to reoccupy all their land.'

Brutality

In fairness, in one sense, Chomsky acknowledges this. He writes of the many thousands of Palestinians in Lebanon who were bombardeed by Israel in 1982 who were first expelled from Israel in 1948. The Zionists stole these people's land. No wonder they are worried about any reminders of their 'legitimacy'. And as Chomsky also acknowledges the brutality of 'Greater Israel' has its roots in this first phase.

Maybe the PLO would have settled for a partitioned West Bank state. But the struggle for total liberation would have re-emerged in much the same way as the struggle for Irish liberation has re-emerged after the partition of Ireland in the 1920s.

In fact, the analogy with Ireland is important for another reason.

Throughout his book Chomsky insists that he is in favour of 'Israel's right to exist'. How he squares this with his anti-Zionism is never made clear. The same argument is repeated in Maxine Rodinson's 'Cult, Ghetto & State* and continues to haunt many Jewish anti-Zionist intellectuals whose work otherwise has made a profound contribution to the Palestinian struggle.

In the case of Chomsky's history of the partition and constant vilification by American Jewish and Israeli spokesmen — Labour Zionist Ahele Eban, allegedly a 'cove' on the Palestinian issue, has accused Chomsky of a 'basic complex ... of guilt about Jewish survival' — seems to have helped prise the uncomfortable concession from him. A 'Matzot' gloss is sometimes added to help defend Jewish national right to self determination (similar to the 'two nations' theory in Ireland). Just to confuse matters further, the Fourth International have just published Trotsky's writings on the question of Jewish national self-determination. Though they couldn't find a defence by Trotsky of fulfilling this wish by stealing Arab land.

Actually this helps us clarify the problem. There is no defence of a nationalism, however oppressed it itself has been, that owns its very survival to the oppression of another nationalism. Where this is the case all the other claims to national liberation (culture, language etc) become superfluous. This applies as much to Uster Protestantism, the Afrikaners in South Africa as it does to Jewish Zionism. In fact the siege mentality is common to all three. And in no other case are these virulent nationalisms (all racist note) have only come into play at all because of their service at different times to the global imperialist structure of power.

Their destruction starts with uprisings by the oppressed. A prospect which Chomsky now completely rules out at least as far as the Palestinians are concerned.

In fact he seems to regard the Palestinian cause as totally hopeless. For when it comes to the Reagan Peace Plan (advanced in the summer of 1982 at the height of the Beirut crisis and revived again at the time of writing) which Chomsky discounts very effectively as a complete fraud because it excludes the PLO, he nevertheless can write:

'Given the objective constraints established by US power a case can perhaps be made that the worst course for the Palestinians would have been to accept the Reagan proposals, thus committing national suicide, but at least raising some obstacles to the US-backed Israeli take over of what remains outside Israel's complete control in the occupied territories. Maybe this was written with tongue in cheek but the fact remains that Chomsky has nothing else to offer the Palestinians. What, though, is the solution?

Throughout his book, Chomsky, tends to treat the Palestinians as victims. He merely sees them as revolutionary fighters. The enthusiasm and courage of the Palestinians seeps through the pages only occasionally. Yet, despite all the terrible defeats, hundreds of thousands of young Palestinian men and women remain dedicated to the armed overthrow of Zionism as the only means of destroying it.

As Socialist Review readers will know we have always greatly feared a defeat for the PLO. Its strategy of combining the armed struggle with reliance on the (usually corrupt) Arab regimes rather than with the struggle of Arab workers and peasants against those regimes was doomed from the start.

The failure of an alternative strategy to develop was and is ultimately a failure for the revolutionary left which emerged in different forms throughout the world at the same time as the PLO itself emerged in the 1960s.

Serious examination of this is beyond the scope of this article but suffice to note that Chomsky's tragic vision of Zionist rule smashing up Arab and non Jewish population in the Middle East to set up a one rather important truth.

Discipline

Despite the world recession the Middle East has been industrialising. In fact it has been industrialising quite quickly. Zionist rule itself has transformed thousands of peasants into workers.

One reason for the recurring form of rule by brute force in Arab state after Arab state is to maintain labour discipline. Another reason is to silence news of explosive incidents of labour discipline breaking down from spreading. All this has been accompanied by a concentration of Arab Palestinians who must soon begin to see their part in this development fused with the only power that can bring about their liberation, the Arab working class throughout the region.

FOOTNOTE:

* Published by Al Saqui Books, and distributed by ZPress

Rodinson is a former member of the French Communist Party.

'Cult, Ghetto & State' collects several of Rodinson's articles over a fifteen year period which frankly add little to his first major work.

However, one essay certainly does deserve mention. In 'Jewish Nation & Jewish Problem' Rodinson comes to the defence of Abram Leon's 'The Jewish Question'.

Leon was a Jewish Belgian Trotskyist who perished in Auschwitz. His book challenges the whole basis of national identity in Jewish history. It offers instead a closely argued case for understanding Jewish survival in terms of economic classes performed in pre-capitalist societies particularly in Russia and Poland.

Rodinson's promotion of Leon's much ignored work is a great hon.

Socialist Review March 1984
Dictatorship on the Brink

The military regime in Uruguay is facing mass opposition. Mike Gonzalez looks at another tottering dictatorship.

Uruguay has lived under martial rule for ten years. Its torturers have been as bad as Pinochet's, and its repression more complete than Argentina's. Though it has lived under the shadow of Chile and Argentina throughout the last decade, it has been an important ally for the military dictatorships. Perhaps because it was not so much in the public eye, it has gone further in its metanestor model and deeper in its corruption than either of the other two.

Yet as the level of struggle rose throughout 1983 in the southern cone of Latin America, Uruguay too has experienced the rebirth of the mass movement. In November, half a million people marched through Montevideo—one-sixth of the population in a single demonstration, and about half of all the workers of Uruguay. In January, a strike of fishermen and an occupation of a textile factory were followed by a spontaneous transport strike in Montevideo and a battle over wages in the energy and communications industries.

These actions were a prelude to a massive General Strike called for 18 January by the illegal trade union congress, the PIT.

Jalbreaks

Unlike its partners in the military alliance of the Southern Cone, the Uruguayan military has not, until now, faced, since the coup of 1973, any significant mass resistance. The major guerrilla organisation of the left, the Tupamaros, has earned itself a reputation for miraculous jailbreaks and spectacular military actions in the early 1970s. But it had also resolutely refused to develop any forms of mass organisation. The Tupamaros were the purest form of Guerrilista. The task of the militants in the trade union movement they said, was 'to organise support for the armed struggle and preparation to join it'. Thus although the Tupamaros claimed most of the newspaper space, and incurred the wrath of the military, control of the trade unions remained overwhelmingly with the Uruguayan Communist Party.

It is ironic that the years when the Tupamaros were most active (1967-72) were also the years that marked the highest level of mass struggle that Uruguay had ever experienced. Until then, Uruguay's reputation as a stable democracy, and its skeletal welfare state, bred a trade union movement mainly integrated into the state sector rather than elsewhere in the continent.

As Uruguay faced its first major recession in the late 60s, therefore, the government of Pacheco Areco faced well-organised and firmly reformist unions. It responded with extraordinary brutality, imposing a total wage freeze and instigating the systematic torture of mass leaders.

It was at this time that Dan Marcone, expert in torture for the CIA, went to Uruguay to train its local counterparts. As the film State of Siege narrates, he was later captured and executed.

The coup of 1973 was the culmination of the policy. The campaign against the Tupamaros provided an excuse for the imposition of a state of emergency, and a systematic repression of the left. Some deputies in parliament, the rector of the University and a range of workers' leaders were jailed and tortured for supporting the Tupamaros.

Because they wanted to distinguish themselves from the revolutionary left, the reformist parties, the Blancos and the Colorado, and the Communist Party, allowed this to happen.

When the coup of 1973 brought the process to its logical conclusion, as the military took power directly, the major trade union federation even supported the coup in the belief that it was progressive sectors of the military who were in charge. As the almost total privatisation of the economy, and the savage repression of all forms of working class organisation followed immediately, their protests sounded particularly hollow.

For the next ten years Uruguay was a model military dictatorship. Despite some pinches of internal riots (the usual desperate and baseless talk about spirits within the military), the army was solid.

Military personnel had their wages doubled, and all officers were provided with free cars and petrol among other privileges. The police, too, were incorporated into the military organisation, and received special treatment.

By 1982, military expenditure accounted for 60 percent of the annual national budget. A series of military decrees ensured that the oppositional press (particularly the excellent Noticias) was closed, and that the remaining newspapers were subjected to prior censorship. The censors forbade the use of certain words ("Tupamaro", "Communist", "Marxism" among others). The National Anthem was even changed so that the words "tyrants will tumble" could not be stressed when the anthem was sung.

Trade unions were dismantled and replaced by corporate associations. In the economy, all collective bargaining legislation was rescinded, allowing foreign banks and companies direct control over capital and production within Uruguay.

By 1983, Uruguay provided a home for the most rapacious end of multinational capital. Of its 22 banks, 20 were foreign-owned and their owners included the Moises, whose $700 million worth of investment in the country were the result of favours shown by the president, Alvarez, whose father-in-law was a vice-president of Moons' worldwide political organisation—Causa.

Another bank was owned by the Spanish company Rivas, which recently collapsed after massive corruption was discovered throughout the company. Still another was owned by the Bank of Chile, owning the banks through which Roberto Calvi laundered Vatican funds. Furthermore, the major Uruguayan bank was owned by P-2, the Italian Masonic organisation which had been discovered to be preparing a possible military coup in Italy. Like Chile, the Uruguayan model required total incorporation into the world economy, meeting the competition demands of the trade union organisations, controls over wages, and the maintenance of repression and terror.

If the silence has now been broken, it is fundamentally for economic reasons. The Uruguayan model ensured that the banking crisis would bite as deeply here, if not more so, in Brazil, Mexico, Chile, and Central America. The national debt in 1983 was a 50 percent rise in the cost of living and an unemployment level of 30 percent. A number of banks were taken over by the State, though this was useless as a political instrument. Uruguay felt the full effect of the crisis, and when it renegotiated its foreign debt in April 1983, it accepted without protest the onerous conditions imposed by international financiers.

The same month (May 1983) saw the first mass demonstrations in Chile—and they continued, on the eleventh of each month, from then on. The mass protests that began in Uruguay were directly influenced by these events, and by the similar path that each country had followed since the military coups of 1973. And Argentina, which has always dominated its much smaller neighbour, was also witnessing the most massive and combative May Day demonstration since the military took over there in 1976.

There was, nevertheless, a key difference between Argentina and Uruguay. For in Argentina, throughout the period of repression, mass workers' organisations continued to exist and to fight—and only the Falklands factor enabled the Argentine military to divert a growing working class movement in the direction of a nationalism whose final fruit was the Radical government of Alfonsin.

But Uruguay had not experienced working class struggle for ten years. The PIT (the clandestine trade union organisation) claimed to represent 220 unions by November 1983—yet it was not directly responsible for the rising level of struggle. It remained, however, the only organised force to assume the leadership of the movement when it did arise.

Protests

Its very strength, however, reflects a fundamental problem for the developing working class movement. For Uruguay has no independent revolutionary organisation active in an organised way within those working class struggles—and it is a bourgeois opposition with a long history of betrayal of workers' interests which is now
reaping the political harvest and preparing for a long, slow return—\textit{in consultation with the military}—to a limited form of democracy twelve months from now.

The palpable truth is that all sections of the opposition see the mass demonstration as a form of pressure, to bring the military to the bargaining table. The traditional bourgeois parties—the Blancos (Whites) and Colorado (Reds)—collaborated directly in the early preparations for military rule. It was a Colorado government that introduced the State of Emergency, and the Blancos are no less culpable. Both seek dialogue with the military, though it is the leader of the Blancos-Alfaro who has emerged in the last few years as the champion of human rights. Ten years ago, he was also a presidential candidate, with a right wing policy.

Today, he has changed the smile to the left side of his face in an effort to win the votes of those 50 percent of the electorate who marched through Montevideo in November. As far as the Communists and Socialists are concerned, their main demand is the release from prison of the retired Admiral Seregni, who had been the candidate of a broad left alliance very much like Chile's Popular Unity, in the elections of 1971.

By July last year, the military government had entered negotiations with the opposition organisations. Their object was clear: to establish control over an emerging mass movement, and to tie the political leadership of the opposition (as they saw) to a long process of preparation for a guided democracy.

The government of Alvezes insisted, at the same time, on a tighter control over trade unions, the judiciary and the press, and a firmer hand in the transition period to destroy all political "threats to democracy". The quid pro quo was presidential elections early in 1985. The negotiations did not last. A series of protest rallies in August and subsequent months were banned and then attacked by police and troops.

The revolutionary organisations (which were tiny) were brutally destroyed in 1972-4, with the tacit acquiescence of the opposition parties of today. The last organisation to be repressed was the Communist Party, many of whose members in the trade union federation CNT were scrapped (later dismantled) had welcomed the 1973 coup.

The Communist Party has certainly been active—though fundamentally in international campaigning. Yet today, and despite the terrible lessons of a decade ago, its central demand for the release of Seregni suggests that it has set its sights on the electoral process, even if that means mortgaging the mass movement to negotiations with the military. The left has nothing to offer, and the ghost of the Tupamaros has left nothing but nostalgia for the individual heroes of another time.

Alvezes, the military president, has watched events in Argentina and Chile during the past months. He has seen his military colleagues bring to trial in Argentina for crimes no worse than those committed by those under his command. And he has seen Pinochet mount a new campaign of repression and terror with the approval of a world capitalism growing increasingly anxious about its ability to impose its global solutions to the crisis.

Directly to the north, the Brazilian working class movement has provided a magnificent lead for workers' organisations who have lost their faith in long-term democratic solutions that always function at their expense. For Alvezes, the tiny cracks opened in 1973 have now been definitively closed. Those who talk of bargaining with a murderous military, and those who seek divisions within a military apparatus that has consistently and relentlessly destroyed workers' organisations and revolutionary parties, are sowing a dangerous delusion that will guarantee only that history will repeat itself as tragedy.

For a working class without an independent political leadership, time is short and the task urgent. The lead is coming from Brazil, where workers have answered the IMF with strikes and occupations. For the working class of Uruguay, that is the road to the future.

---

**Marxism by the shore at Skegness '84**

**Easter Weekend—20-23 April**

**Highlights of the Weekend include:**

- **TONY CLIFF** on the general strike
- **JOHN DEASON** on Hugh Scanlon—from factory floor to the House of Lords
- **PAUL FOOT** on 1984
- **SHEILA Mc Gregor** on Germaine Greer—the feminist who ratted
- **ANN ROGERS** on feminists and the unions
- **DUNCAN HALLAS** on Marx and democracy
- **CHRIS BAMBERY** on Easter 1916
- **CHRIS HARMON** on the origins of the family

Lots of good political meetings, plenty of top rate entertainment, a variety of sports, and a great opportunity to relax and meet socialists from around the country and from overseas.

The all-in price for this great weekend—including meals and accommodation—is only £38. Kids under five are free, five to 15 are £10. To ensure your place at Skegness book now—a £10 deposit will secure your reservation.

See your Socialist Worker seller, or ring Sally or Martin on 01-739 0914 or fill in the form below.

---

**Entertainment:**

Bands include Republican and Irish Mist

Films: Battle of Algiers, Casablanca, The Front, Strike, Superman 2 and many more plus a Grand Talent Night on Sunday

---

I want to come to Skegness

Name: ________________________________
Address: ________________________________

Send to: Skegness Rally, P.O. Box 82, London E2

---

Socialist Review March 1984
Greece's 'curious' socialists

The Papandreou government in Greece has been caught in the classic trap of both trying to run the system and reform it. Noel Halifax looks at how it has solved its dilemma.

Greece has a small, ramshackle capitalist state with old-fashioned industrial and state machinery. Internationally it is not very competitive, like Britain only more so.

The Greek Socialist Party (PASOK) inherited an antiquated state machinery with laws still owing more to the era of Metaxas than the age of the EEC. There was no civil marriage. Adultery was a criminal offence. Trade unions had almost no rights.

Greece had been ruled previously by a military dictatorship so state capacity was crushingly efficient and developing the tourist trade. Greece was over the government of the New Democratic Party, which was so incompetent as to become something of a joke.

When PASOK was elected in October 1981 it was pledged to change the fabric of society, to introduce social justice, a better deal for workers, freedom for the unions and to transform Greece into a modern efficient industrial state.

The similarities with the Wilson government are clear. Papandreou wrote his A Strategy for Greek Economics back in 1963, and the strategy was, and is, to modernise Greece by making it an export-oriented economy, to get Greece out of NATO and the EEC, grant social reforms and improve living standards.

It was a programme that was popular and PASOK won a clear and absolute majority on a wave of popular expectations and hope. There was no need for any compromises or judgements on the support of minority parties.

Reforms

For the first year or so PASOK embarked slowly on its programme of reforms. It gave a 6 percent increase in real earnings. A 40 hour week was introduced. The laws on marriage and women's rights were liberalised. The government drew up its economic plans. Even in its early days, though, it failed to legalise the factories which it had promised. In spite of having already drafted a bill to do so.

The start the reforms upset the Greek economic order. The world crisis was hitting Greece hard. GNP fell in 1981 by 1.5 percent, then stabilised in 1982. It only increased by 0.3 percent in 1983 in a Despite the 6 percent increase in earnings and the plans. Inflation remained at 20-25 percent, productivity declined and unemployment increased to an estimated 8-10 percent of urban dwellers, so that one in three school-leavers were without work in 1983. In 1982, Greece's balance of trade in agricultural produce went into the red for the first time. Its debts increased and the level of investment went down.

The reforms lowered productivity and led to a decline in investment in spite of the new tax concessions and aid schemes to industry. To modernise Greece means increasing investment and productivity. To increase investment means having a high level of profit. That in turn means cutting real wages. The logic of the system is for the 'socialist' government to attack workers' ability to resist real wage cuts. It means attacking the very people who voted PASOK into office. It is a logic that PASOK has not shed away from.

The government started its attack by dropping plans to introduce a minimum wage and halving in a wage freeze for 1982. Previously there was no freeze on prices. At the same time, January 1982, the Droschora was devolved to make Greek goods cheaper to foreign buyers. The economics minister, Armenis, appealed on national TV for support for an austerity programme and a U-turn on the reforms.

There was widespread opposition to the austerity programme, led by the Greek Communist Party (KKE) which, through the unions, has a large influence on the working class. Though only 25 percent of workers are unionised, they are in the important and dynamic public sector which makes up 50 percent of the GNP, and have a tradition of militant action.

Throughout the spring of 83 there were strikes, break out in the public sector, in transport, schooling, hospitals. An anti-austerity demo drew over 100,000 in Athens (Greece has a population of around 8 million).

The government's reaction to the strikes was to appeal to the patriotism and fear and hatred of Turkey and America. Nationalism has always been a feature of both PASOK and KKE rhetoric. When this failed, the government threatened to conscript the strikers into the army. Finally, it went to the courts and had the striking outlawed. Against this KKE ruffled and pulled in opposition, calling token strikes and demos. In the end it refused to spread the action to a general and mass strike. They eventually backed down and the strike was broken. This KKE is heavily imbedded in the bureaucracy of the unions.

The government's spring offensive did not stop with the wage freeze. The logic of the system in crisis is that the gains given in 81/82 have to be clawed back for the plans for modernising to succeed. The government aimed to increase profits, drop its pledges, blind workers with nationalism and fears of a military coup and to call for unity at all costs. Greece has not withdrawn from NATO or the EEC. Instead the government has been renegotiating its agreements to get more for allowing American bases on Greek soil and to get more from the Community agrarian policy.

Typical of the government's actions is its intervention in Greek shipping. Shipping is one of the few very successful bits of Greek capitalism. On the one hand it has attempted to integrate it into its planning schemes and rationalisation plans. And on the other to increase the owners' profit.

In February 1983 the government allowed foreign ratings in Greek ships to be paid the rates in force in their own countries and not the far higher rates for Greek seamen, which they had been getting. With a 30 percent 'ceiling' on how many foreign crew a ship can employ, it has been estimated that this will save the owners £600-£2,000 per month, per ship. As a ship to the unions there is a £5000 levy per month, per ship to go to the Greek seamen's unemployment fund. The bigger the ship and the larger the owner, the more money is 'saved' in the scheme. It increases the owner's profit, encourages rationalisation and undermines union organisation on board ship. A more divisive scheme would be hard to imagine.

The most spectacular attack on the unions has been the bill introduced in parliament in May 1983 to limit the right to strike in the public sector.

The Economist noted with envy: 'It is much more radical than the mild limitations on trade unions proposed by Mrs Thatcher in Britain'. (26/5/83)

The article was called 'How to be a socialist Unionist' and goes on:

The Greek equivalent of the TUC, the GSEE (General Confederation of Greek Workers) agreed to the anti-strike bill. Up until 1982 the GSEE was dominated by the right-wing New Democracy Party (NDP), even though many unions are controlled by the KKE.

Manipulation

The new government challenged the right-wing leadership in court, and had the court appoint a new "temporary" council, with 35 PASOK and seven KKE supporters.

This was such an obvious political manipulation of 'free' trade unions that even Len Murray complained about it. It is this PASOK dominated GSEE which began to vote for the anti-strike bill. In a similar court action the government replaced the right-wing leadership of the Civil Servants' union with a PASOK-supporting executive.

The bill was pushed through parliament on emergency procedure which allows only two days of debate. Again there was little in the bill to be understood by transport workers. But there was no mass action and after the initial campaign the scene quieted down. Once again, Papandreou has got away with it. The Economist remarked in awe: 'He is certainly a curious sort of socialist'.

The government's policy has not been slow to follow up its successes. By June 83 the anti-strike bill was passed. In September the government dropped its self-proclaimed 'generous pay policy' and a partial indemnification of wages was announced which resulted...
in a 4.5 percent drop in real earnings.

In October the scheme to introduce a state health service was dropped. It was the last of the promised reforms not already abandoned.

There has been some resistance. In February 1984 workers in private industry won a claim matching inflation (20 percent) but only after the unions, under government pressure, agreed to drop demands for indexation. They had been threatened with the courts.

But the hopes of a new society introduced by the PASOK government have been dashed. What is enlightening is not what has happened but how PASOK has been able to get away with it. The KKE is, after all, a large government in purely electoral terms. The KKE received 20 percent (up from 13 percent) in a local Athens election. The more the government attacks its own base, the more the KKE hopes workers will vote for them and force PASOK to form a "left coalition" government on its terms.

**Cretinism**

Such an analysis is parliamentary cretinism in the extreme. It overlooks the actual effects of the government on the balance of class forces. PASOK's action can only demoralise and weaken the working class and restrict its ability to fight. Just as Callaghan paved the way for Thatcher with

dition of rank and file activity or a shop steward movement. This is in part a hangover from the days of the Junta and state-controlled unions.

Neither are the problems helped by the nationalism of both PASOK and KKE. All parties play on the patriotism and particularly anti-Turk and anti-American feeling. To get through its unpopular policies, PASOK has constantly played the patriotic card. Hence the erratic foreign policy and the row over the Elgin marbles. The KKE responds by being more patriotic and anti-American.

The KKE is one of the more Stalinist Communist parties. It did not support Solidarity for example.

---

**What's a Greek earn?...Not enough!**

party with a good industrial base in the important public sector. Why is it the KKE has not led a struggle similar to that led by the much smaller British CP in the 70s against Heath, or earlier to sabotage the Wilson plan for union bashing?

Part of the answer is the severity of the crisis and the resulting toughness of the government, which has far less room to manoeuvre than before. PASOK has, via the courts, been able to undermine any anti-government move coming from the GSEE. But, more importantly, is the failure of the KKE and the lack of any left alternative to the government.

Instead of using the government's attacks to organise resistance through strikes, the KKE has seen the unpopularity of the social contract, so PASOK could be paving the way for the right or even the military.

The KKE is unable to lead any real fight partly because of its belief in parliamentary politics and its aspirations for governmental office. But it is also imbedded in the trade union bureaucracy. Both its Stalinist ideas and its position in the union bureaucracy lead it to see workers as a stage army to be called on to act at the Party's behest. The idea of mass self-activity by workers is both alien to its politics and to its practice in the unions it controls.

In spite of widespread anti-government feeling and a wave of strikes, there is no alternative leadership to take on the government's policies. In Greece there is no real tra-

Behind all this looms the military. There is no doubt that the more intelligent of the Greek ruling class see little to fear and much to gain from the present PASOK government. But not all the ruling class are as farsighted. There is always the option of a military takeover if PASOK fails to deliver the goods.

This is especially a possibility if the working class has been defeated and demoralised. But even short of the tragic consequences of a military coup, the government's actions do nothing but prepare the ground for the right. Despite real fears of a coup, the government has failed to reform or weaken the armed forces. It's only action has been to use the fears to drum up support for itself and call for 'unity'.

Socialist Review March 1984
Symbol of decline

The recent writings of Germaine Greer have surprised many of her admirers. Sheila McGregor argues that Greer's failings are indicative of the failings of the women's movement as a whole.

In the past few weeks Germaine Greer, author of _The Female Eunuch_ and one-time symbol of the Women's Liberation Movement of the 1960s, has reappeared in the media with a series of articles in the _Sunday Times_ based on her forthcoming book _Sex and Destiny_.

Many people will probably have been shocked, angered and somewhat bewildered by her utterances on women and sexuality. In her second article on 22 January she defines the 'problem':

"If we are to rescue our young women from the nightmare of unsuitable contraception, promiscuous and uncommitted sexual activity, unwanted pregnancy and illegitimacy, we will have to find the way forward.

The way forward Germaine Greer proceeds to outline is nothing but reactionary. Sexual activity (referred to at times as 'lechery') should be replaced with 'chastity', all forms of contraception with either 'non-invasive intercourse' or 'coitus interruptus plus abortion'.

Relationships between men and women should give way to the 'primary family' of mother and child.

The articles are composed of a horrifying, highly subjective confusion of statements about 'ideal' traditional societies in India, Italy and Burma, spiced with wonderful statements about young Islamic Marxists who consider debauchery to be the cause of political impotence in the West.

Reasonable observations about the abuse of female sexuality in the media, problems of motherhood in modern society, are answered with pleas for sexual restraint and a return by women to 'surrendering to the peremptory demands of her child'. For someone trying to wean us all away from sex, she spends an awful lot of time writing about it.

If Germaine Greer's transformation from a symbol of women's liberation into one of reaction were an isolated event, it could be simply dismissed as individual crankiness. Unfortunately however, other women have also radically changed their views: look at Betty Friedan, author of _The Feminine Mystique_ and founder of the US National Organisation of Women, or Erin Pizzey, who took up the cause of battered wives.

And the Greenham Common women's campaign for peace is based on the reactionary premise that women as child bearers are congenital peace makers in opposition to male aggressors.

The abandonment of its ideals by the Women's Liberation Movement since its inception in the late sixties is not an isolated occurrence to be explained by individual quirks of personality. There has taken place a political transformation of the movement and it is there the key to what has happened to Germaine Greer can be found.

To begin to understand how ideas develop and change, we need to understand where ideas come from, how they are shaped and how they change in the course of history. In _The German Ideology_ Marx explains the development of ideas from the materialist conception of history:

"...[that] does not explain practice from the idea but explains the formation of ideas from material practice, and accordingly it comes to the conclusion that all forms and products of consciousness cannot be dissolved by mental criticism, by resolution into 'self-consciousness' or transformation into 'apparitions', 'spectres' 'whimseys' etc but only the practical overthrow of the actual social relations which give rise to the idealistic humbug..."

This provides us with the key to understanding the development of the ideas of the Women's Liberation Movement and those of its articulate exponents such as Germaine Greer.

**Workforce**

The Women's Liberation Movement developed in the late 1960s as a product of the expansion of higher education in the post-war boom. As huge numbers of women entered colleges and universities with aspirations for comfortable jobs in the New Middle Class, many of them came up against barriers of sex discrimination. It did not require much insight to realise that women were giving up the only freedom they had access to the lifestyle of the New Middle Class.

This was how the WLM was born in Britain, the USA and other countries. However, it was not a movement born in isolation from wider society. This was a period still characterised by Harold Macmillan's famous phrase: 'You've never had it so good'. It was a period of almost continuous expansion with the building of the welfare state in Britain, the advent of the Pill and the possibilities of real birth control.

Millions of working class women entered the workforce as a permanent feature. Capitalism seemed to promise an endless ability to concede reforms and satisfy people's aspirations. Free legal abortion, equal pay, and an end to sex discrimination was, formally at least, granted. This seemed to herald a permanent weakening of previously powerful reactionary institutions and ideas. Surely everything was possible under capitalism after all? Certainly some, like Betty Friedan, thought so. But there were also other forces at work which shaped the origins of the WLM.

The 1960s was also the period of civil rights campaigns - for Catholics in Ireland, for blacks in the USA - as well as the international campaign against US intervention in Vietnam and the triumph of the Cuban and Chinese revolutions. In Britain, the working class was shaping up for huge struggles which were to put an end to Tory government and industrial strife.

This period also saw a rebirth of revolutionary socialism struggling to gain roots independently of the Stalinist Communist Parties. All these forces were brought to bear on the WLM, influencing and shaping its development. All the time however it was bound by the material basis of the movement itself - upwardly mobile students. Moreover, the basis of the upward mobility was individual competitiveness in the academic field.

In the beginning, sections of the WLM certainly felt an affinity with working class struggles and the aspirations of revolutionary socialism. In its early period in this country the WLM marched on 'Kill the Bill' demonstrations and joined some even, independent organisations like ours. However, the WLM was always a heterogeneous movement composed of autonomous groups with radically varying political viewpoints ranging from reformists to radical feminists through to libertarians and quasi Marxists.

Essentially what united them all in practice was a preoccupation with challenging the sex roles of men and women under capitalism, with an emphasis on consciousness raising groups as a central means of achieving this. What united such women was the common revolt against reactionary views of women's role in life being defined by motherhood, passivity, femininity, subordination to men in personal relations and women as sex objects.

Hence there developed a practice which concentrated on attacking conventional sex roles, trying out new kinds of relationships, asserting women's independent sexuality, attempting to challenge women's role in the media etc. After all, for middle class professional women what is crucial is that their careers are not threatened by their motherhood, chauvinistic male partners or sex discrimination.

Hence the WLM showed all the characteristics associated with its class position. Its relationship to women workers in struggle was marginal and the only real national campaign it ever fought was a defensive one on abortion.

Women workers' struggles are characterized by quite different features: strikes and occupations over issues such as unionisation, pay, jobs and conditions, and are often either mixed struggles involving men or are dependent on male workers for solidarity. Women workers come up against the same forces that inhibit their struggle as male workers: the trade union bureaucracy, lack of solidarity, the law and the press.

The class position of the WLM determined both its content and its form, and it is in its early stages that Germaine Greer made her name as a proponent of Women's Liberation: a strong woman who challenged accepted definitions of women as...
weak, passive sex objects consigned to permanent motherhood. Her book, *The Female Eunuch* published in 1970, rages against society's role for women, their sexuality and place in society as wife and mother: ‘Hopefully this book is subversive. Hopefully it will draw fire from all the articulate sections of the community. The conventional moralist will find much that is reprehensible in the denial of the Holy Family, in the denigration of sacred motherhood, and the inference that women act on or by nature mannishness.’

Just how subversive was Germaine Greer being?

For Germaine Greer, women were the only true proletariat and therefore had to ‘withdraw’ from society, but not by going on strike and mobilising workers’ power.

For her withdrawal means women simply refusing what they are supposed to be. A clearer indication of this is contained towards the end of the book when she writes: ‘I thought again of the children I knew in Calabria and hit upon the plan to buy, with the help of some friends with similar problems, a farm in Italy where we could stay when circumstances permitted, and where our children would be safe.’

In this, Greer’s *The Female Eunuch* only offers individual rebellion and alternative living arrangements. We could say along with Marx in the *Communist Manifesto* writing about ‘Critical Utopian—Socialism and Communism’: ‘These proposals, therefore, are of a purely Utopian character.’

**Material**

*The Female Eunuch* betrays one of the central weaknesses in the WLM: an inability to locate the oppression of women with all its manifestations of sexual behaviour, sex discrimination, pay, jobs etc in the material relations of the society we live in. Marx describes in the *German Ideology* the task we have to do to understand oppression: ‘This (materialist) conception of history thus relies on expounding the real process of production — starting from the material production itself — and comprehending the form of intercourse connected with and created by the mode of production, ie civil society in its various stages on the basis of all history, describing it in its action on the state, and explaining how all the different theoretical products and forms of consciousness, religion, philosophy, morality etc arise from it, and tracing the process of this formation from that basis, thus the whole thing can of course be depicted in its totality (and therefore too the interconnection of all these various sides on one another).’

Hence the task for us, as Engels outlines in *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*, is to explain the rise of the family and how it has been shaped according to the material form of production. We have to explain the alienation of men and women, one from the other, how sexual relations — the most intimate form of communication between two people — have become an alien power used for the buying and selling of commodities.

Moreover, we have to try to do justice to the complexity of relations between people. Not all men hate, beat up and rape women. Not all women are passive doormats, abused as sex objects. Millions of men and women struggle together for something better and altogether different. We have to look at the impact on men and women of their working together, the impact of working women on their husbands or of work on women’s own aspirations and conceptions of themselves, and of contraception on personal and sexual relations, and the effect of mechanization of housework.

How does the material basis of today’s society reflect itself in ideas, attitudes and behaviour? And if it is true that sex has replaced religion as ‘the opium of the people’, we have to explain that heaven is not to be found in bed on a capitalist earth. There is no escape from alienation under capitalism.

This is the limitation the WLM came up against. The WLM was engaged in a sexual revolution without understanding the material foundation on which all social relations are based. It soon perceived its limitations. Men were not to be changed so easily by a few years of broken relations of political lesbianism with separation from men as the means to achieve the goal. As Beatrix Campbell puts it in her essay: *A Feminist Sexual Politics—Now You See It, Now You Don’t*.

‘Secondly, there has been the equation of lesbianism with prioritisation of women and not wanting time on men. Strategically, because the left has allowed only flight from heterosexuality which is represented as sex-collaboration — fraternising with the enemy.’

That such ideas have come to the fore in the WLM is itself a reflection of what has happened to it as a movement. Limited in its conception of the struggle to be waged, the WLM has swung between radical and feminist politics, socialist organisation and consciousness raising.

With the decline of working class struggle, and the shift of the founders of the WLM into the New Middle Class, came a growing disbeliber in the working class as a material force for social change and finally the abandonment of the working class altogether. With the overall shift to the right in society there is nothing to hold them from drifting.

Sheila Rowbotham marks the break with the working class in *Beyond the Fragments*. In its place, we have reformist solutions in the Labour Party (see *Sweet Freedom*) and radical feminism — another accommodation to the status quo. And now we have Germaine Greer. Her response to the failure of the sexual revolution is of the worst kind. She has lapsed into reaction.

Only when you stand on the ground of the proletariat, the only revolutionary class, it is possible to make sense of the world in which we live. As Marx put it in *The German Ideology*: ‘The coincidence of changing circumstances and of human activity can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice’.

When Germaine Greer argues that women using contraception are ‘jeopardising their health and fertility with potent medication and miscible gadgetry’, we have to reply that, imperfect though the pill may be, it has meant sex without fear of conception for millions of men and women and brought planned parenthood within the grasp of many.

When she postulates chastity as an alternative to ‘intravaginal sex’, we should reply that sexual activity is a normal part of human relations, not to be constrained by conscious development of forms of birth control. In answer to her plea for coitus interruptus and abortion we should point out that any sexual practice which gives complete control to one party inevitably involves complete dependence by the other.

We want equality in sexual relations, not dependence. Abortion as a means of birth control is damaging both physically and mentally for women who want to control conception, not conceive in order to have to abort.

**Constraints**

And as for the ramblings about Islamic Marxism, we should remind her of the students of Iran who were faced with non-veiled headmistresses and religious law and replaced with a veiled one: ‘We are going to count to 15, and if you are still here, we will not answer for your safety’. The veiled woman landed up in hospital.

The Ayatollah Khomeini had to reimpose the veil and other reactionary practices on men and women in Iran by force, as part of a process of breaking down organisation. And when Germaine Greer dwells on the primacy of mother and child relationships over relations between men and women, we should point out that for the working class today relationships based on what Engels calls ‘individual sex love’ are a huge advance over previous relations determined by a more backward society. They bring into the agenda the possibilities of loving and caring between human beings freed from economic and social constraints. We can only expect a flowering of human relations with the advent of the socialist revolution. To Engels belongs the last word: ‘Thus, what we can conjecture at present about the regulations of sexual relationships after the impending effacement of capitalist production, is in the main, a negative character, limited mostly to what will vanish. What will be added? That will be settled after a new generation has grown up, a generation of men who never in all their lives had occasion to purchase a woman’s surrender either with money or with any other means of social power, and of women who have never been obliged to surrender to any man out of any consideration other than that of real love, or to refrain from giving themselves to their beloved for fear of economic consequences. Once such people appear, they will not care a rap about what we today think they should do. They will establish their own practice, and their own public opinion, conformable therewith, on the practice of each individual — and that is the end of it.’

*Socialist Review* March 1984
Morris the revolutionary

William Morris was probably the greatest socialist England has produced. Typically, in this most bourgeois of nations, as Engels called it, he is better known for wallpaper than for workers' power. Geoff Ellen, outlines his politics.

He was born 150 years ago this month, by odd coincidence in the same week that saw the marking of another great legend the Tolpuddle Martyrs.

His story could hardly have been more different. Where the Tolpuddle farm workers were sober, Christian trade unionists seeking to case 'their savage exploitation', Morris was well-to-do, privileged, atheistic and committed to overthrowing the system that created that exploitation.

He was also, after a comfortable rural class apprenticeship at Marlborough and Exeter College, Oxford, one of the most feted artists of his day.

Designer, architect, typographer, poet, the range of his work was startling and so were the ideas he brought to it.

Morris, a product of a Romantic tradition which stretched back to Wordsworth and Blake, was influenced by the new world he saw about him.

Crushed

Amid the sheer ugliness of 19th century capitalism—its ugly social relations, its ugly degradation of work, its ugly factories spewing out ugly smoke and ugly goods—his conception of art led him to a devastating critique of Victorian civilisation.

'I don't want art for a few', he insisted, 'any more than education for a few, or freedom for a few'. For art was 'the expression of man's pleasure in labour', a pleasure crushed by capitalism.

'Is it not possible to make a man's labour a pleasure? Is it not possible to make the man a master of his work, and his work a master of his leisure?'

He sought to achieve this by creating a new kind of community, based on the principles of harmony and cooperation, rather than conflict and exploitation.

He founded the firm of Morris & Co., which became famous for its beautiful textiles and furniture, and he used his influence to promote the idea of 'art for all'. He believed that art should be accessible to everyone, not just the rich.

Ought to become, he said, a storehouse for manure. There was also the matter of Hyndman's chauvinism, 'the persistent foe of Socialism' as Morris and his comrades called it.

The new organisation set out its position in a manifesto written by Morris and which still reads powerfully today, a century later. The debt to Marx's Communist Manifesto is obvious but it also contains Morris' own astonishing insights.

How about this as an answer to the Socialism in One Country of our century: 'The Socialist League therefore aims at the realisation of complete Revolutionary Socialism, and well knows that this can never happen in any one country without the help of the workers of all civilisation.'

Or this as an assessment of a Labour Party still to be born: 'No better solution would be that State Socialism, by whatever name it may be called, whose aim it would be to make concessions to the working class, while leaving the present system of capital and wages still in operation: no number of merely administrative changes, until the workers are in possession of all political power, would make any real approach to Socialism.'

Elsewhere, he was even more acutely prophetic:

Speeches

'Attempts at bettering the condition of the workers will be made, which will result in raising one group of them at the expense of another, will create a new middle class and a new proletariat; but many will think the change the beginning of the millennium ... This transitional condition will be chiefly brought about by the middle class, the owners of capital themselves, partly in ignorant goodwill towards the proletariat (as long as they do not understand its claims), partly with the design both conscious and unconscious, of making our civilisation hold out a little longer against class. This never-ending flood of conception on the one hand, and revolution on the other.'

Reading Morris on the State, on capitalism, on the class struggle or on communism, it is only with difficulty that you remember that these were the writings of a relative newcomer to Socialist theory—and a newcomer at a time when left-wing idealism, having just emerged from the long, dark tunnel of mid-Victorian class peace, was inevitably lazy.

If the clarity of Morris's Socialist propaganda was remarkable, so was its volume. In Commonweal, which he edited (and largely funded) for the Socialist League, in works such as News from Nowhere and A Dream of John Ball, and in endless platform speeches, he brought revolutionary socialist ideas to thousands.

News from Nowhere, his vision of the new society, should be read by every socialist still. In a memorable chapter called 'How the Change Came', a veteran revolutionary looks back to the seizure of power, in which a revolutionary party, a general strike and the election to the working class of the rank
and the file of the army were all crucial.

Here Morris was drawing on the experience of the 1880s, with its New Unionsism, its unemployment, and free speech struggles and its clashes with the state, most notably at Trafalgar Square on Bloody Sunday, November 1887. In all these events, Morris was centrally involved and they left him in no doubt about the nature of the state. Here he is speaking to a meeting of 2,000 striking Northumberland miners in April 1887:

"If there was such a thing as a general strike, he thought it was possible that the masters of society would attack them violently — he meant with hot shot, cold steel and the rest of it. But let them remember that they (the men) were many and the masters were few. It was not that the masters could attack them by themselves. It was only the masters with a certain instrument, and what was that instrument? A part of the working classes themselves.

"Even these men that were dressed in blue with bright buttons upon them and white gloves — (Voices: 'Out with them!') — and those other men dressed in red, and also sometimes with gloves on their fingers, what were they? Simply working men, very hard up, driven into a corner and compelled to put on the livery of a set of masters. (Hear, hear, and prolonged hooting.)

"When these instruments, the soldiers, and sailors, came against them and saw that they were in earnest, and saw that they were many — they all knew the sufferings of the workers — what would happen? They would not dare obey their masters. The cannon would be turned round, the butts of the muskets would go up, and the swords and bayonets would be sheathed, and these men would say "Give us work! Let us all be honest men like yourselves!""

As socialist propaganda, this was superb. But in a sense Morris's great strength was also his great weakness.

The goal of socialism was exciting but abstract. On the immediate practical issues, Morris so often had little to say — 'in the details of the strike,' he told the meeting above, 'he would not enter' — betraying an all-or-nothing purism that was at best ambivalent towards reform or 'palliatives' as he and many of his comrades called them.

It was not that Morris failed to make contact with the mass struggles of these years. He spoke, after all, to countless — often very large — meetings organised around them. It was rather that pure propaganda, then as now, was unable to bridge the gap between fighting capitalism and overthrowing it.

This was true not only of Morris but of the Socialist League as a whole. In September 1886, it set up a Strike Committee to intervene in the major disputes then raging. However its standard strike leaflet, which was issued by the thousand, was such that, in the words of Morris's biographer, Edward Thompson, strikers may have sometimes been at a loss to decide whether they were being approached by enemies or friends."

Part of it read:

"You are now on strike for higher wages or against reduction in your already small wage. Now, if this strike is but to accomplish this object and nothing more, it will be useless as a means of permanently bettering your condition, and a waste of time and energy, and will entail a large amount of suffering on yourselves, your wives and families, in the meantime."

The leaflet then went on, in the style similar to vastly superior to today's Socialist Party of Great Britain, to argue for Socialism. The League's approach, in other words, was as Thompson puts it 'Utopian in form, but in actual effect and tone defeatist'.

**Throats**

This was part of a general malaise among early Marxists who, Engels turned, reduced Marxism to 'a rigid orthodoxy which workers are not to reach as a result of their class consciousness, but which, like an article of faith, is to be forced down their throats at once and without development.'

It is this weakness, rather than the incessant wrangling with the anarchists within its own ranks, that primarily explains the Socialist League's ultimate failure.

Morris left it in 1890, eventually becoming reconciled with the SDF shortly before his death.

When that came, in 1896, it seemed to symbolise more than the departure of a man who had done more than any to popularise socialism in England.

In his final years, Morris knew that he had failed to establish the revolutionary socialist organisation which he believed so important. And, depressingly, he saw the idea of a quite different body gaining ground — the Labour Party.

There could be no better epitaph than the words he himself wrote in *Dream of John Ball*:

"I... pondered how men fight and lose the battle, and the thing that they fought for comes about in spite of their defeat, and when it comes turns out not to be what they meant, and other men have to fight for what they meant under another name."

The best available book on Morris is by E P Thompson. *William Morris* is published by Merlin for £5.95 and is available from Bookmark.
Ransome and revolution

The Russian Revolution altered many lives. Jane Bassett looks at its impact on one of the more unlikely ones: Arthur Ransome.

Arthur Ransome today is best known as the writer of such well-known children's books as Swallows and Amazons and Swallowdale. They are based on a combination of adventure story, fantasy, and accurate and realistic descriptions of Ransome's own passions, fishing and sailing.

What is less well-known is that on and off for ten years he lived in Russia, where he first wrote for The Daily News, for which he covered most of the major events of 1917, and then for The Manchester Guardian.

During this time he was on friendly terms with many of the Bolshevik leaders, including Lenin and Trotsky, whose secretary Evgenia he eventually married. He tells the story of these events in his Autobiography and in Six weeks in Russia in 1919, a classic piece of reporting.

Ransome's ambition was to write stories, and he entered the 'semi-bohemian' literary world in London, writing hack articles and stories. Rapidly, and somewhat naïvely, he agreed to the publication of a study of Oscar Wilde. This involved him in a libel action, brought against him by Lord Alfred Douglas, in connection with the latter's homosexual relationship with Wilde.

To escape this, and his own disastrous marriage, he set off for Russia in 1913 to collect and translate Russian folk stories.

He had a reckless audacity helped by his own private income, and a childlike conviction of his own immunity to danger.

He tells in his autobiography, for example, of how he and Evgenia left Russia with Soviet papers in 1921. On approaching the White Russian lines, they destroyed the papers and, trusting to luck, walked on. Luckily they met an old chess-playing acquaintance, now a White officer, who sent them on their way. Ransome was in fact bearing Soviet agreement to an armistice with the Estonians.

As a correspondent he was immensely curious, always talking to people, and observing places and events closely. He insisted on taking the attitude of an open-minded, 'non-political' observer. Though his attitude to the Revolution changed considerably, and he grew far more sympathetic, in the final analysis he remained detached, and left things to the 'experts'. To those with a knowledge of Economics from both the Capitalist and Socialist standpoints, to which I cannot pretend. (Introduction to Six weeks in Russia in 1919).

This 'non-political' standpoint led him into disastrous misunderstandings. Protesting against intervention by the Allies, he had to be told by Luckham, the British chargé d'affaires at Vologda, that 'You don't seem to realise that these people (ie, the Bolsheviks) are our enemies'.

Armistice

On the other hand he sometimes saw the situation more clearly than many. He was telling a sceptical Foreign Office in 1917 that it should give more aid, and adjust its war aims, or resign itself to losing an ally.

Writing in The Daily News, he was in favour of a bourgeois/liberal democracy along western lines, and was strongly against the 'Extremists and Lesbians'. On the arrest of July 1917 he wrote:

'Such a crisis as this may end in civil war... it also opens the way to manifestations from the extreme left. In any case its whole character is likely to intensify class feeling, and to set democracy in opposition to the bourgeosie, and the soldiers against the officers, which... is the end result of agitation by the extreme right or the extreme left. (The Daily News, September 1917).

He clearly saw the crucial role of the army, but put revolutionary outbreaks down to 'agitation' rather than the growth of mass consciousness and mobilisation. Indeed he described the revolution itself as a coup d'etat taking place in a power vacuum, and largely dependent on 'dry rot and apathy', he saw a desire for 'Bread, peace and some kind of order' (The Daily News, December 1917).

Inconsistently he also attributed the revolution with a massive popular base, since a majority of the Soviets were in favour of it. He described the Soviets as: 'the broadest elected body in Russia'.

Once the revolution was an established fact however, and he got to know most of the Bolshevik leaders, including Lenin, who he greatly admired, his attitude changed.

Although he was unconvinced when Lenin told him that a revolution in England was both inevitable and desirable, Ransome was strongly attracted to the atmosphere of revolution:

'There was a feeling, from which we could never escape, of the creative effort of the revolution... set against a background of that extraordinary vitality which persists in Moscow even in those dark days of discomfort, disillusionment, pestilence, starvation and unwanted war.' (Introduction to Six weeks in Russia in 1919).

Ransome gave a brilliant account of a new society being made, despite the awful strains caused by the war:

'There can be no doubt about the starvation in Moscow... I saw a man driving a sleigh laden with, I think, horseflesh, mostly bones, probably dead sled dogs. As he drove a black crowd of crows followed the sleigh and perched on it, tearing greedily at the meat.

Describing such horrors graphically, he also captured the energy and determination to hold out and rebuild. He visited the headquarters of the Committee of State Construction, and heard about the building of new railways, and a new power station for the electrification of Moscow.

In the textile factories he saw how production had been rationalised by concentrating all processes in one area, and how necessity had forced them to experiment and learn how to combine cotton and flax, a task previously believed to be impossible.

Above all he felt that democratisation was really taking place. Despite speculation, basic food was fairly distributed, as was housing, and the people were taking part in cultural life. He described a trip to the opera:

'The Moscow people were of bald merchants and bejewelled fat wives had gone. Gone with them were evening dresses and white shirt fronts. The whole audience was in the monotony of everyday clothes.' Ransome eventually returned to England, settled down and wrote his stories. But his accounts of the revolution are well worth reading, both for the fascinating and vivid picture he drew of the new kind of society, and for their depiction of a man whose attitudes changed so radically.
In theory this book should be essential reading. If only because Kautsky was such an important figure.

For twenty years, from the death of Engels in 1895 to the beginning of the first world war in 1914, Kautsky was 'the Pope of Marxism'. He was the number one recognised authority in the international socialist movement which included Lenin, Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg.

Yet today no-one reads him. As the introduction to this book rightly observes: 'For every hundred readers of Lenin's The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky it is doubtful if one has read Kautsky's The Dictatorship of the Proletariat which Lenin was attacking.'

It might be thought that the reason for this in Britain at least, is the fact that Kautsky's works are very difficult to get hold of. They are either untranslated or the translations are long since out of print. Karl Kautsky: Selected Political Writings should remedy that.

I say 'should remedy it'. And I said the book 'should' be essential reading. But in fact it is difficult to read through it without a yawn.

In small part this is due to the way the selection has been made and edited. (Although my main criticism here is that it doesn't actually carry enough material and chop it around too much. But far more it is due to the very nature of Kautsky's Marxism. The reason why it is so barren is however of considerable interest. Let me explain.

Kautsky was no organisation man, but his authority as a theoretician was rooted in an organisation: the German Social Democratic Party (the SPD). From 1883 until well into the first world war he edited Die Neue Zeit the SPD's theoretical journal.

The SPD had been the first major national organisation to claim general allegiance to Marx's politics. It was founded in 1869 by Wilhelm Liebknecht and August Bebel. In 1875 it became the dominant organisation of the German working class when it merged with a larger non-Marxist organisation founded by Ferdinand Lasalle.

The party survived and grew through twelve years of semi-illegality (the Anti-Socialist Laws 1878-90) and emerged from them to adopt what was seen by all concerned as a fully Marxist programme, the Erfurt Programme of 1891.

On the basis of the Erfurt Programme the SPD continued its steady but spectacular growth with only one or two stumbles until the eve of the first world war.

The sheer scale of the SPD at its highpoint is worth emphasising. In 1914 it had just over one million members. Its press counted 90 daily newspapers with a total circulation of just under 1 1/2 million plus a host of well subscribed specialist periodicals including a women's paper, a satirical magazine, a gymnastics magazine and even a journal for stenographers.

Pariah

Nearly three million workers belonged to the Free Trade Unions, aligned with the SPD. Hundreds of thousands belonged to the party's sporting and cultural organisations. And at the 1912 election (the last before the war) the party polled 4.25 million votes; 35 per cent of the total.

And remember that supporting the SPD was no easy option. It meant being a pariah from the official life of the Kaiser's Germany. Remember too that this huge support was for a party which was at the centre of an international movement, the Second International, and was regarded internationally as the model of what a Marxist party should be.

On 4 August 1914 the illusion was exploded. The SPD's Reichstag delegation voted for the war credits and became loyal supporters of the Kaiser's war machine. For Lenin it was a shattering fall from grace. But with hindsight it is possible to see the crash coming, years, even decades, before. The post-1914 Kautsky was not just a renegade from pre-1914. The 'Pope of Marxism' had had feet of clay all along.

Take for a start the Erfurt Programme of 1891. This consisted of two parts: a general statement of capitalist development and the aims of the socialists drafted by Kautsky and a list of immediate demands drafted (ironically, as it was to turn out) by Eduard Bernstein. It remained the basis for the 'tried and tested tactic' of the SPD right up until the war. And Kautsky was its most vigorous defender against any opponents from left or (more often) right.

Subsequent revolutionary criticism of the Erfurt programme has focussed on its 'two-deck' character: the fact that it was the second half, the list of specific reforms, that was the operative part while the first half was just wheeled out for May Day speeches.
There is of course much truth in this. But it rather lets the first (Kautsky-drafted) half off the hook. And this first half is by no means revolutionary. It stresses that the working class cannot achieve ‘the passing of the means of production into the possession of the collectivity without having acquired possession of political power’. But it provides no further elucidation about how the working class is to acquire that possession.

In The Class Struggle a book Kautsky wrote at the time specifically to amplify the Erfurt Programme, he filled in the gap: the working class should seize political power through ‘parliament’. It was ‘the most powerful political lever that can be utilised to raise the proletariat out of its economic, social and moral degradation’.

So Kautsky and the SPD were from the start committed to the parliamentary road. Of course that was a serious parliamentary road. It didn’t mean taking office at any opportunity. It meant remaining in absolute opposition until you won a majority in parliament.

When this majority was finally achieved the SPD would, it was believed, use it to totally expropriate the capitalist class. There was no talk of ‘Bund Demokratischer Allianzen’ or ‘Alternative Economic Strategies’. It was nevertheless the parliamentary road, and that remained constant in Kautsky’s political vision until his death.

But because it was a serious parliamentary road and because the question of smashing the bourgeois state had been so deeply buried in the years between the defeat of the Paris Commune and the First World War it could appear to be revolutionary. Lenin, for instance, in 1899 had this to say about the Erfurt Programme:

‘We are not in the least afraid to say that we want to imitate the Erfurt Programme; there is nothing bad in imitating what is good, and precisely today, when we so often hear opportunists and equivocal criticism of that programme, we consider it our duty to speak openly in its favour.’

And Kautsky had not just drafted the programme. He was involved in a series of controversies defending the programme against attacks from the right. Extracts from Kautsky’s contributions to two of these are included in Karl Kautsky: Selected Political Writings.

Revisonism

First is the controversy over the peasant question. From the early 1890s, Georg von Vollmar, leader of the SPD in Bavaria, argued that the party should adopt its programme to better secure peasant votes. Kautsky replied that the inevitable laws of capitalist development would lead to the proletarianisation of the peasantry. The dispute looks rather academic. But what was at stake was the first appearance of ‘revisionism’ in the party.

Bavaria was not just an area with a weak working class and a strong peasantry. It was also an area with a rather more ‘liberal’ bourgeoisie. Here the SPD was not necessarily forced into the absolute opposition it was in Prussia. The temptations of practical politics were far greater here, not just on the peasant question.

Kautsky apparently won the day. The ‘orthodox’ position of the inevitable proletarianisation of the peasantry was re-affirmed at the SPD’s 1895 congress. And a few years later Kautsky published a weighty book on the peasant question which became the authoritative text on the subject in the Second International (the extract in this collection is from that book).

But that did not prevent revisionism maintaining and developing its hold on the Bavarian SPD.

The second major controversy featured in this collection in which Kautsky stood on the left is that with the most famous of all revisionists, Eduard Bernstein.

From 1896 to 1899 Bernstein published a series of articles which attacked Marxism all along the line. Capitalism was not fundamentally crisis-ridden, nor was it polarising into two major classes. The SPD must become openly a party of social reform.

A number of counterattacks were made to Bernstein, the most eloquent and famous of which was Rosa Luxemburg’s Reform or Revolution. Kautsky joined in the controversy rather late and his attack on Bernstein was, in words of the introduction to the selection here, ‘rather pedestrian’ in tone.

But at the time it was Kautsky’s rebuttal of Bernstein that earned real weight. A resolution condemning revisionism was passed by 216 votes to 21 at the 1899 SPD congress and even more overwhelmingly at the 1903 congress held in Dresden. The declarations and votes in Dresden signify to the burial of theoretical revisionism as a political factor,’ commented Kautsky.

This was self-delusion on a grand scale. For the anti-revisionist motions were so general that the most prominent revisionists felt quite able to vote for them! Even the daddies of the revisionism von Vollmar did so.

Kautsky had reactivated the Erfurt orthodoxy but it was so toothless that it stopped no-one from getting on with the job of being a revisionist in practice. No wonder his contribution to the debate seems ‘pedestrian’.

The same self-delusion emerges in the next major debate in the SPD that Kautsky was involved in: the debate on the mass strike. Again Kautsky appeared to be the champion of the left.

The debate took place against the radicalising impact of the Russian Revolution of 1905. It radicalised the SPD which voted at its Lena congress in 1905 in favour of accepting the use of the mass strike as a principle. And it radicalised Kautsky who joined in this advocacy of the possible use of the mass strike.

Even that alarmed the trade union leaders. At their congress in 1905 they condemned the idea of the mass strike as inhitter terms. And the following year they effectively imposed their views on the SPD.

Under pressure from them, party leader Bebel proposed a resolution to the 1906 SPD congress in Mannheim which, while maintaining the theoretical possibility of the use of the mass strike insisted that without the ‘adherence of the leaders and members of the unions, the feasibility of the mass strike is unthinkable’.

In other words the union leaders would have a veto, which, as they had made clear, they would行使. The Bebel resolution was passed. The union leaders had decisively imposed their authority on the party.

Fabricated

Kautsky protested. But three things show the shallowness of his protest and indeed of his whole commitment to the mass strike.

First, at even the high point of his support for the mass strike Kautsky attacked those on his left who wanted to go on to talk concretely about the steps necessary to actually use it. He warned them that its use would be a ‘life and death struggle’ and that ‘revolutions cannot be fabricated’.

In other words the mass strike was a theoretically possible tactic whose actual use was to be put off indefinitely.

Second, the mass strike was always just another idée fixe. Contrast that with Rosa Luxemburg, whom the 1905 Russian revolution prompted to write the magnificent The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions in which the mass strike is ‘the first natural practical form of every great revolutionary struggle of the proletariat, and the more highly developed the antagonism is between labour and capital, the more effective and decisive must mass strikes become.’

Third is Kautsky’s judgement on the situation after the Mannheim congress of 1906. He claimed that it had put an end to the whole question and that the so-called ‘Erfurt revisionism’ and that the ‘mark of Mannheim’ was ‘above all a decisive left turn within the unions’. Again the self-delusion,

for at Mannheim the right wing trade union leaders had in reality taken open control of the party. And over the next few years they followed up their victory by restrictions on the left wing youth and women’s movements and on May Day.

The theory of absolute opposition this side of a majority in parliament was more and more coming into contrast with the practice of the party where on one issue after another that absolute opposition was abandoned.

Bebel dissociated himself in the Reichstag
from anti-militarism and proclaimed himself more patriotic than the government. In 1913
the SPD deputies for the first time voted for a
government tax bill raising money for mili-
tary expenditure on the grounds that it in-
cluded direct taxation.

Rosa Luxemburg saw clearly the way
things were going:
'If you take the position of our deputa-
tion's resolution then you will get into
the position where, if war breaks out, and
if then the question arises whether the
costs of the war should be covered by in-
direct or direct taxes you will then
logically support the approval of war
credits.'

But to reach this realisation she had to
break with Kautsky. The break came in
1910. The question was again the mass
strike. This time whether it should be used in
the growing agitation over the restricted
franchise in Prussia.

Rosa Luxemburg wrote an article arguing
that it should. The party leaders refused to
publish for fear of inflaming the situation.
Kautsky also refused on the same grounds.
Instead he wrote an article entitled 'What
Now?' against Luxemburg. It is probably the
most interesting part of this selection,
because it is filled with tactical arguments and
faithfully placed references to the theoretical possibility of a
mass strike, to end with the pathetic assertion
that in the actual circumstances nothing
has to be focussed on the next election (in two years time).

In that election, with the war danger in-
creasingly threatening, the SPD leadership
deliberately downplayed the issue of anti-
militarism in cement a quid pro quo electoral deal with the pro-imperialist bourgeois
Progressive Party.

Pathetic

Kautsky’s role was now simply to provide
apparently sophisticated Marxist justifica-
tions for complacency. They do not wear
well. One article (unfortunately not included
here) was entitled: 'The New Liberalism and
the New Middle Class.'
It argued that 'all the plans of the reaction-
aries were ruined by the re-vitalised liberal-
ism which was now ready to struggle against
the right'. The 1912 election had produced a
situation 'unprecedented in the history of
Germany'. Written less than two years
before the first world war, this looks pretty
pathetic today.

And equally pathetic was the shift in
Kautsky’s views on imperialism, a repre-
sentative selection of which is provided in
this collection. At his most radical in The Road to
Power published in 1909, he had argued that
because of capitalist development 'a world
war is now brought threateningly close'. But
as that war began he had changed to arguing
that 'out of the world war of the imperialist
great powers there can now result a
federation of the strongest amongst them,
which will eliminate the arms race'.

So the war was a mistake for the
capitalists, and support for it was equally
a mistake, but only a mistake, for socialists. So
although Kautsky opposed the war, from a
pacifist standpoint, his whole position drove
immediately after the end of the war.

But by that time it is questionable whether
Kautsky himself had anything really
different to say than those right wing social
democrats. Or at least anything that anyone
took any notice of. For whereas most post
War centrists paid lip service to the Bolshevist
Revolution, Kautsky was quick to attack it.

Excerpts from some of the works in which
he did so form the last two parts of this selec-
tion. All the Marxist jargon is still there but
in essence his argument is exactly the same as
the right wing — the Bolshevists were not
parliamentarians. And from then, until his
death in 1938, Kautsky was to occupy an
honoured but irrelevant niche in very
plainly, unrevolutionary social democracy.

It had been a long political journey. But
once the initial direction on the Erfurt
Programme’s parliamentary road had been
set, then in the real world each step followed
logically from the last. It was a journey of
enormous importance and every revolu-
tionary today should be familiar with it to
make sure they do not retrod it.

But unfortunately selections from
Kautsky’s copious itinerary, no matter how
carefully selected, do not on their own make
very exciting reading. You need the land-
scape around sketched in. For that far better
to turn to Massimo Salvadori’s Karl Kautsky
and the Socialist Revolution or Carl
Schröck’s German Social Democracy 1905-
1917.

A new book by Socialist Worker
editor Chris Harman

Explaining the Crisis

A Marxist re-appraisal

£3.95 from your local Socialist Worker bookstall or (post free)
from Bookmarks, 265 Seven Sisters Road, London N4 2DE
Squaddism in Nazi Germany

Bearing the fascists? The German Communists and political violence 1929-33

Eve Rees-Hall

Cambridge LBC 60

The fight against fascism is not a priority for revolutionary socialists in Britain at the moment. But it was back in 1929-33 when the National Front were growing fast and picking up more votes than the Liberals. And it may well be again in the not too distant future, soinvesting intofascism remains very important.

This book looks at the most important single experience we have to go by — that of the attempts to stop the Storm Troopers in their tracks in 1929-33. It does so looking in detail at how Communists in working-class neighbourhoods of Berlin organised to fight back against Nazi attacks.

Social democratic sources sometimes give the impression that the German Communist Party refused to fight the Nazis: the SA marched on its territory without a fight, and it is said that the party made no errors, like supporting a right-wing inspired referendum aimed at getting rid of the right-wing social democratic government of the state of Prussia.

But, as this book tells, the party was involved, day after day, month after month, in the physical fight to stop the Nazi advance. It recruited in itself many of the most active, militant working class youth, and, through a plethora of anti-fascist front organisations, sought to resist the SA troops and SA outposts.

With 30,000 members in Berlin, and a third of the total vote, the party should have been well placed to mount such resistance. But it could not achieve this.

For instance, in April 1931 the party launched a campaign against the growing network of Nazi taverns, which were beginning to dominate the working-class class areas. Publicans who had previously hosted social democratic or Communist meetings now began to open their doors to the Nazis, and the taverns were converted into virtual Storm Trooper barracks in the middle of red areas. Closing their doors was a vital part of any anti-fascist strategy.

But the party soon found it was a goal it could not achieve. Demonstrations against the taverns were attacked, not only by the Nazis but also by the heavily armed SA units.

The anti-fascists had to stand impotently while the Nazi barracks continued to flourish.

The party could issue the call: "We must intensify the attack against the Nazi barracks instead as it is possible for us, through the organisation of mass assault, which we must develop into mass terror action, to drive the SA troops out of their murder dens."

But it could not deliver effective "mass assault action" because of the overwhelming police power.

To many in the party — including sections of its leadership — there seemed an easy answer. If mass terror would not work, why not try counter-terror?

A series of armed attacks were carried out against the taverns, and even against the police, by small, highly organised conspiratorial groups.

A typical action was that of 15 October against a tavern in Richardstraße.

Members of the Communist-led anti-fascist fighting organisations were summoned to a "mass demonstration" kilometre away from the tavern by their leaders. The only furniture the SA troopers had to distract the attention of the police. The real struggle was left to an armed group under the control of one of the local party leaders that was so secret that even many Berlin-leftist party workers did not know about it.

A young man was despatched to chain up the back gate of the police station. Witnesses in the Richardstraße area saw the entire group of men suddenly assemble themselves into a procession. Between 30 and 50 approached the tavern in a slow march, shouting "Down with fascism," and unloading the Internationale. Suddenly there was a shout, the procession stopped and the first shot was fired. It was followed by at least 20 more, fired in rapid succession by four or five young men, while the crowd of demonstrators remained standing in the street. The sound of the blast and the crowd dispersed.

At first, the raid seemed a success. The landlord was killed and the tavern was burned down. In October and November 1931 such shoot-outs cost 14 Nazi lives in the entire country, as against only six Communists. Local party leaders could easily draw the conclusion that this was the basis of a successful anti-fascist strategy.

"With a really thorough application, it will be possible in the near future that there will once again be SA."

But this was soon proven to be nonsense. The tavern was back in use as a Nazi hang-out within three weeks, and in the case of the police, who had arrested 22 of those involved in the raid. It came just to shorten runs on the streets, the police with their heavy armaments and the Nazis with their weather-beaten faces were bound to be more successful than the 30,000 Berlin Communists.

The party leadership soon realised this, and on 31 November 1931 passed a resolution denouncing individual terror. But leading Berlin party members were not convinced. As one of them put it: "In my opinion, mass terror is a sheer impossibility. Fascism can only be held down by terror now, and if that fails, in the long run everything will be lost."

But if it failed, and everything was lost.

Was there an alternative? This book shows that in terms of the CP act by itself, or through its front organisations, there was not. The party recognised the need for class action, and even counter-revolutionary action against the Nazis. But in 1931 more than half Berlin’s factory workers were unemployed. Under such circumstances, the 3000 Communists were not capable, by themselves, of pulling strikes in protest at fascistic violence.

And this was not, as is sometimes asserted, because the Communist Party had become a party of the lumpen proletariat. This book shows the great majority of its members, although young, were full-time workers or workers who had lost their jobs with the slump. The problem was that mass unemployment had produced a terrible downward in the confidence of the unemployed workers to fight just as it had produced mass demoralisation and bitterness among many of the unemployed.

Under such circumstances, "counter-terror" in the shape of small conspiratorial actions by small conspiratorial groups — was bound to seem attractive to anti-fascists.

Yet there was another option. In Berlin the mass workers were not including striking, did drive the Nazis from the streets in 1931 — even though the local state government was Nazi-run.

But this could be mass action of the 30,000 most militant Communist sections of the working class alone. It required the involvement of the majority of employed workers, organised by the re-founded Social Democratic Party and its unions.

This alternative was not easy to get. The Social Democrats were keen to break up any mass organisation. In 1931, even if the Nazis were storms trying to power to power. Even after Hitler’s accession to power in 1933, Social Democratic leaders denounced "these underground opposition groups."

During the last years of the Weimar republic, the Social Democrat leaders often saw the Communists as a bigger menaces than the Nazis. On May Day 1929 the Social Democrat police chief of Berlin banned a Communist-led demonstration, and when the tract passed through his headquarters. They shot demonstrators down on the streets and then turned their attention to working-class areas, snatching out tenant blocks and breaking into flats. In more than three days of fighting, 30 civilians were killed — but not one policeman. Never did the Berlin police take any such action against the Nazis.

No wonder not only party hacks but the mass of Communist Party members hated the Social Demo- crat leaders. No wonder the real anti-fascist fighters had nothing but contempt for the Hitler regime — a massive social democratic "defence force" which always thought up some excuse for not mobilising against the fascists.

For, it should not have been the end of the argument. More than half the Berlin working class continued to follow the leadership of the Social Democrats. A way had to be found to bring them to the struggle against the Nazis.

There was only one way to fight for this support. It was to apply the tactics of the left fractions worked out in the early years of the Communist international.

Again and again, the Communist Party should have been inviting the Social Democrat leaders to engage in united action against the fascists. Let Social Democrats and Communists together defend social democratic premises from Nazi attacks, and fight Communists premises from the attacks.

The Social Democratic leaders would try to avoid such united action, and if united action would result would, without or without those leaders.

The German Communists refused to make such appeals. They had been told by Stalin that the Social Democrats were social fascists, and this tied in with much of their own experience of repression from the hands of the Social Democrat-run police forces. Instead of teaching young workers to organise against reformism, but to fight with reformist workers against the fascists, they gave the impression to reformism and fascism were the same.

Finally enough, the people who most benefited from this way of life were the Social Democrats. Instead of legalising the police, they could excuse their disastrous passivity in the face of the Nazis by blaming the Communists for "dividing the working class."

Many of the mistaken policies of the Communists led them into the blind alley of squaddism and individual terror.

This book does not go all the way in defending the image. The author does not even mention the person who best essayed it then at the time, Ernst Toller. The book is also too academically oriented to be easy reading. Nevertheless, the author is to be thanked for throwing valuable light on a most important, and disastrous, episode in working class history.

Chris Hannan

Socialist Review March 1984
Brecht and Stalinism

Brecht in Context

John Willett

Meltemian £2.50

Willett's book is at once both fascinating and misleading. This is partly the fault of the book's structure in a series of different articles and lectures. Willett, however, has done a great deal of Brecht over many years. In the course of compiling the book, Willett extensively re-examined and re-wrote many of his pieces, giving the final book a new focus. It seems clear that Willett has done an exemplary job of selecting the right pieces and editing them together in a single volume.

A more accurate title would have been Brecht in Contexts. The book is divided into chapters dealing variously with Brecht's work in the field of poetry, film, and theatre. Not surprisingly, it is the chapter dealing with Brecht's attitude toward politics that provides the most interesting reading. Whereas Brecht is now considered a minor poet for both the Royal Shakespeare and National Theatres, Brecht's politics are still a subject that can stir up people around the world.

By far the most lively piece of writing in this book is John Willett's correspondence with Professor Hannah Arendt. A fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and a Brecht's scholar, Willett provides a subject for each of those other Brecht's works he had up his sleeve.

In the chapter dedicated to Brecht and the visual arts, Willett writes that the artist George Grosz became 'too' obsessed with Brecht's support of Stalin in the way too 'obsessed'. Was it the subject matter of Brecht's poetry and plays that Grosz objected to? If so, why should Grosz have felt so strongly about it?

Grosz wrote to friends that he felt Brecht wanted him to work in a style he no longer felt relevant. He could no longer cope with political topics. It's an interesting point for by the time that Brecht became so committed to communist politics in the late twenties Grosz had become disillusioned and sceptical of the German Communist Party and the direction it was taking.

Bearing in mind the deterioration of the Communist International Grosz had every reason to be sceptical about the political work required of him. This isn't to say that Brecht was wrong to make the political commitment when he did. It's just what exactly was the nature of that commitment. How was it reflected in Brecht's art?

Apart from the debate with Arendt, one of the main themes of the book is the non-existence of an ode to Stalin Willett's decision to show большевик, or the wise words of a Karl Marx, still the most relevant to the understanding of this book today. Willett's book is a valuable contribution to understanding Brecht's world.

Peter Court

King Coal?

Undermining Capitalism; State Ownership and the Dialectic of Control in the British Coal Industry

Joel Kottkai

Pluto Press £7.95

On 1 January 1947 the British coal industry was nationalised. Contemporary accounts tell of red flags being hoisted over some pits and much singing of 'The Red Flag', even the 'International'. The jubilation didn't last out the winter. The then Labour government demanded harder work and sacrifices for the nation—the capitalist nation, that is.

Any strategy for socialism today must reject utterly the notion that state ownership equals utopia. Joel Kottkai rightly observes.

Socialist Review March 1964

Barnsley area 12,000 men came out on unofficial strike over victimisation. Such guerrilla action over bonus and discipline is the result of the scheme. Unlikely to take on the employers differs to the workforce has reasserted itself locally, sectional and mechanised. Each new management strategy produces its own response from the workforce. 

Krieger's book contains many insights into this history, particularly in his case studies of individual pits. It is, however, a frustrating book. Written in sociological jargon, it is full of phrases like 'cultural undertows' and 'the excessive exigencies of capitalist accumulation'. It appears quite ignorant of a socialist tradition which does not equate socialism with state ownership, but with working class self-management.

More seriously, his accounts of the conflict at the point of production are not related to the events the broader class struggle. He places too much emphasis on 'regressive differences', instead of analysing how they can be overcome by workers' struggle or intensified by management victories. In other words, he produces a vague sense of the capitalist's struggle rather than a contribution to socialist theory and practice.

For a book which has the word 'dialectical' in its title it is distinctly undialectical. It is a sign of the limitations of Krieger's academic Marxism that he concludes his book with glowing praise of Arthur Scargill's leadership just as it has been found wanting. The embryo of future advance for the miners lies in the guerrilla struggles over bonus and manning levels, and the ability of socialists in the coalfields to relate these issues to pit closures and pay.

Neither left bureaucrats nor academics like Krieger have much to say about such struggles.

Alan Gibbons

OUT NOW

A bolshevik classic on women's liberation Sexual Relations and the Class Struggle by Alexandra Kollontai

50p from your Socialist Worker bookstall or (plus 20p post) from Bookmarks, 265 Seven Sisters Rd, London N4 2DE
Orwell and the Trotskyists

John Deacon's article on Orwell was spot on, showing that Orwell, despite his faults, was a brilliant novelist and political writer, who for many years of his life saw himself as a revolutionary socialist.

However, I question one aspect of John's article. He says of the Trotskyists of Orwell's time: "There is no evidence that Orwell had even heard of Trotsky's views.

In fact, in an essay "Notes on Nationalism", written in 1925, Orwell devotes a page to a description of Trotskyism, and we have come to read some Trotskyist literature.

"Trotskyism. This word is used so loosely..." use it to mean a doctrine Marxists who in the early days of the Stalin regime Trotskyism can be better studied in obscure pamphlets or in books like the "Soviet Apparatus" than in the works of Trotsky himself, who was by no means a man of one idea..."

Orwell was not very complimentary about Trotskyism.

"The Trotskyists are against Stalin just as the Communists are for him... He wanted not so much to alter the external world as to feel that the battle to prove his case was going in his own lifetime."

Why did not Orwell reject Trotskyism? Perhaps it was for the same reason that led him to reject the working class as theagents of change - his extreme pessimism and despair which led him to see workers, usually as victims and sometimes as assassins who had to be killed, and not as revolutionaries.

But for all that, perhaps Orwell had a point in his criticism of some early Trotskyists.

Victor Serge, writing in the "Labour Leader" in his "From Marx to Trotsky" book, claimed that "the proletariat could be the revolutionary class.

Moreover, it perpetuated the belief that the working class can entrust its destiny to the few enlightened beings who will ensure our salvation. The subjectivity of the working class comes down to putting a cross in the right box at election time - what Edward calls "local democracy". But the whole point is that "democracy" under capitalism, whether at parish or parliamentary level, is meaningless. When the worker has no choice but to sell his or her labour for an inadequate弥补 wage, what does freedom mean? "Parliamentary democracy" is merely one of the capitalist's subtle ways of persuading the worker that, in certain circumstances, he is used against the ruling class, but fundamentally, it is one of their tools.

Orwell was not purely a Trotskyist, but his views on the role of the workers were similar. In his book "The Road to Wigan Pier", he writes: "The fight for a meaningless capitalist slogan, 'local democracy'. The fight will be rooted, not in the self-sacrifice of the workers, but in their attempt to change the minds of MPs of all parties."

There is no point in keeping silent on this or other similar points for the sake of unity. Any unity not based around some sort of workers' self-activity is futile, misguided and, from a Marxist viewpoint, wrong.

Nick May

Bembridge

Self Emancipation

Edward Stenoch's letter in Socialist Review on Trotskyism and self-emancipation summed up a view prevalent on much of the left. The reason this view is totally incorrect is that it springs from a wrong basis. Socialism, if it is to be anything, must be self-emancipation of the working class.

Not only can socialism not result from self-activity, but self-emancipation is the condition for it.

I do not doubt that the labour movement is well-intentioned. The tragedy is that they are blind to reality. All are doing is attempting to provide palliatives for the evils of capitalism. Not only is the trade union capitalistic, but it also prevents workers from realising the class struggle. These Labour councils are necessary to maintain the property owners and managers and their interests. They are, however, not the real class struggle.

Moreover, their attempt to prove that the working class can only be emancipated by the trade unionists is to perpetuate the belief that the working class can entrust its destiny to the few enlightened beings who will ensure our salvation. The subjectivity of the working class comes down to putting a cross in the right box at election time - what Edward calls "local democracy". But the whole point is that "democracy" under capitalism, whether at parish or parliamentary level, is meaningless. When the worker has no choice but to sell his or her labour for an inadequate弥补 wage, what does freedom mean? "Parliamentary democracy" is merely one of the capitalist's subtle ways of persuading the worker that, in certain circumstances, he is used against the ruling class, but fundamentally, it is one of their tools.

Chris Harman's incisive summary of the balance of class forces (Socialist Review February 84) is supported only by a strong "innovation".

What is this "bureaucratic mass strike" he has discovered? For us, the mass strike is the greatest instrument of the working class. As a united class and therefore inevitable, it is the only way to satisfy the workers' demands.

Trade union leaders hate it like death, because it is the greatest weapon of the working class.

Self-emancipation is essential to the working class.

Instead trade union leaders call what Rosa Luxemburg describes as "political demonstration strikes" - political strikes as we usually refer to them. 14 May 1980 - the TUC's "Day of Action", 22 September 1982 - the day in support of the hospital workers. These are not strikes in the true sense of the workers at GCHQ. In truth, these are not strikes at all in the proper sense of the word. A strike is a trial of strength by the workers. By definition, that means the outcome must be, to some extent, uncertain. For that very reason, in their conservatism, officials hate them. Hence, in turn, to call something that looks like a battle but involves no risk.

Not only are Chris's historical examples deadly dull but they precisely the opposite of his case. In 1928, the TUC General Council had the slightest intention of going through with the strike. When they called it, as they drew close, they put all their energies into trying to call it off. It was Baldwin the Tory Prime Minister who pushed them into it, knowing they would lead to the government's fall. At least, there was no danger of an alternative rank and file leadership wresting control from the General Council.

In 1948, in France, it is true that the national officials called a one-day strike in support of the students on the Monday 13 May. What Chris does not mention is that though the one-day protest was far more successful than the bureaucrats had expected, on the Tuesday over 95 percent of the strikers were back at work. Only a handful of plants, like Sud-Aviation in Nantes, had occupied. It was they - not the officials - who played the key role, generalising the strike till it ballooned beyond the control of any officials.

Chris is right in his conclusion the situation can change must suddenly. We will see more mass strikes and we will see the bureaucracy destroying them. But the strikes will have been called by workers, let's be clear about that.

Geoff Brown

Manchester

By any other name

I never realized Peter Goodwin was so old. He must be in his eighties at least. He knew Rosa Luxemburg well enough to call her by her first name (see Back Page in Socialist Review of January 1935).

If the articles in Socialist Review on Rosa Luxemburg regularly referred to 'Karl' and 'Vladimir', there would be no cause for comment. But I wouldn't dream of suggesting that an enlightened socialist journal would dignify workers with surnames while trivialising women with first names.

Or is it the '57-year-old mother of two Paula Zednik answered about brigitte Rosenblum's telegram' from now on?

Maybe the Leninist experts should remember that Lenin himself, while frequently disagreeing with Rosa Luxemburg, nonetheless honoured her with a surname.

Ben Ross

Leighton Buzzard

Harman's innovation

Chris Harman's incisive summary of the balance of class forces (Socialist Review February 84) is supported only by a strong "innovation".

What is this "bureaucratic mass strike" he has discovered? For us, the mass strike is the greatest instrument of the working class. As a united class and therefore inevitable, it is the only way to satisfy the workers' demands.

Trade union leaders hate it like death, because it is the greatest weapon of the working class.

Self-emancipation is essential to the working class.

Instead trade union leaders call what Rosa Luxemburg describes as "political demonstration strikes" - political strikes as we usually refer to them. 14 May 1980 - the TUC's "Day of Action", 22 September 1982 - the day in support of the hospital workers. These are not strikes in the true sense of the workers at GCHQ. In truth, these are not strikes at all in the proper sense of the word. A strike is a trial of strength by the workers. By definition, that means the outcome must be, to some extent, uncertain. For that very reason, in their conservatism, officials hate them. Hence, in turn, to call something that looks like a battle but involves no risk.

Not only are Chris's historical examples deadly dull but they precisely the opposite of his case. In 1928, the TUC General Council had the slightest intention of going through with the strike. When they called it, as they drew close, they put all their energies into trying to call it off. It was Baldwin the Tory Prime Minister who pushed them into it, knowing they would lead to the government's fall. At least, there was no danger of an alternative rank and file leadership wresting control from the General Council.

In 1948, in France, it is true that the national officials called a one-day strike in support of the students on the Monday 13 May. What Chris does not mention is that though the one-day protest was far more successful than the bureaucrats had expected, on the Tuesday over 95 percent of the strikers were back at work. Only a handful of plants, like Sud-Aviation in Nantes, had occupied. It was they - not the officials - who played the key role, generalising the strike till it ballooned beyond the control of any officials.

Chris is right in his conclusion the situation can change must suddenly. We will see more mass strikes and we will see the bureaucracy destroying them. But the strikes will have been called by workers, let's be clear about that.

Geoff Brown

Manchester

Socialist Review March 1984
Wild about animals

Andy Strouthous managed to put an otherwise excellent review, albeit6 simplistic, of animal liberations and vegetarianism by inserting an anachronistic quote from Engels, to wit: 'The meat diet, however, has its greatest effect on the brain, which now receives a further flow of the materials necessary for its development.'

Andy would appear to agree with this statement: 'Men now above the other primates because he was the only one to eat meat.' The ramifications of this proposition are mind-boggling. It would explain why India, with its large vegetarian population, succumbed to the meat-eaters of the British India Company. If only they had eaten meat, which presumably is fortified with materials which we all must obtain from vegetables and meat by simple processes of digestion.  

Indeed, assuming the properties of meat to be stated, then surely meat-eaters' flesh would be even more nutritious than that of a vegetarian. Therefore we should, as a party, start a programme of conversion. Andy could make the first sacrifice.  

(Blauinte de Strouthous)

Personally, I shall be voting for your Porrin twice a day, and I'm not a vegetarian.

J Fisher

London NW1

Engels, parrot fashion

The review by Andy Strouthous in last month's Review (SR 62) entitled 'Animal Crackers' was a sectarian foray into a topic rather than an attempt at a Marxist analysis of the parochialism of the subject concerned. The lack of Marxism resulted in scientific investigation of the current development of the human race, and the condemnation of the united front tactic leaves us questioning how such contributions get into Review's Review.

The so-called review of the two pamphlets was a crude attempt to justify a sectarian opinion of animal liberationists by its base dissections, or at worst plain lying and prejudice. The quoted pamphlet by Engels was The Part Played by Labour in the Transformation of Ape to Man, not the part played by Marx. All primates eat some meat. Engels quite rightly points out the decisive step in the transition from ape to man was the adaptation to living on the ground. The consequence of the move from tree to ground, the development of hunting and gathering skills, the invention of tools and communication, all in all the social organization of early man, is what led to the advancement of the human above other animals. (Not the chewing of raw beef?)

Engels' pamphlet is correct in its overall theme, but its specific content is incorrect in many respects, e.g. 'lizards are the only animals that can learn to speak (other than Man)'. Let no one say that the parrot does not understand what it is.  

Secondly, the article's total condemnation of all one-issue campaigns as a 'waste of time and energy' is curious in its absurdity. Has Strouthous forgotten the united front tactic? Were we wasting our time in the RTWC, ANL, or CND etc? If we are seriously to question whether we can involve ourselves in any united front action, we should assess the activities and campaigns of the organisations concerned at the given time and their relationship to the working class. To condemn the use of the united front tactic completely to justify our disagreements with the animal liberationists is unfair to all.

The point of this letter is not to support the animal liberationists or to call for united front action with them, but to draw attention to the fact that Strouthous' article does not provide our members and contacts with a credible Marxist argument against the movement of the animal liberation movement.

J. Jackson

R Colyer

Kilmarnock

A vegi strikes back

Speaking as a vegetarian, Andy Strouthous probably thinks I'm deficient in brain cells. Nevertheless, I'd like to make a couple of comments on his article on animal liberation in February's Review.

Most of what Engels wrote is still relevant today. He also wrote the odd bit of nonsense, invented by the prevailing ideas of the society he lived in. To argue that animal beings developed larger brains by eating more meat may have been correct in the time of Strouthous' lifetime. It's certainly out of line now, and Andy does Engels no credit by resurrecting it. Actually, if Andy hadn't noticed there are a lot of other sources of protein besides meat, and many other animals consume meat in large quantities without any noticeable increase in brain capacity.

There was a serious article to be written about the rise of the animal liberation movement. A lot of young people have been attracted to its form of rebellion, sentimentality and activity. This shouldn't particularly surprise us in the downtown, but it merits some critical evaluation rather than being ignored in the Review.

Pete Cameron

Hammersmith

Meat and materialism

Andy Strouthous' review, Animal Crackers (Review's Review 62) is wonderful, up to a point. Namely, where it turns from bashing the Animal Libbers single-issue theory to defining his own peculiar and indefensible Real Beet 1 theory of materialism, enmeshed as Marxist.

Andy asserts that man's materialistic system for human beings, the only meat-eating primate, developed organisation and weapons to deal with them. As a result, the nutrients for a more rapid development of the human brain were secured, as were new skills, in competitive nature. Thus, humans differentiated themselves from the rest of the animal kingdom.

Now this is a materialist theory. A very meaty materialism. But it is also wrong. Engels is actually incorrect. Flexiblism, lower primates, like Andy, eat meat.

Secondly, it makes two false assumptions: that food gathering doesn't generate organisation and tools and more importantly, that organisation and tool-making is specifically human traits. They are not, both are pro-human. What characterises the human organisation and tool-making is conscious ingenuity. Animal behaviour is determined by inherited physiology, or instinct. That is why we have a self-made history, and animals only a natural evolution.

This was Marx's position: 'What distinguishes the wise architect from the best of bees is that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality.'

Finally, we come to the thesis, taken from Engels, that meat-eating speeds up brain development. There is nothing to say about it, except that it shows the limited nature of scientific knowledge in 1876. Not one of the 50 essential nutrients for good health are discovered. Sugar, proteins, carbohydrates, minerals, vitamins, acids and fibre is more than a meat diet.

Animal Libbers cannot be faulted on anthropological or nutritional grounds. Rather their danger lies in placing the needs of animals on a par with our own, human needs which capitalism subordinates to the profit drive, destroying food stocks whilst tens of millions starve.

Andrew Loske's Animal Libbers play down this contradiction. We will never hear of them hijacking forty loads of fly spray or organizing consumer boycotts of de-boning machines. But we should not be fooled. This is a reactionary suburban ideology of the well-fed middle class.

Rod Hudson
Building BLOC?

You may well have written to George Williamson over the past few weeks. Or rather, you may well have asked your union branch secretary to write to him.

If you haven’t then pull your finger out sharpen up and do so. For George Williamson is the person you write to to get credentials for the conference in Sheffield on 24 March called by BLOC, the Broad Left Organising Committee.

George is organising secretary of BLOC. He is also Chairman of the USDAW Broad Left and is known among USDAW activists as an open and committed supporter of Militant.

All of which makes George Williamson’s views on the BLOC conference of considerable interest. They are set down in a full page interview in Militant on 10 February. It is worth quoting at some length.

Working class

The first striking thing about the interview is George’s estimate of the current mood of the working class.

‘According to the Tories, a “new realism” exists within the ranks of the trade union movement. They point approvingly to the level of days lost through strikes in 1983—the lowest since 1967—as confirmation of their claims.

‘The Tories are in for a shock. Their “new realism” theory will be blown apart. Enormous anger is being accentuated in the ranks of the trade unions. Everywhere there are workers trying to improve and extend their conditions and to build their organisations, but, first and foremost, to get rid of the Tories. They want their unions and their leaders to act with the same determination and tenacity which the Tories show on behalf of the bosses.’ (My emphasis).

That is one example of how George sees the current state of the working class. To make it quite clear that it is no slip of the tongue here is another.

‘Unfortunately for the trade union leaders, the rank and file have no intention of letting their organisations, built painstakingly over decades of struggle, to be undermined and their gains frittered away over beer and sandwiches at the Department of Employment. All the attacks will be forcefully resisted, postal ballots, political levy restrictions, enforced ballots on industrial action etc — all of these present the Tories with a potentially explosive minefield of opposition.’ (My emphasis).

Note carefully what George is doing. The quite correct general argument that eventually in the long term, there will be a sharp revival of industrial struggle is used to justify quite false assertions about what is happening at the moment or what is going to happen in the near future. The result is statements like the ones above that I have put in italics. Just look at them again. If he believes them, George is living in a dream world. If he doesn’t, then he is engaging in a dangerous bluff.

The second striking thing about the interview is what George Williamson says about the union leaders. It has its radical side:

‘The NGA dispute showed that the more vicious the attacks on the working class became, the more unable to lead a fight-back do the leaders appear to be. The decision of the TUC General Council not to support the NGA in the dispute underlines even more clearly the need to campaign in the trade union movement to take the working class as a whole to its fundamental principles of defending working class rights and the need to transform the unions from top to bottom.’ (My emphasis).

Again, note particularly the bits I have put in italics. I agree with them. But does George Williamson? The rest of the interview indicates that he does not.

Firstly, for George the villain of the piece in the NGA dispute was the TUC General Council and he emphasizes earlier that at the 1983 TUC the General Council was “rigged to favour the right wing and the white collar unions.” He adds that the Congress itself “saw the right forcing through an agreement to have talks with the Employment minister.” These events at the 1983 TUC were, according to George, “the point of departure for the BLOC conference.”

So it looks as if when George refers to ‘trade union leaders’ disparagingly that is really a shorthand for right wing trade union leaders. So he says earlier in the interview ‘the right wing TUC leadership have shown no willingness to fight.’ What of the left wingers on the General Council? You may well ask. They only receive one mention in the whole of the interview. Here it is in its entirety:

‘... Rodeney Bickerstaff, Ray Buckton and Arthur Scargill have wished the (BLOC) conference success.’

Which immediately prompts the question: do NUPE, ASLEF and the NUM need “transforming from top to bottom”? George and the rest of the Bread Left Organising Committee act as if they do not.

Serious discussion

One last point. George Williamson explains why the 24 March conference has been called as follows:

“This conference will bring together rank and file activists to thrash out a strategy to defend the working class against Tory attacks.”

To ‘thrash out a strategy’ for the future requires a serious discussion of the balance of forces and a serious discussion of why past strategies have failed. In other words it will need discussion of exactly the sort of points I have raised above.

This makes me a bit disturbed by the fact that in the interview, George keeps alternating between referring to 24 March as a ‘conference’ and as a ‘rally’. The two words do not mean the same thing. You don’t ‘thrash out a strategy’ at a rally. The ‘rank and file activists’ in Sheffield on 24 March will have to be firm that it is a conference they have been delegated to, and they want to talk to each other, not be talked at.

Pete Goodwin