

# socialist worker Review

April 1986

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## TORIES IN CRISIS

The state of the  
struggle today

Interview with  
Tony Cliff



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# NOTES of the month

## IRELAND

# Loyalist laments

**THE STRIKE** by Protestant workers in Northern Ireland at the beginning of March highlighted once again the sectarian nature of the Northern state.

The strike brought thousands of Protestants onto the streets demanding an end to the Anglo-Irish agreement. In reality though, the strike reflected a deep sectarianism. It produced sectarian attacks on Catholic workers and wide-scale intimidation.

Lying behind the demands of the strikers were a whole number of assumptions about Protestant supremacy. The Anglo-Irish deal, as portrayed by the likes of Ian Paisley and James Molyneaux, represents a serious threat to Northern Ireland's role as a 'Protestant state for a Protestant people'.

Despite 12 years of direct rule Protestant workers can still identify with the state as the defender of their interests.

The disparity in levels of unemployment between Catholic and Protestant has actually widened in this period. Major firms with British subsidies such as Shorts and Harland and Wolff are still looked upon as bastions of Protestant employment, and on the day of the strike both factories came out solidly.

Two of the three major repressive forces of the state, the Royal Ulster Constabulary, and the Ulster Defence Regiment, are manned at all levels overwhelmingly by Protestants and are thought of as Protestant forces.

Both forces came in for severe criticism of their handling of the strike.

Anyone who has watched the police at Orgreave or Wapping would have been bemused by the contrast of the RUC's behaviour on the day of the strike. There was little of the violence that has become a regular event on picket lines here, and there were serious complaints from Catholics about lack of protection.

Catholics themselves have often felt the heavy hand, boot and rubber bullet of the RUC. The contrast was certainly noted.

As for the UDR, there were many reports of off-duty members of the force being on the Loyalist barricades.

With all these factors, plus the somewhat surprising size and solidity of the strike one could be forgiven for thinking that the leaders of the major Unionist parties would be feeling very pleased with themselves. In fact they and their parties are, as a result of the strike, in an even greater state of disarray than before.

Molyneaux and Paisley were reluctant strike leaders in the first place, but their complete lack of a coherent strategy for confronting Thatcher meant that they were forced to go along with the idea. They did meet Thatcher and come to a deal with her just days before the strike, but were unable to sell the deal to their supporters back home.

Their reluctance did not go unnoticed, and on the day of the strike the movement largely bypassed them. It looked either to those with a harder version of Paisleyism, such as his deputy leader Peter Robinson, or to the extreme right wing Loyalist paramilitaries—the Ulster Defence Association and Ulster Volunteer Force.

Paisley and Molyneaux had to subsequently endure not just the anger of British politicians over the violence of the day, but also ridicule over their complete inability to control their own forces.

The result of all this has been that Molyneaux has made it clear that he will not support any more activities of this sort. He undoubtedly reflects the views of

Northern Irish bosses. They may not like the Anglo-Irish deal but they are also determined that their profits are not going to be the price paid for smashing it.

Paisley's attitude is less clear. Although he enjoyed the strike about as much as Molyneaux did he may find it less easy to say so, given the more bellicose nature of his support.

All of this is very important because there is now much talk of an all-out stoppage to coincide with the Protestant marching season in the summer. It is difficult to see a divided Loyalist camp delivering an indefinite strike of the same magnitude and success as the recent one.

It is necessary to add a degree of caution to this (the one day strike was much bigger than anyone predicted) but all the signs are that extreme Loyalists, lacking the support of their mainstream political leaders, would find it difficult to deliver.

It is also clear that the response of the British to a future strike would be somewhat different both from that of the recent strike, and of Labour's response to the anti-Sunningdale strike in 1974.

It is now widely believed that the British troops and not the RUC will bear the brunt of any future confrontation, and there is no question of their loyalty to the Thatcher government.

Thatcher has got the Unionist leaders over a barrel and knows it. With each new disruptive action comes ominous talk of damaging the Union. This does not mean that Thatcher is about to pull the plug on Northern Ireland, but she can hit back in various ways. Both Shorts and Harland and Wolff rely heavily on British subsidies to keep going. Thatcher can certainly begin to threaten withdrawal of subsidies if these factories become central to any strike strategy.

All this leaves the Loyalists with major problems in terms of how they take on the Anglo-Irish deal. It may in these circumstances be much easier to terrorise Catholics than confront the British government.

Then we may witness a horrific return to sectarian murders, perhaps accompanied by a terrorist campaign waged against the South.

Ultimately the losers of the whole process remain the Catholic working class.

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They gain nothing significant from the Anglo-Irish deal, are seemingly no nearer to a united Ireland, and they are once again the victims of the sectarian state.

But ultimately there are a second set of people who lose out—the Protestant working class. As long as they bind themselves to sectarianism and British imperialism, they will be all the more easily exploited and their ability to fight weakened.

In reality Protestant workers are both agents and victims of Northern Ireland's sectarian state. ■

## UNION LAWS

# Positively dangerous

SOME people may not have taken much notice of the recent TUC conference on positive legislation. But the discussions at it were as significant as those which heralded the Social Contract between the unions and Labour over ten years ago. In that sense it marks another milestone on the TUC's march to the right.

The TUC leadership aims to introduce a 'bill of rights' to protect trade unionists' individual rights in the law.

So, for example, some of the individual rights that Rupert Murdoch was so easily able to trample on when he moved his publications to Wapping will now be enshrined in the bill of rights.

This was the aim of the SOGAT submission to the conference. It calls for the repeal of existing Tory laws, to be replaced by positive legislation protecting individual rights.

These rights included the right to strike after a secret ballot, the right to have closed shop agreements, the right to some secondary picketing and solidarity action.

But far from the bill being a means of strengthening workers' rights, it is a sign of the weakening of the unions in recent years. Such positive legislation is not an additional back-up to the collective rights of trade unions—it is an alternative and a weaker alternative.

SOGAT's advocacy of positive legislation cannot be separated from the new realism of the TUC. Gone is the defiant rhetoric of the early days of Thatcher's rule.

Then there was talk of repeal of the anti-union laws, both from the TUC and from Labour. Today there is much more caution on all sides. That is why the SOGAT proposals are welcomed by many—although not all—of the union leaders.

Positive rights appeal to them on a number of levels. Firstly, they are a means of maintaining certain union powers—which even the most right wing union leaders sometimes need to win strikes, as the example of Wapping shows.

Secondly, they place control of the unions far more in the hands of the official machine. The experience of the last forty years in the United States shows that while individual rights may be substantial, collective rights for rank and file trade unionists are curtailed. Thirdly, such legislation can be very effective in answer to the inevitable charges of union power, come the next election. Kinnock can point to the bill of rights, which gives the right to strike and the right to scab, as showing the even-handedness of Labour.

It is perhaps this final aspect that causes some unions, like the AUEW, a degree of concern. They are worried that such laws will not only make it easier for people to leave unions, but will also make them reconsider why they should be in unions at all. After all, union membership in the US has fallen to 19 percent.

Yet although some union leaders may have qualms, the general tone of the conference was clear. As far as the TUC is concerned, the experience of Wapping, and not of the miners' strike, should be the rule for the future.

The emphasis over Wapping has been placed on the injustice of the printers' lot. They were sacked unjustly, tricked out of their redundancy money after years of producing profits for the newspaper industry. The key method of righting this injustice is to win public opinion at large to the idea that it is wrong. This, coupled with a Labour election victory, will bring about success for the print workers.

It follows from such an analysis that anything which upsets middle class opinion, or the prospects of Labour electorally, must be opposed. So Brenda Dean has argued against delegations from mining areas to Wapping, and has argued against the bad publicity caused by mass pickets.

As we go to press she is engaged in talks with News International aimed at a compromise involving redundancy payments—not reinstatement.

Yet what is patently obvious is that the new realism at Wapping has been anything

but realistic, and has not brought the dispute any nearer to success.

Even so, the handling of the Wapping dispute has become the model, and the bill of rights the panacea, for the Labour shadow cabinet.

They are yet another indication of the political consensus which makes Labour and the TUC virtually indistinguishable from the Social Democrats. But if the TUC conference is any indication, the trend is likely to continue at least till the next election. ■

## NATIONALISM

# The real divide

ONE of the most sickening aspects of the union bureaucracy's role over Wapping has been the appeal to nationalism.

Rupert Murdoch is attacked not because he is a vicious capitalist, but because he is not British. There are calls for a future Labour government to introduce legislation which prohibits people like him from owning businesses in Britain.

Unfortunately, such ideas are not exceptional. There has been a rising tide of nationalist ideas in recent months. Much of the argument about Westland centred around whether Britain would retain an independent helicopter industry. The argument about the sale of Leyland to the US General Motors was not about the future of jobs, but about whether a foreign firm would control the last remnants of the British motor industry.

It is not surprising that such arguments take root in the present climate. Workers are aware of a general level of crisis, but there is not the degree of confidence or of organisation to raise the level of working class struggle. In such situations the power of nationalist arguments will be very strong.

The arguments are, of course, nonsense. It is very convenient to blame Murdoch's policies on his nationality. But although there are divisions inside the British ruling class over his approach, there are many, including Thatcher, who would love to see him succeed.

It is understandable for Midlands car workers to fear the future of their jobs if GM takes them over. But the massive decimation of jobs at Leyland over the past ten years has been presided over by a British owned company.

The reason is simple: the aim of British, American and all other capitalists is fundamentally the same, even if they differ over tactics. It is to increase the level of exploitation, both through job losses and higher



## EGYPT

# Revolt against rulers

'MERCY, mercy, we cannot bear another year.' This was the cry of 17,000 Egyptian police conscripts as they poured out of camps in Cairo for a night and day of destruction.

By the time their mutiny had been brought under control they had not only burned hotels, nightclubs, police stations, buses and cars, but stimulated a similar movement in the nearby industrial centre of Helwan and the southern cities of Assiut and Sohag. They had also shown that Egyptian capitalism is degenerating so fast that the state apparatus itself is no longer reliable.

The rioters were the riot police

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themselves. The Central Security Forces (CSF) are the 300,000-strong force formed in 1969 to deal with the wave of discontent which swept the country during the last years of President Nasser's rule.

Since then they have been used to guard factories and universities, mosques and government buildings, and to control students, workers and the urban poor when strikes and demonstrations have been organised. Current president Husni

### Leyland cars: buying British?

productivity. Their interests are therefore opposed to the interests of the working class internationally.

So when it comes down to it, British bosses are just as likely to stick the boot into 'their' workers if they feel that the competitiveness of their companies is threatened. That is why virtually all the Fleet Street newspapers are now taking advantage of the Wapping dispute to impose massive job cutting deals on their workforce regardless of the nationality of their owners.

This conflict of interest between the working class and ruling class is all too often blurred by the system itself. And appeals to nationalism are one of the major ways in which that blurring takes place. They allow workers to believe that they have something in common with 'their' bosses, and therefore are a very convenient card for the ruling class to play.

Labour has always pandered to these sorts of ideas, and has often as now played a major role in encouraging them. As the crisis continues, and as Kinnock continues to have no way out of it, we are likely to see increasing use of nationalist arguments.

That makes it all the more important for socialists to take every opportunity to counter the nationalist arguments being put forward with alarming frequency. Attacking Murdoch for his nationality only leads print workers up a blind alley. Believing there is a national interest means workers will work harder in the interests of British bosses, not their own interests.

All those arguments have to be countered at work and on the picket lines. ■

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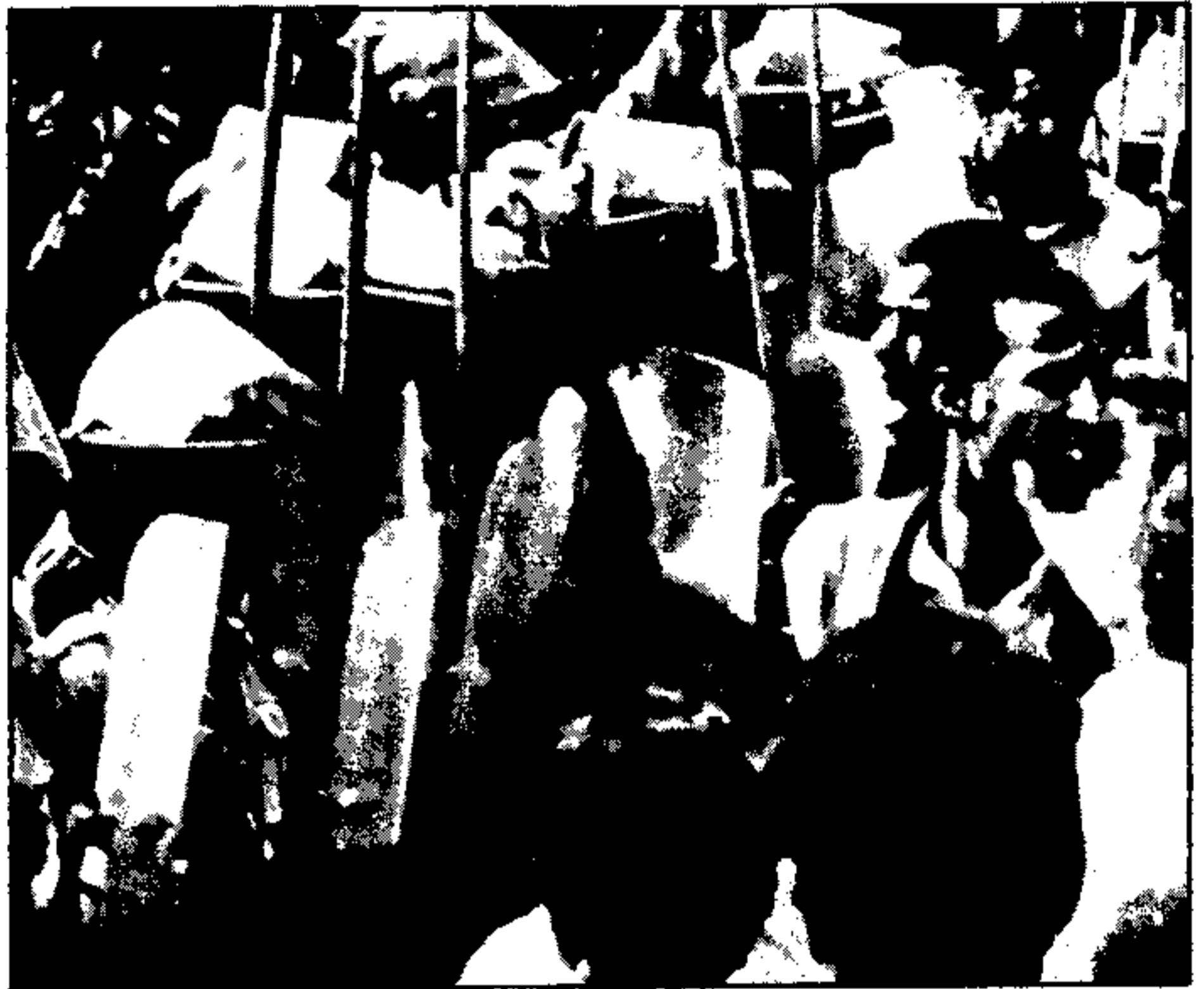
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Mubarak has admitted that the CSF riots were so serious that they 'paralysed' internal security.

The conscripts' call for 'mercy' was a response to the announcement that their term of service was to be increased from three to four years. Their conditions were already insufferable.

Unlike the regular army, which is relatively well paid and enjoys privileges including special shops and hotels, members of the CSF earn £4 a week, are fed poorly, live in camps little better than shanties and are treated as serfs by their officers, for whom they act as servants and even unpaid workers.

If this seems extraordinary for a supposedly key sector of the state apparatus, it merely points up the arrogance of the Egyptian ruling class, which has grown used to turning to this loyal instrument of the state to neutralise popular opposition.



**The Egyptian riot police: now the tables are turned**

Even Mubarak has admitted that the causes of the riots were 'economic', rather than 'political'. This is a recognition that claims that they had been organised by Islamic fundamentalists were false. The CSF is conscripted from the poorest sections of Egyptian society, in particular from the landless peasants and the urban poor who find it most difficult to arrange conscription into the armed forces proper.

Its members rioted for bread, for *ful* (beans—the staple food), for some end to the misery of their overcrowded, flea-bitten conditions. In short, they rioted for the

same reasons that have repeatedly produced strikes and mass protests over the past 15 years.

Only four months ago January's *Socialist Worker Review* described how massive population growth and declining food production are putting enormous pressure on Egypt's workers, peasants and the poor. This crisis has since deepened.

The fall in oil prices has hit Egypt hard. Production has dropped from 900,000 to 600,000 barrels a day and exports are falling fast. Last year oil revenue represented 60 percent of total exports of about £3 billion. This year oil revenue alone could fall by £1 billion. Now the riots have caused a 60 percent drop in tourist arrivals and, according to one estimate, Egypt will lose £350,000 a day in tourist revenue.

Even before these losses the foreign debt was a huge problem. Each Egyptian man, woman and child 'owed' £430 to bankers or foreign governments. Now Mubarak is under more pressure to accept the programme of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which has demanded that the government increase the price of staple foods and fuel, so reducing its enormous food subsidy bills.

Tiny increases in the price of bread have gone ahead, but nothing like enough to satisfy the IMF. Soon Mubarak has to decide whether to take the plunge and really attack the living standards of the poor.

The omens are not good for the Egyptian president. Only a fortnight before the riots workers at the Mehalla al-Kubra textile mill occupied in support of a wage claim. With a workforce of 35,000 the mill is one of the largest textile plants in the world.

In demonstrations in which there was fighting with scabs and police, anti-government slogans were raised. One

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hundred and eleven strikers were arrested as the occupation was put down. The police involved in the operation were the CSF.

Following the conscripts' own protests, the government claimed that civilians had not been involved. This is wrong. Within hours of the first protests young Cairenes were joining in, carrying off whatever they could find in the hotels, nightclubs and shops near the CSF camps.

Had Mubarak not been able to use the army to crush the mutineers, there is every sign that the movement would have spread. Next time there is likely to be a direct confrontation between civilian protestors and the army.

Egyptians will not fail to notice that the government has made major concessions to the conscripts. While 2,000 members of the CSF have been arrested and 21,000 dismissed, the announcement of an increase in service has been described as 'totally unfounded', and Mubarak has agreed to improve wages, food and conditions in the camps. Just as in 1977—when bread riots almost brought down President Sadat—the government has been forced to concede.

The stage is set for further upheavals in which workers and the urban poor struggle to defend themselves against starvation. Mubarak may balk at calling in the CSF, turning directly to the army. There is no guarantee that sections of the armed forces will not turn against the government, though the army is far more coherent than the CSF and a successful intervention may encourage leading officers to expel Mubarak and take power themselves.

This prospect could be provoking much thought in the Pentagon. Having lost the Shah in Iran, President Numeiri in nearby Sudan, and now Marcos in the Philippines, Washington may be cagey about supporting another military dictator. But the prospect of further instability in Egypt—America's closest Arab ally and by far the most important country in the region—may lead them to support army chief Abu Ghazala, seen in Egypt as 'Washington's man'.

The weakness of the legal political parties gives the army added weight. All are likely to be bystanders in further mass protests.

The only significant organisation on the left—the National Progressive Unionist Rally, (*Tagammu*), is a thoroughly reformist organisation under Stalinist leadership, without working class roots. The only real threat to the military is likely to come from the fundamentalist organisations, which have recently been growing stronger, especially among students.

Workers are likely to return to the stage and play a leading role in further mass protests.

But the crisis of leadership in the working class is profound. The hope must now be that further struggles will help produce a new generation of socialists who offer an alternative to the religious reactionaries and the military. ■

## FRANCE

# War of manoeuvre

THE AFTERMATH of the French elections is proving more exciting than the campaign itself. The Socialist Party has managed to do something few thought it capable of—rob the right wing parties of undisputed outright victory.

The Assembly now looks like it used to look under the Fourth Republic (1944-1958): a patchwork quilt of different parties, each sniffing round the spoils of office, none with a commanding majority.

True, the Socialists have lost—they now have 215 seats, whereas they had 283 in 1981—and the right wing coalition of the Gaullist RPR and the centre-right UDF have between them 293 seats (289 was the magic number they had to overtake to be certain of an absolute majority). But the rivalries within the coalition give President Mitterrand plenty of room for manoeuvre—there are at least three contenders to succeed him in the office of president.

Manoeuvre has been the hallmark of Mitterrand's politics. He introduced proportional representation, not in the interests of democracy, but to allow the National Front to steal votes from the traditional right wing parties. That their breakthrough (35 seats in the new assembly) will give a renewed impetus to anti-immigrant feeling is a measure of Mitterrand's cynical calculation of short-term gain. He has nurtured a monster that may yet devour him.

Mitterrand's choice of prime minister is Jacques Chirac, leader of the RPR, the bigger of the parties in the right wing coalition. If he accepts, the clash of political personalities and constitutional powers promises to introduce a degree of instability into French politics that De Gaulle hoped he had eliminated when he drew up the constitution of the Fifth Republic.

The choice of prime minister is a poisoned gift. Mitterrand has enough clout to ensure that whatever goes wrong can be blamed on the right rather than the left, thus strengthening his (rather than his opponent's) position in the presidential elections in two years' time. No wonder Raymond Barre, the most popular politician in France according to the opinion polls, refuses to 'cohabit' with a socialist president.

But not to become prime minister has its perils as well. If Chirac decides to accept,

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and does well, he, rather than Barre, will be able to exploit the prominence of his position.

But if the parliamentary arena is wide open to the delights of politicking, the prospects for the working class are not quite so rosy. The fascists, having been handed a sizeable block of seats by Mitterrand's 'proportional representation', are well placed to take another step forward. The Communist Party, now at the historical nadir of its fortunes (it is difficult now to believe that after the war one in four voted for the communists), will not have either the confidence or the capacity to wage any real resistance to the austerity measures that the new government will inevitably instigate.

Instability in the state machine should be a boon for all those seeking to expose illusions in parliamentarianism—especially as the world crisis will demand fresh sacrifices of the French working class in a way that the boom of the 1950s did not under the Fourth Republic. But whether—in the circumstances of fascist resurgence and CP decline—anything can be made of it remains to be seen. ■

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT

# No rate reprieve

LAST MONTH'S court judgement to impose massive surcharges and disqualify from office 80 Liverpool and Lambeth councillors shows the real nature of Tory democracy.

The courts were clear. By delaying setting a rate in an attempt to get more money for council services from the government, they had, said one of the judges, 'reached a pinnacle of political perversity in their deliberate disregard of statutory duties.'

The case against Liverpool and Lambeth was a test case. Another 220 councillors now stand in the firing line. As we go to press there are reports of action being started against five London boroughs and Sheffield city council.

The courts are skating on legal thin ice. Existing legislation is extremely vague about whether councils have to set a rate at the beginning of the financial year. It is so vague that the Tories are rushing a bill through parliament to make sure that in future there will be no such ambiguity. Nevertheless it didn't stop the courts from finding the 80 guilty.

The use of the law by the Tories amounts to nothing more than a blatant political attack upon left wing Labour councils.

It is not the first time this has occurred. In the London borough of Fulham in 1925, in Poplar in 1927, and in the Derbyshire borough of Clay Cross in 1974, the same law was used and in similar circumstances.

But the surcharged councillors can gain little comfort from Kinnock and the Labour leadership. 'There will be no retrospective legislation' says Kinnock.

He has precedents. In 1973 a Labour Party conference voted overwhelmingly to cancel the surcharges imposed on the 11 Clay Cross councillors who had defied Tory laws.

But in 1974, the newly elected Labour government made plain they would be doing no such thing. The eleven would remain disqualified and bankrupted.

Kinnock has gone one better. By accusing the Liverpool councillors of 'creating grotesque chaos' and of 'pursuing impossibilist policies' at last year's Labour Party conference, he has given anyone who wants to stick the knife into the Liverpool councillors, a cast iron reason for doing so.

Unfortunately neither Liverpool nor Lambeth has been able to combat this. Lambeth councillors have never asked the council workforce for anything more than moral and financial support. So when the courts finally made their judgement, the council was left floundering. On 16 March only just over 100 people turned up to a rally organised in the council's support.

In Liverpool the campaign has been a lot more serious.

But after seeing the streets of Liverpool city centre jam packed with council supporters last year and the year before, the pathetic showing of 400 supporters the day after the court judgement must have left many socialists asking what went wrong.

The problem is political. The whole campaign of left Labour councils to challenge Tory cuts had one fatal flaw—it was tied to Kinnock and the drive to win elections. This meant that despite what the councillors said publicly, they saw the council chamber as the main arena for the battle.

Now they are left looking for a reprieve to the same courts which disqualified them. ■

*Additional notes by Pat Stack, Phil Marshall, Gareth Jenkins and Maureen Watson*



NIGEL HARRIS

## A Big Bang?

ON 1 MARCH, the rule that no more than 29.9 per cent of a member firm of the London stock exchange could be owned by a non-member was ended (an event called in the City 'the little bang'). On 27 October of this year, fixed commissions paid to stock exchange members for trading will end. The level of commissions will become competitively decided. This is known as 'the Big Bang'.

What is the meaning of these apparently trivial events? They come as the culmination of a long drawn out process which, in sum, is as revolutionary as anything else that has occurred in world capitalism. Most people in the City think that the big bang will constitute a major transformation, but nobody knows what the final results will be.

In the long boom in the world system up to 1974, private financial markets grew much faster than the official reserves of governments. This was especially true of the Eurocurrency market which expanded twenty times over between 1970 and 1983. One of the symbols of an officially supervised system was the maintenance of fixed exchange rates by governments. In 1971, the private offshore markets had attained such domination that they swept away the fixed exchange rate system. The combined efforts of the leading states of the world could do nothing to stop it.

Financial instability was considerably increased. The weakness of public finance could only be offset by permitting private finance to flow freely between countries. In 1974, the United States and West German governments dismantled the main controls over the flow of finance between themselves and the rest of the world to encourage short term inflows to strengthen currencies. In 1979, Britain and Japan followed suit. As a result, finance capital flowed freely between those four establishing what is now recognised in the textbooks as 'perfect mobility of capital'.

The British were only just in time. London handles the largest share of the Eurocurrency market, but it could lose that swiftly if conditions for inflow and outflow of finance were more restrictive than in other markets. 1979 was a belated attempt to match 1974 on Wall Street and in Frankfurt.

Once linked to a global market, some surprising things happened. For now finance capital could, in principle, dispense with any particular country. More narrowly, competitive commissions (introduced in the United States in 1975) narrowed margins and forced concentration, the merger of firms at the same time as global integration was taking place.

On the one hand, finance companies tried to diversify into all sectors in order to

balance profit earnings and match their competitors; on the other, they tried to create new giant global general companies, operating in all financial centres on terms of equality with the natives. Out of the Wall Street changes have emerged some new giant general finance companies, poised to take over London and Tokyo: Merrill Lynch, Salomon Brothers, American Express, Shearson Lehman.

In Britain diversification is now well advanced. The banks moved into insurance broking, house mortgages, property development. The building societies moved into banking, and foreign exchange dealing. The trustee savings banks became ordinary banks and ran credit cards. Department stores are set to sell stocks and shares and lend money. Industrial companies—for example, BP and GEC—set up banks (but outside Bank of England control because they do not accept deposits from the public). The small partnerships that used to dominate the stock exchange are being converted to limited liability companies. And overall, in the turmoil of reorganisation the desperate search for staff is bidding up pay to astonishing heights (most recently, Chase Manhattan lost its 13 Eurobond sales and trading staff, bribed with higher pay to other companies).

Key elements in this dissolution of traditional sectors has been both the great increase in competition and radical changes in new technology plus the means to transfer information. The isolated areas of expertise have disappeared as all relevant global data becomes available on one small screen—and prices in all major markets can be presented in one instantaneous format. This is one of the reasons why companies that deal in the hardware of information (for example, British Telecom) or have traditionally transmitted information (for example, Reuters) have also moved into financial activities. The growth sector of Reuters' work is now transmitting share prices globally.

People foresee the emergence of general money centres or financial supermarkets: single companies that handle all types of transactions, from the transmission and storage of financial information, distribution of cash, transfer of credit, retail sale and purchase of stocks and shares, insurance, mortgages, gold and commodity dealings and so on. Some leading companies are well along that road.

One element of this has been the integration of the markets in different countries for trade in stocks and shares. The Eurobond market started the trend twenty years ago, but in the last five years, the value of international equities traded in London has increased from 2½ to 10½



billion dollars. Much of this trade does not go through the established stock exchanges. It is handled by 24 hour telephone markets maintained by the largest security houses and automated trading systems. If the trend continued, it would spell the end of stock exchanges.

This was the reason to break the ancient monopoly (17 jobbers and 200 brokers) of the London stock exchange and open it up both to competition and to foreign entry. For the non-exchange markets which provide the basis for evading the stock exchange have come to dwarf it. The 1982 Eurobond turnover was double the value of the transactions of the New York stock exchange and seven times that of London. With decontrol, the large finance houses are swarming into the London exchange in order to add the vital link in global control between Tokyo and New York. Furthermore, the changes affect all units of capital—industrial companies can now move their stock trading to wherever it is most profitable. Thus, sixty per cent of ICI's stock is now traded in New York.

On 1 March the Californian bank, Security Pacific, was the first into the London stock exchange by increasing its share of the ownership of an exchange member, Hoare Govett, from 29.9 to 80 per cent (Security Pacific already have their own London merchant bank and operate on the Eurocurrency market). Phillips and Drew became part of the Union Bank of Switzerland. Nomura of Japan and Merrill Lynch of New York are next in line.

The pre-eminence of London in global finance can only be secured by increased internationalisation. Japanese banks—with overseas assets in 1985 at 640 billion dollars—have just overtaken United States banks (at 580 billion dollars). It is entirely appropriate that, owning 23 per cent of all the banking assets in Britain, Japanese banks are just about to overtake the position of British banks in Britain.

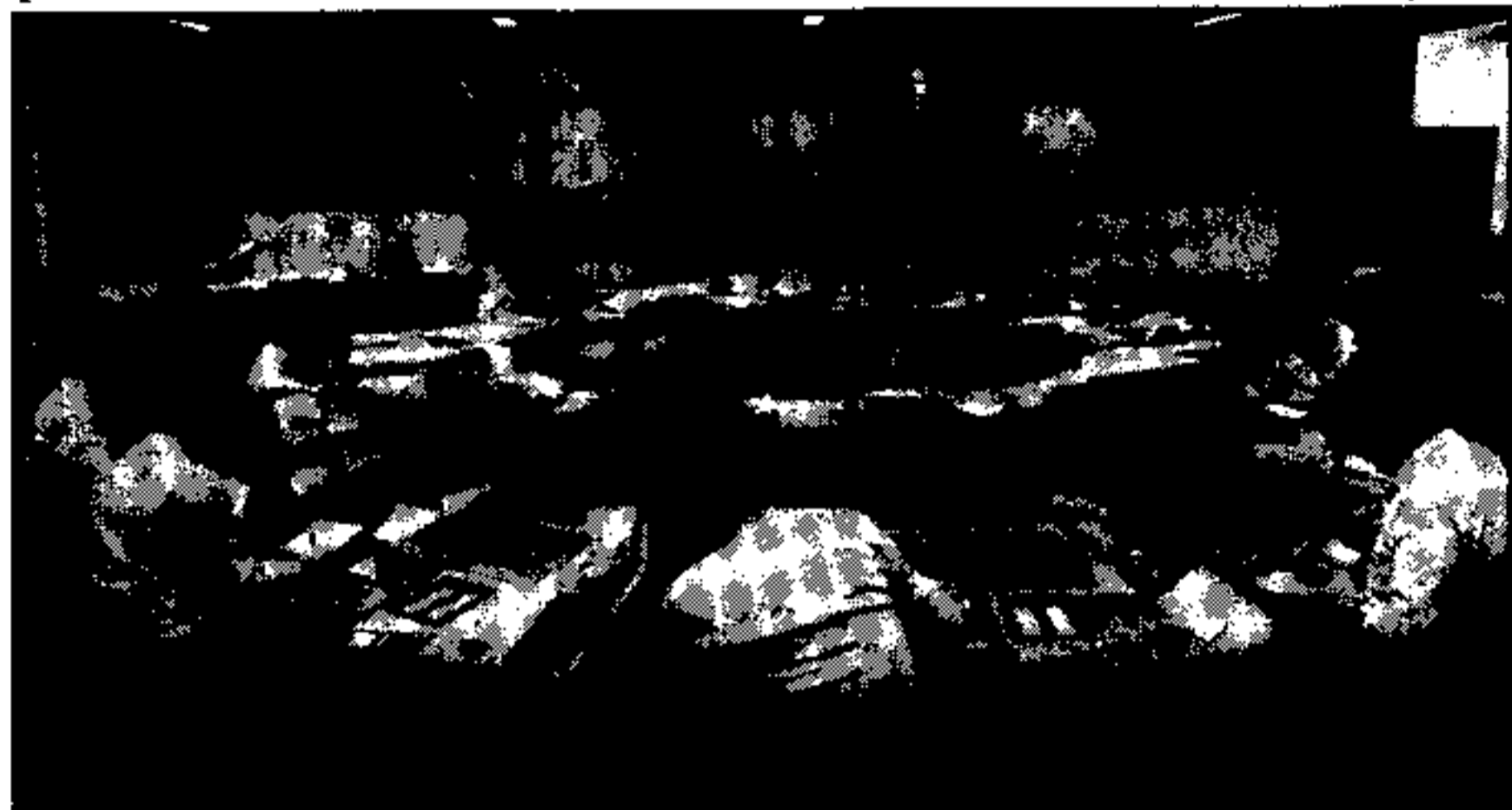
The stock exchange has been driven to liberalise by the pressure of the world financial markets. But it is still very nervous. It could fail to capture the new global equities market. The New York stock exchange has just applied to become a 'self-regulatory organisation' on the London exchange in order to keep an eye on its New York members. The two stock exchanges are colluding to try to ensure they keep what they have. The joint statement of the two exchanges speaks of their new relationship as 'a major step in the revolutionary development of a global trading system' (in finance—NH); they then add bravely, 'within the framework provided by the world's leading stock exchanges.'

They ought to be nervous since, with new technology, the world market need not be in any particular place at all. Perhaps this observation underlies a certain amount of movement away from the City—Morgan Guaranty to Stratford; Citibank to

Lewisham; Chartered Consolidated to Ashford; Sun Life to Bristol; Midland to Sheffield, and Barclays to Poole. But there are still queues of the world's banks to get into the City (the number of foreign registered banks in Britain was 114 in 1967, and is now over 400).

The scale of operations is far beyond the control or regulation of any particular government or any likely combination of governments. As the *Financial Times* put it recently: 'The national frontiers which once ensured that national markets would remain broadly self-contained and thus responsive to national supervision are becoming completely permeable.' National regulations become unenforceable where companies can slip out of the national net to another centre. Companies cannot be suspended from trading if they trade in many centres.

This is part of the reason for the recent spate of City scandals—in Lloyds, the stock exchange, the tin market and the ramifications of a staid and respectable bank, Johnson Matthey, dabbling in gold speculation in order to rob the government



of VAT. As institutions combine, prices can be made to rise or fall before you buy or sell. A recent enquiry into these 'insider deals' by the stock exchange concluded:

'Time and again our investigations have run up against a brick wall of an offshore company, whose true ownership we cannot discover. We can track down the small insider deals which are done in this country, but the big fish go offshore.'

Gingerly the government is trying to formulate new rules and regulatory agencies. It is a difficult business because the rules must balance the degree of order and honesty required to safeguard the validity of transactions against restrictions that will deter dealings in London or allow overseas markets to outbid London for the deals. The Eurocurrency market came to London originally because Wall Street's rules were more restrictive. The reverse process can happen, or there can be movements to other offshore markets—in the Caribbean, Luxembourg, or Singapore.

The flurry of scandals, sudden changes,

the disappearance of well known landmarks in the system, are the symptoms of momentous changes. Understanding them is constantly clouded by an archaic nationalism. For the changes are not about the takeover of the City by 'US banks', or 'Japanese banks' so much as the use of London as a key element in the transactions of the new world capital.

In the long history of capitalism, there have been changes in the law or regulations which have been forced by a long prior process of evolution but which then precipitate even more radical changes. The 1862 Companies Act is of this kind. It allowed a capitalist to borrow and operate with capital other than his own. A joint stock company under limited liability gave the capitalist access to an unknown multitude of lenders (that henceforth played no role at all in the management and control of the firm—they simply drew, as it were, a rent on their loan). As Hilferding put it, commenting on a similar change in Germany, the emergence of the corporation—'The corporation can draw upon the whole supply of free money

capital'. The legal change signified the emergence of the *class* of capital as opposed to a group of individual capitals and capitalists. Accumulation no longer depended solely upon short term returns or the profits of the individual company.

But that was *national* capital, whether British or German. What we are now witnessing is the escape from simply national capital to a global pool of capital, the source of which in terms of countries is unknown. It is a change even more momentous than the establishment of national pools of capital.

It is quite unclear what phases the emergence of world capital will go through, what methods will be used to establish order in an unsupervised market, what will be the complex patterns of relationships between the international interests of world capital and the national interests of States. Can the competing clusters of global capital maintain an order while subordinating the States to the administration of localities.

So the big bang on 27 October does have some significance. ■

# Saying yes to NATO

WITH A mixture of manipulation, lies and appeals to voters' political loyalty, the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) has managed to win last month's referendum in favour of staying in NATO. Some 52 percent voted yes, as opposed to 40 percent no. Only in the Basque country, Catalonia and the Canary Islands did the no vote triumph.

From the outset the Socialists have completely distorted both the nature of the referendum and NATO itself.

After having made a hundred and eighty degree turn on their previous position against NATO only mass pressure forced them in the end to carry through their pre-1982 electoral promise of holding a referendum on the subject.

The PSOE have shown they were prepared to go to any lengths in order to convince the electorate of the need to vote yes, through removing the word 'NATO' from all their propaganda and replacing it with the innocuous and fictitious 'Atlantic Alliance', and by phrasing the referendum question in a way designed to cause the maximum confusion. Remaining in NATO would be linked to a reduction of US troops in Spain, no nuclear weapons on Spanish soil and no entry into the 'alliance's' military structure.

The government's argument was based on the idea that NATO equals progress, modernity and the best guarantee for peace.

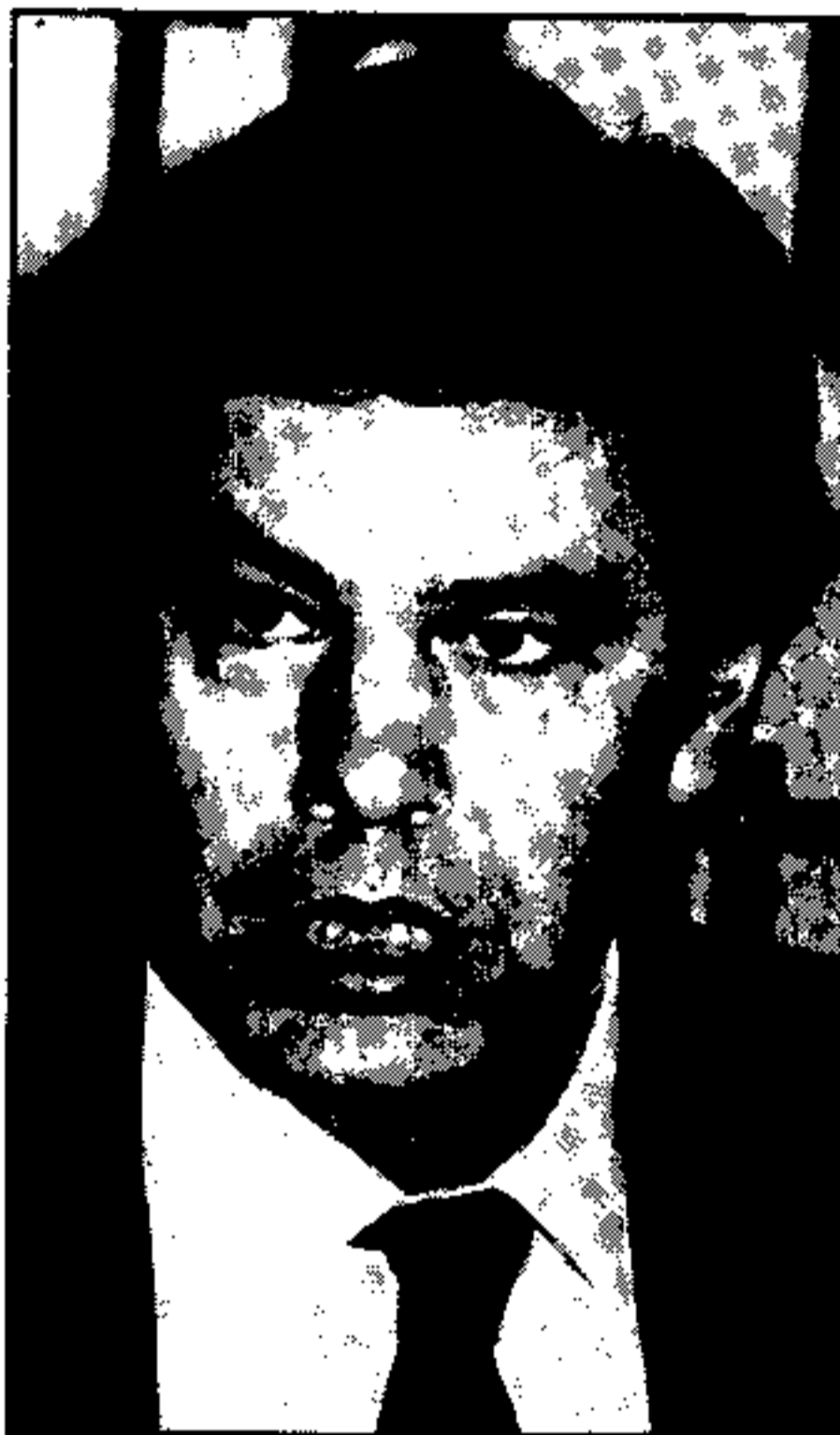
The only alternative to being in NATO, the Socialists claimed, was to maintain bilateral relations with the USA. Typical of their intervention was a speech by Gonzalez at a rally to close the campaign when he managed to mention the word 'peace' 40 times and the 'Atlantic Alliance' only twice.

As the campaign progressed, so the tone of the PSOE's argument became more ludicrous, for example to vote 'Yes' was 'a vote for the poorer classes'; 'No' meant unemployment and that Spain would have to leave the EEC; that NATO represented democracy and economic prosperity.

Not surprisingly the PSOE have avoided public debate on the question. The complete domination of NATO by the USA, its role as a totally military and nuclear alliance and the history of some of its components—Greece, Portugal and Turkey, were all conveniently forgotten.

Moreover this was a vote for Felipe Gonzalez and for the PSOE to vote no would, it was argued, only help the right.

The PSOE's campaign was designed to win and in this it was successful. The socialist government relied heavily on the mass media to get their message across. By running the referendum on the basis of a general election those who favoured the no



**Felipe Gonzalez**

vote were virtually excluded from having space on TV as only six MPs—the four communists and two left nationalists—supported this position.

The state-run television company gave preference to government and pro-NATO statements in all its news programmes. Two days before the vote they even went as far as to present millions of viewers with a surprise fifty minute 'interview' with Gonzalez instead of the scheduled Sunday night football round-up.

In many localities Socialist-controlled municipal cleaning services were used to conveniently remove 'unwanted' anti-NATO propaganda. Likewise public venues were often mysteriously unavailable for events in favour of the no vote.

None of this should surprise anyone, coming as it does from a government that has continually forced down working class living standards and been quite prepared not only to leave untouched but to enthusiastically use the repressive state apparatus inherited from Franco.

The right, much to the alarm of most of their western European counterparts, called for abstention, arguing cynically that the referendum should never have taken place at all and that even if the government lost there was no way Spain would leave NATO. Nevertheless, as the vote approached and opinion polls continued to predict a 'no' victory so the right mellowed in its criticisms.

Opposition to the government has been

led principally by the state-wide Coordinating Committee of Pacifist Organisations (CEOP). This campaign has its origins in a number of local initiatives the most important being the Anti-NATO Committee in Madrid. The campaign itself has been massive, with thousands of local activities and a huge 800,000 demonstration in Madrid in February. But the peace campaign has little resources.

The CEOP was established as a nationwide campaign in July 1983 and is composed of hundreds of local committees based principally in working class areas, workplaces and colleges. Its structure is open and democratic.

A whole range of other bodies such as trade unions, women's groups, tenants associations and cultural organisations are also affiliated. All parties to the left of the PSOE formally support the Coordinating Committee without having direct representation.

The CEOP is unique among European peace movements for the relatively important role played in its leadership by the revolutionary left, principally the Movimiento Comunista, and its subsequent radical politics.

From the outset revolutionaries along with a majority of non-aligned activists, worked enthusiastically to build a broad and militant campaign with a strong working class base. In fact the Madrid Anti-NATO Committee was initially modelled quite consciously on the British Anti Nazi League.

This intervention, along with the political content of the campaign—its clearly anti-imperialist message—has meant that the Spanish movement has not suffered from the moderate and reformist orientation common to other European peace campaigns.

Others opposed to a yes vote included the Young Socialists (JJSS) and the Communist Party (PCE), though the former did little to campaign against the referendum and even called for a 'yes' vote on TV a few days before the referendum because they didn't want to damage the government. The PCE was reluctant at first to join the united campaign and only did so after its own separate initiatives did not appear so fruitful. This has meant their influence on the orientation of the CEOP has been severely restricted.

In part to try and overcome this and also with future elections in mind the PCE set up their own Civic Platform against NATO in the weeks preceding the referendum. This campaign, although collaborating with the CEOP, had a more respectable and institutional image.

The vote is a defeat for the left. It is a particularly bad blow because so many activists believed they would win, and underestimated the possibility of losing.

The campaign now is focusing on making sure that Gonzalez sticks to the conditions which he stipulated—especially in ending the bilateral agreement with the US. ■

**Andy Durgan**

# Free speech for all?

RECENT events in the student world have thrown many socialists into confusion. This confusion centres round the application of the National Union of Students' 'no platform' policy. In the past months this policy has been used to deny a platform to a whole range of people whose ideas are very far from the original intention of the ban.

So Tory ministers have been attacked in the name of 'no platform', and in a bizarre twist to the policy last month, a black students' society at South Bank Poly was 'no platformed' for listening to tapes of the American black nationalist leader, Louis Farrakhan, who has made anti-Semitic statements.

These bannings have at best caused confusion and have at worst led to allegations that socialists will try to ban everyone with whom they do not agree.

It is worthwhile in such circumstances to consider what was the idea behind no platform originally, and how it developed in this particular direction.

The slogan 'no platform for racists and fascists' was raised inside the student movement as early as 1973 in response to the growing toehold of the organised extreme right and fascists. The argument behind it was very specific. Fascist and racist organisations had a particular aim: to organise against black people and other racial minorities and drive them off the campuses—and of course ultimately drive them out of the country altogether. Their arguments were not based on rational debate, but on race hatred.

The experience of fascism in Germany and other countries before the war demonstrated that fascists could not be treated as simply another political party. They would use democratic channels to build their support, and then suppress all forms of political opposition—not simply left wing organisations, but trade unions, campaigning groups and so on.

It was therefore argued that it was not enough to challenge such organisations to debate—they had to be prevented from gaining a platform to propagate their ideas.

It was also extended to those racists who were organised in groups like the Monday Club. These had very similar ideas to the fascists and were also prepared to organise along racist lines. The policy was never extended to those who simply held some racist ideas—probably the majority of most trade union or student union members. The way to deal with those ideas—of say, support for immigration controls, or for the general line of the popular press—was through open and democratic debate. Here socialists could hopefully win at least some of the arguments against racism.

The organised racists and fascists were to

be restricted—denied free speech—precisely to protect the democratic rights of the majority. An NUS pamphlet published at the time explained why very well:

'We reject the view that the restriction of fascist organisations in this way is to deny all freedom of expression; our aim is to make the ideal of freedom of assembly and expression meaningful in reality. To turn the problem of "free speech" from a practical into an abstract question is to jeopardise the position of the labour movement and its defence of democratic rights, and to allow fascists and racists to shelter under the democratic freedoms when their ultimate aim is to destroy such freedoms.'

The argument had a certain amount of success. 'No platform' meant stopping the fascists from marching where possible, and preventing them from holding rallies and meetings. Sizeable counter demonstrations were mobilised: in 1973 and 74 at Red Lion Square in London, in 1974 in Leicester and in 1977 in Wood Green. These and many others culminated in the successful mass mobilisation against the National Front in Lewisham, and the subsequent founding of the Anti Nazi League.

By 1979 the NF had become a spent force, on the margins of the political scene, and the argument about fighting the nazis was hardly a central one.

But, although the NUS leadership was by now embarrassed by its no platform policy (removing its commitment to stopping the fascists 'by any means necessary' in the late seventies), the policy itself didn't disappear, and in fact was extended by the early eighties to be not only against

unspecified 'racists' but against 'sexists' as well.

This was the result of two things. Firstly, there was the growing awareness among a layer of young people of the racist and sexist nature of capitalist society. This meant that quite large groups of students could feel very strongly about the issues and want to take quite radical action against them.

Secondly, however, there was a growth in the level of tokenism about how to deal with the issues. By the early eighties, NUS conferences were riddled with points of order objecting to remarks supposedly discriminating against women, blacks, gays, disabled people and so on. Most of the objections were trivial and a few downright stupid. Nearly all could have been dealt with by argument, not no platform.

But the tokenism was a reflection of the tokenism towards the various movements that we have witnessed over recent years, and which even Kinnock is often happy to encourage. It went hand in hand with a general move to the right in the student movement and so has become even more meaningless. Despite the no platform policy, there are more college rags, with their racist and sexist magazines, than there were ten years ago.

So the policy often means little in confronting racism and sexism on more than an individual level. But what is more, it broadens the definition of no platform to an almost unworkable degree. The original no platform went for stopping organised fascists and racists, because their organisation was such a threat. That is not the case with individual members of the rugby club, however noxious they might be. Those people have to be defeated politically, in open and hopefully large union meetings.

To some extent the same is true of Tory ministers and MPs. They have horrible racist and sexist ideas, and are responsible for all sorts of anti-working class measures.



*Should these people be allowed to speak?*

But again, their ideas can be defeated politically, and many Tory students can be won to seeing that those ideas are wrong—if socialists know how to argue with them.

That is not at all to say we don't organise protests against such people. These are often very successful. But a protest against Tory minister Waddington at Manchester, or Victoria Gillick in Sheffield, should not be graced with the title of 'no platform'.

Racists and sexists should not go unchallenged in union meetings. But the way we challenge again has to be sensitive and not just a blanket ban.

Understanding this makes it easier for us to understand the tactics that have caused so much trouble in recent months. We have to make a distinction between the organised fascists and extreme racists—like Harrington at North London Poly, or the Tory MPs Harvey Proctor and John Carlisle (who have extreme-right links)—and mainstream Tory MPs. We deny the right of free speech to those who want to destroy free speech altogether.

There are of course situations where socialists might oppose the right of others to have a platform (for example where counter-revolutionaries are plotting to sabotage a revolution; or even where scabs are trying to mobilise a back to work movement). But those examples do not apply in the present situation.

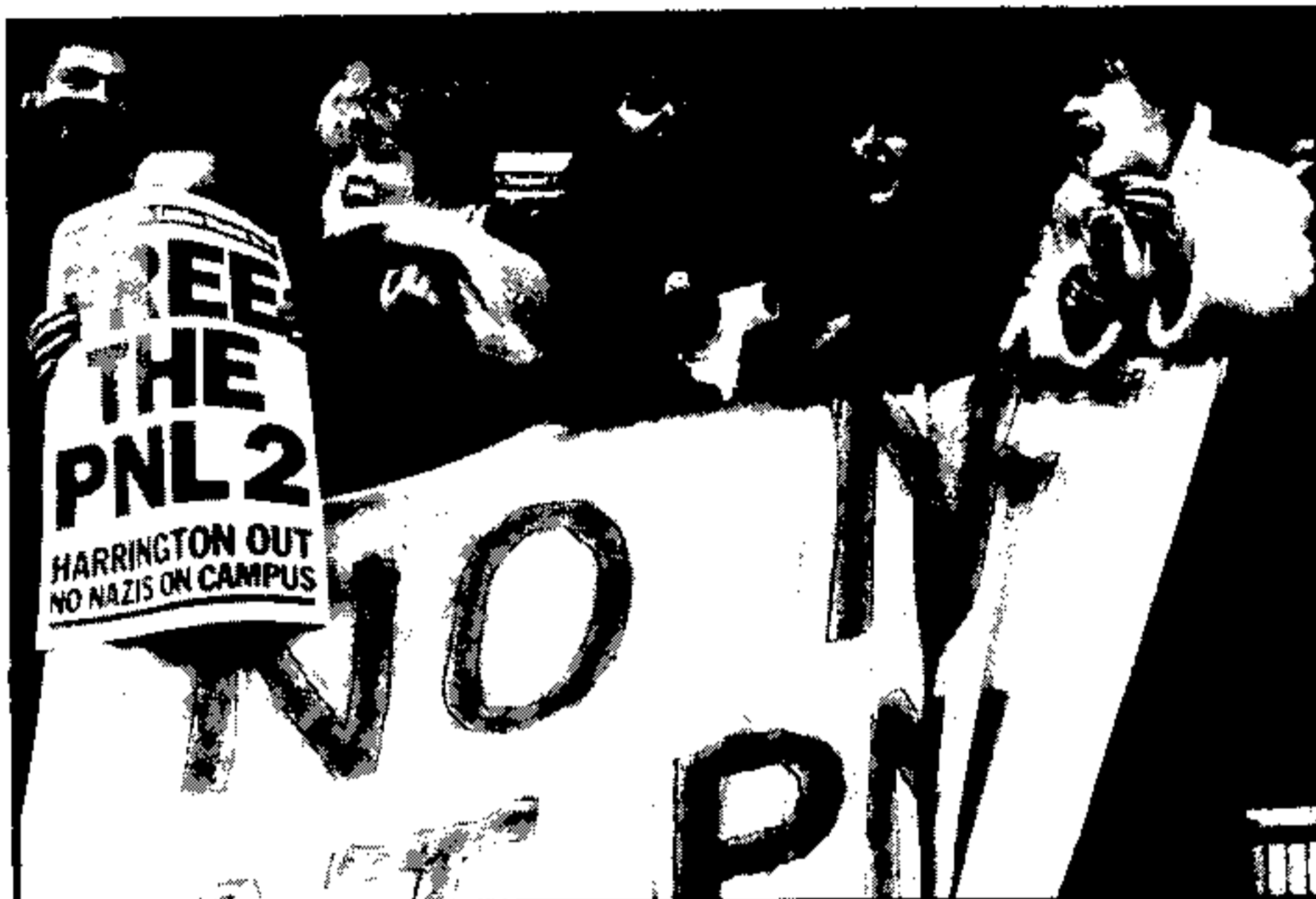
Even with racists and fascists we have to adopt tactics which fit. There is no point in fifty students storming the stage where a rightwinger is speaking if they are incapable of mobilising wider numbers. Socialists have to think in situations like this that many people will oppose these rightwingers—so how do we get them involved in the maximum activity?

This is important both in terms of the protest itself and in terms of the aftermath. At places where small numbers have taken direct action they have all too often found themselves threatened with victimisation. A large demonstration at the time is much greater protection against such threats.

With racist lecturers, students etc, the campaign has of necessity to be much longer and has to be as wide as possible. The Harrington campaign was successful both because it was based on very militant tactics and because it involved far wider numbers of students than simply the existing left, including the philosophy students on Harrington's course.

Similar campaigns against a racist lecturer at Bristol university, and a fascist student at Plymouth need to get similar levels of support if they are to succeed. And they need to mobilise round specific aims—it is no good including a shopping list of demands, including the total abolition of racism in society, in a campaign to get rid of a racist lecturer. The wider issues should be taken up in Socialist Worker Student Society meetings, in *Socialist Worker* and *Socialist Worker Review*.

It is also worth remembering that the no platform policy has always been aimed at those who wanted to maintain oppression



Large numbers of students were mobilised against Harrington

inside this society. We have always to distinguish between the racism of the oppressor and that of the oppressed. That is why the banning of the black society at South Bank is wrong. We have to argue that the ideas of Farrakhan are wrong, and often reactionary. He is totally misguided to see the oppression of blacks in America stemming even in part from another oppressed group, the Jews. American blacks are even more misguided to believe that Farrakhan has any answers to the problems of black workers.

But he cannot be equated with the racists inside the National Front, who want to deny the rights of all oppressed groups.

The argument about no platform is unlikely to go away in the next month or two. The NUS leadership are trying to reverse the present no platform policy. They are supported by those like the SDP who are already campaigning round the question in colleges like Lancaster.

Reversal of the policy would be a defeat for the left. It must fight to maintain the right of students to deny racists and fascists a platform. There are signs that the executive will not have an easy ride on the question. Even at Oxford University, which held a recent referendum on the subject, over 2,000 students voted to keep the no platform policy although it was defeated. Local campaigns have often been very successful, and show little sign of going away.

But the policy will only be defended successfully if its supporters avoid two things. The first is to widen the policy far too far, and therefore allow the right wing to make capital from particular issues. The second is to get trapped into allowing the right to pose as the defenders of free speech. Nothing could be further from the truth. ■

Lindsey German

LOUIS FARRAKHAN

## The false prophet

Recently the Hackney Black Peoples Organisation caused a furore by inviting Louis Farrakhan, the American Black Muslim leader to this country. Farrakhan has been widely quoted for making anti-semitic remarks to meetings of thousands of people. Farrakhan is director of the organisation, the Nation of Islam. His programme is called POWER (People Organized and Working for Economic Rebirth). POWER is planning to manufacture and distribute household products such as detergent, soap, toothpaste, toilet paper and napkins in the black community. It has been funded by a \$5 million loan from Libya's Colonel Qaddafi.

Clearly, many of those who argued to ban

Farrakhan did so on racist grounds. We do not want to line up with those racists. But that doesn't mean we defend his politics. We reprint here an article from *Socialist Worker*, the paper of the International Socialist Organisation in the US.

IN THE run up to a rally at Madison Square Garden last year, which attracted 30,000 people, a campaign against Farrakhan was launched by Mayor Ed Koch and the news media—ignoring many of Farrakhan's attacks on US policy, and exaggerating the content of many of his statements.

The chief controversy over Farrakhan has centred on his remarks about Jews. In the course of his nationwide tour,

Farrakhan called Judaism a 'dirty religion' and a 'gutter religion', and he referred to Hitler as a 'great man'. At his Los Angeles meeting in September, he told 15,000 people that Jews were 'not the chosen people of God'—Blacks are. He predicted that 'with political power, 40 million Blacks can be as wise and manipulative as the Jews in America today.'

At the New York meeting, after quoting some of the same biblical verses used by the 'Christian Identity' movement—a fundamentalist neo-Nazi grouping—to provide theological justification for anti-Semitism, Farrakhan compared himself to Jesus. He stated, 'Jesus had a controversy with the Jews. Farrakhan has a controversy with the Jews. Jesus was hated by the Jews. Farrakhan is hated by the Jews.'

As the crowd cheered him on, Farrakhan added, 'I am your last chance, Jews. You can't say "never again" to God, 'cause when He puts you in an oven, you are in one indeed!'

A few days before the rally, a group of black and white politicians and religious leaders held a news conference denouncing Farrakhan. In response, Farrakhan singled out City Clerk David Dinkins, a powerful black New York City politician, calling him a 'silly Tom' and saying that people of Dinkins' sort did 'the masters' bidding' because 'they fear white people. But they have to learn to fear the people that they are supposed to represent. Do you feel we ought to let them live?' The crowd answered 'No'.

Supporters argue that Farrakhan at least opposed US intervention in Central America, and—while distancing themselves from some of his comments about Jews—they argue that his call for black political and economic 'empowerment' is quite positive. Some contend that, after all, in the initial phase of his political development the politics of Malcolm X were quite similar to Farrakhan's. Others have argued that Farrakhan has simply been quoted out of context.

But this is completely mistaken. For years, Farrakhan has argued in support of a version of black capitalism. Malcolm X appealed to those who wanted to *fight* capitalism—not uphold it. The comparison between Farrakhan and Malcolm X is even more ludicrous when one considers the fact that Farrakhan was one of Malcolm's harshest detractors. In a December 1964 article in *Muhammad Speaks*, the Nation of Islam paper—nine months after Malcolm X's break with the group—Farrakhan wrote that 'such a man as Malcolm is worthy of death'. Malcolm was assassinated two months later.

Still, with a straight face, Farrakhan announced in New York, 'I'm warning you, Mr Reagan, you have killed your last black leader when you killed Martin Luther King and Malcolm X.'

Farrakhan is intent on becoming the black nationalist leader of the 1980s, and he is well on his way there, though his rise has been years in the making. In 1975, Imam W D Muhammad, the successor-son

of long-time black Muslim leader Elijah Muhammad, completely transformed the group, bringing it in line with orthodox Islamic teaching.

Farrakhan served in the group for two years before breaking off to form a group exposing Elijah's race-oriented views. Recently Imam W D Muhammad's Muslim Mission dissolved, eliminating the organised opposition to Farrakhan's Islamic credentials.

Farrakhan's vision is one of racial separation. And just as that vision led black nationalist leader Marcus Garvey to meet with the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s to discuss their common interests, the same vision has led Farrakhan to relate to white supremacists, some of whom have expressed support for him.

At an October 10 summit meeting of neo-Nazi and other white supremacist leaders held on a Michigan farm, one leader declared, 'The enemy of my enemy—he is my friend. I salute Louis Farrakhan and anyone else who stands up against Jews.'

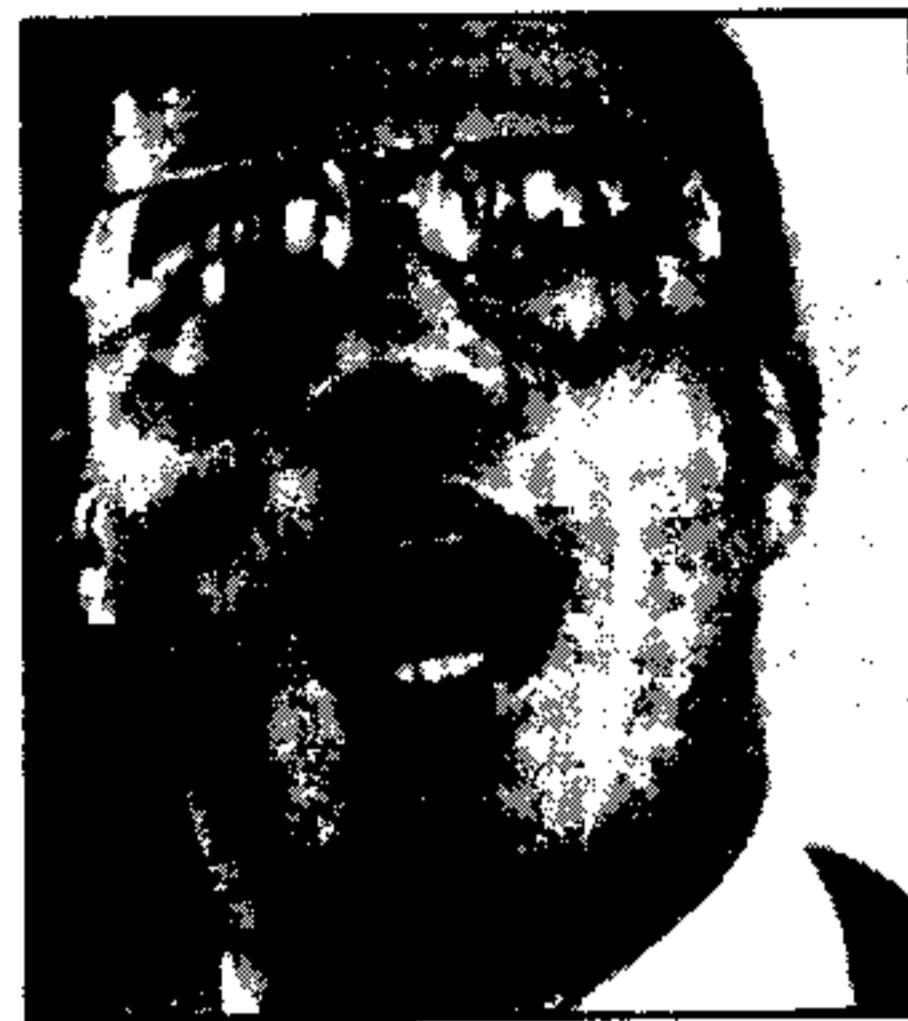
Thomas Metzger, former grand dragon of the California Knights of the Ku Klux Klan and present head of the White American Political Association (which he describes as a white nationalist group) agreed. 'America is like a rotting carcass. The Jews are living off the carcass like the parasites they are. Farrakhan understands this.' Metzger was personally invited to attend Farrakhan's Los Angeles address.

## **'For years Farrakhan has argued in support of a version of black capitalism'**

Farrakhan's ideas about racial separation are hardly new, but the depth of his anti-Semitism sets him apart from the likes of Marcus Garvey and Elijah Muhammad. Garvey, one of Elijah Muhammad's ideological mentors, was actually a strong supporter of Zionism.

Farrakhan appears to have stumbled into his anti-Semitism, but since then he has continued to dig himself in ever deeper. The controversy began when Jesse Jackson accepted Farrakhan's offer to provide him with protection against threats made by the Jewish Defence League during Jackson's presidential campaign. Soon after, Farrakhan made the speech in which he warned Jews to leave Jackson alone, and made the radio broadcast in which he referred to Hitler as a great man.

The reference to Hitler was ironic since it is standard Nation of Islam rhetoric to use the analogy of Hitler's rise to caution blacks against the dangers of integration. The moral of the story is that since Jews thought they were integrated into German



**Louis Farrakhan**

society and then were annihilated, the same will happen to blacks if they fail to separate.

When Farrakhan first referred to Judaism as a 'dirty religion' he was discussing the Zionists' use of religious justification for the occupation of Palestine. But he has never made a distinction between Zionism and Judaism. And Farrakhan has persisted in making anti-Semitic statements—mainly indistinguishable from those of classic anti-Semitism.

Farrakhan's popularity, according to Don Wycliff, a *New York Times* reporter who has covered the leader for over a decade, is due to the fact that 'he assures blacks they are strong, intelligent and capable, not doomed to permanent victimisation, but destined for success and power. He argues that black freedom and self-sufficiency do not depend on the charity of others but on the action of blacks themselves.'

Far from providing a way forward for blacks, Farrakhan offers a dead-end for the mass of blacks. Worse, his movement will channel many young activists away from the sort of perspective that can actually challenge the root cause of black oppression—capitalism.

It is, of course, true that many right-wingers and Zionists have attacked Farrakhan, including New York City's right-wing Mayor Koch. But this does not make Farrakhan's politics something to defend or uphold as a way forward. The notion which says 'my enemy's enemy is my friend' must be utterly rejected.

Farrakhan is not the Malcolm X of the future—nor does he offer any road forward. The strength of his appeal in black communities is a sign of the depth of the crisis and political vacuum that exists in black America.

The real enemy of blacks in the US is not the Caucasian race but the ruling class. And that is the same enemy for white workers. Clinging to race as the central divide in society only strengthens the ability of the ruling class to maintain the status quo, because racism—white racism—is the single most significant force which divides the American working class against itself. ■

# Jobless prosperity

TWO sharply contrasting images of the state of the British economy can be drawn from the news of recent months.

There is the image of industrial decay and rising unemployment which has been with us now for over a decade. Despite the Tories' blatant fiddling of the figures the number out of work reached a new record of 3,400,000 or 14 percent of the working population in January.

Despite all the talk of recovery manufacturing industry is still producing 5 percent less than it was in 1979 (though 10 percent more than in 1981). North Sea oil revenues are falling rapidly. Investment levels remain depressed. A significant section of the ruling class is voicing its fears of the future and its discontent with Thatcherite politics.

But there is another side to all this which might well make you wonder what many British capitalists have got to complain about. Profits for all British industrial and commercial companies (not including the returns from North Sea oil, or the banks) have risen by 70 percent since the depths of the slump in 1981.

In the same period dividends to shareholders have also risen by about two-thirds on average (more than twice as fast as the increase in wages). The nominal value of their shares has gone up even faster, more than doubling as the stock market continues to boom (see graph for the *Financial Times* Ordinary Share Index).

Perhaps Thatcher and Tebbit are not just having us on when they talk about five years of recovery. Perhaps they just prefer not to mention that the recovery has been a trifle lopsided, combining riches for some with misery and worsening poverty for the unemployed, the old and the low-paid.

In the *Financial Times*, however, commentator Samuel Brittan has continued to stress the benefits of Thatcherism. As he wrote on 27 February: 'The last few years have seen booming stock markets and booming profits—the latter at least seem set to continue. At the same time unemployment has continued to rise. In other words "jobless prosperity".'

The figures for rising profits, spelt out in detail in the January 1986 issue of *Labour Research*, and the *Treasury Economic Report* of January/February 1986, are indisputable. Income from abroad on the growing pile of overseas investment by British companies explains part of their gains. Changes in the tax laws may have affected accounting procedures which served to understate profits substantially in earlier years.

The most spectacular profits in recent years have certainly been made from oil, and these are liable to decline in the next

year or so. But even after all these adjustments have been made, the chart shows that the 'net real rate of return' (after allowing for inflation) has risen to around 8 percent or back to the level of 1973, for non-oil companies operating in Britain.

That represents a rise from the disastrously low figures of only a 3 percent rate of profit in 1981. A similar recovery in profits came after the slump of 1974-76, as the graph shows. That did not prevent the economy plunging back into slump again from 1979. But the profits recovery this time has been slightly more substantial. Indeed according to commentators such as Brittan the fall in the oil price will mean a transfer of some of those bloated oil profits back to industrial companies. They think that the recovery will continue.

## 'Profits for all British Industrial and commercial companies... have risen by 70 percent'

All this raises some important questions. Why or how has this increase in profits taken place, especially given the rise in wages for those in work about which so much fuss has been made? How does it fit with the Marxist explanation of the crisis in terms of a falling rate of profit? Why hasn't the increase in profits produced more investment and growth for the British economy? Last, but not least, how does this affect an explanation of the rows and splits within the British ruling-class which have become so much more intense in the last year.

Firstly, we have to clearly distinguish between what economists call the 'secular' trend (taking place over a long period of time) and the 'cyclical fluctuations' (the ups and downs of the economy as it moves from slump to recovery back into slump again). It is the long-run, secular decline in profitability from the early 1960s evident in the graph, and even more marked in other major industrial countries than in Britain (because profits in Britain were low to start with), which explains why the system entered into the protracted crisis of the 70s and 80s.

But within the long crisis the system's weakness makes it prone to sudden drops in the level of investment, or cuts in demand. These slumps themselves cause a sharp fall in profits as companies find themselves operating well below full capacity.

But as a result of the slump capacity is reduced as factories are closed down and

workers thrown onto the dole. Investment revives a bit as companies replace equipment that has worn out or become out of date. Government spending (even in Britain) may help to prop up demand, if only by paying out dole money. World trade recovers. All of these factors mean that companies move from operating at perhaps only 60 percent of capacity to 80 percent of capacity. This in turn explains the largest part of the increase in profits both in 1976-79, and since 1981.

In both periods British capital benefitted from a revival in the world economy as a whole. Indeed since 1981 it has gained from the lop-sided nature of the world recovery. British companies have increased their profits on investments in the booming American market, and pushed up profit margins on their exports to the USA (even though these have not increased in volume very much). At the same time they have benefitted from the collapse in raw material prices which has devastated many countries in the Third World.

But there is a critical difference between the recovery of the late 70s and that since 1981. In the earlier period companies made significant gains in profits as a result of the success of the Social Contract pushed through by the Labour government and the union leaders. As a result of that the level of real wages for many workers actually fell.

This time round it's been different. Real wages have not fallen. Instead companies have rebuilt their profits through a much more painful process of closing down huge amounts of capacity and writing off chunks of their capital.

Squeezed by a collapse in demand, intense foreign competition and soaring interest rates, industrial companies slashed their operations ruthlessly. A number of smaller companies and one or two larger ones such as Dunlop have disappeared. Those that survived did so by eliminating all but their most efficient and profitable plant. This has shown up in the figures as a significant increase in productivity and profitability. But that's a lot like improving the batting average of a cricket team by eliminating the five weakest players and playing with only six men.

Managements have also taken advantage of the slump and the threat of redundancy to push through changes on the shop-floor. Speed-ups on the assembly line, changes in working practices summed up under the label of 'flexibility', in some places increased automation, have all produced genuine gains in profits. But as Dave Beecham spelt out recently, (February *SWR*) these gains have often had to be purchased with increases in pay well above the level of inflation.

Those wage increases were tolerable as long as productivity was rising even faster. Unit labour costs (wage-costs per unit of output, a critical measure) rose by only around 2-3 percent in 1983 and 1984, well below the rate of inflation. But as increases in productivity have slowed down, wage increases have begun to hurt. Unit labour costs rose by around 6 percent in 1985 on one estimate.

That is one indicator of the continuing pressures on British capitalism. The other is that in many industries the destruction of capital has still not been enough. There has been a certain amount of restructuring and rationalisation, the writing off of old and inefficient capital which Marx argued helps to restore the rate of profit. But in the world as a whole, there is still too much capacity in key sectors such as steel, ship-building, petrochemicals and vehicles. Intense international competition for survival continues.

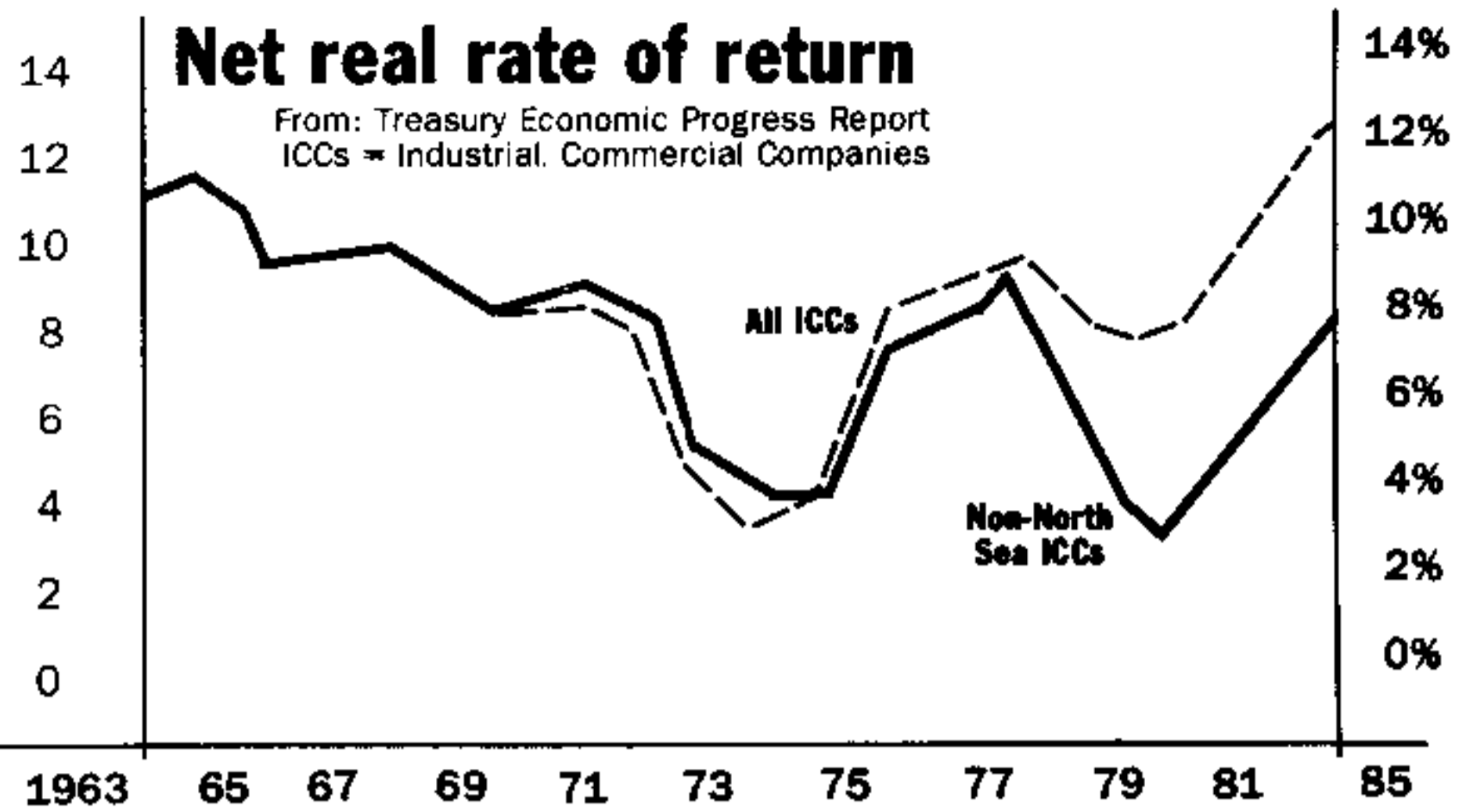
Two examples, ICI and British Leyland, suggest the scale of the problems.

ICI has been one of the much-touted 'success stories' of recent years. In 1985 it became the first non-oil British company to make over a billion pounds. In the slump it cut its workforce here by a third, sold off some of its operations, and more than trebled its trading profits between 1981 and 1984.

Yet in the last year ICI's profits have fallen again by 12 percent back to a mere £912 million. Profits on its oil interests were down. Sales of fertilisers to farmers dropped, and in the heavy chemical sector there were 'increased competitive pressures', according to the report in the *Financial Times*.

British Leyland's situation is far worse. Between 1979 and 1985 it sacked more than half its workforce and closed 14 plants. Productivity increased from around six cars per worker per year to 14 a year today in the Austin-Rover division. In 1985 exports rose by 15 percent and production of 476,000 cars was the highest since the early 1970s. But too many cars were made, unsold stocks started to pile up, and last autumn workers at Cowley and Longbridge were laid off, precisely because they had worked too well.

British Leyland has cut its losses. But at best it broke even in 1985. It is still a small fish in an ocean of sharks, and cannot survive on its own. Yet the government cannot close it down or sell it off without threatening hundreds of component makers, suppliers and dealers which still depend upon it.



Note: 1985 figures are partially estimated, and adjusted for estimated effects of privatisation.

It's not difficult to explain why in this situation manufacturing investment in Britain is still 18 percent below its level in 1979, and unemployment is still rising. As several CBI surveys have shown clearly companies are still reluctant to build new factories to expand their capacity.

Instead companies are handing out their profits in greatly increased dividends, or putting them into the financial markets where they can get a guaranteed return of over 10 percent given the high level of interest rates. Around £55 billion was invested abroad by all companies including the pension funds and insurance companies between 1979 and 1984.

In the last year takeovers worth more than £12 billion have been proposed, or carried through. That in turn has pushed up the paper value of shares on the stockmarkets as have rising dividends.

But much of British capital remains nervous even fearful of the future. Takeovers are not simply an easier and safer way to expand than building new factories or chemical plants. They are also a defensive reaction against the storms that lie ahead and the continuing pressures of international competition from firms that are often even larger in size.

British capitalism has made gains from the years of slump and high unemployment. But it was a painful process. Slimming might be good for you but taken too far it can have unhappy consequences. If profits are to go on rising they need both faster growth in the British economy, and smaller wage increases.

Neither in Britain nor in the rest of the world is the rise in the rate of profit of the last few years sufficient to restore the system to health. A return to the profit levels of 1973 is merely a return to the level which precipitated the crisis. The early 1970s were similar to today in their combination of low levels of productive investment with booming financial markets and a stock-market at record levels.

The disquiet among large sections of the ruling-class with Thatcher's policies and open splits in the Tory ranks are a sign that many of them are looking to the future and dreading what they see.

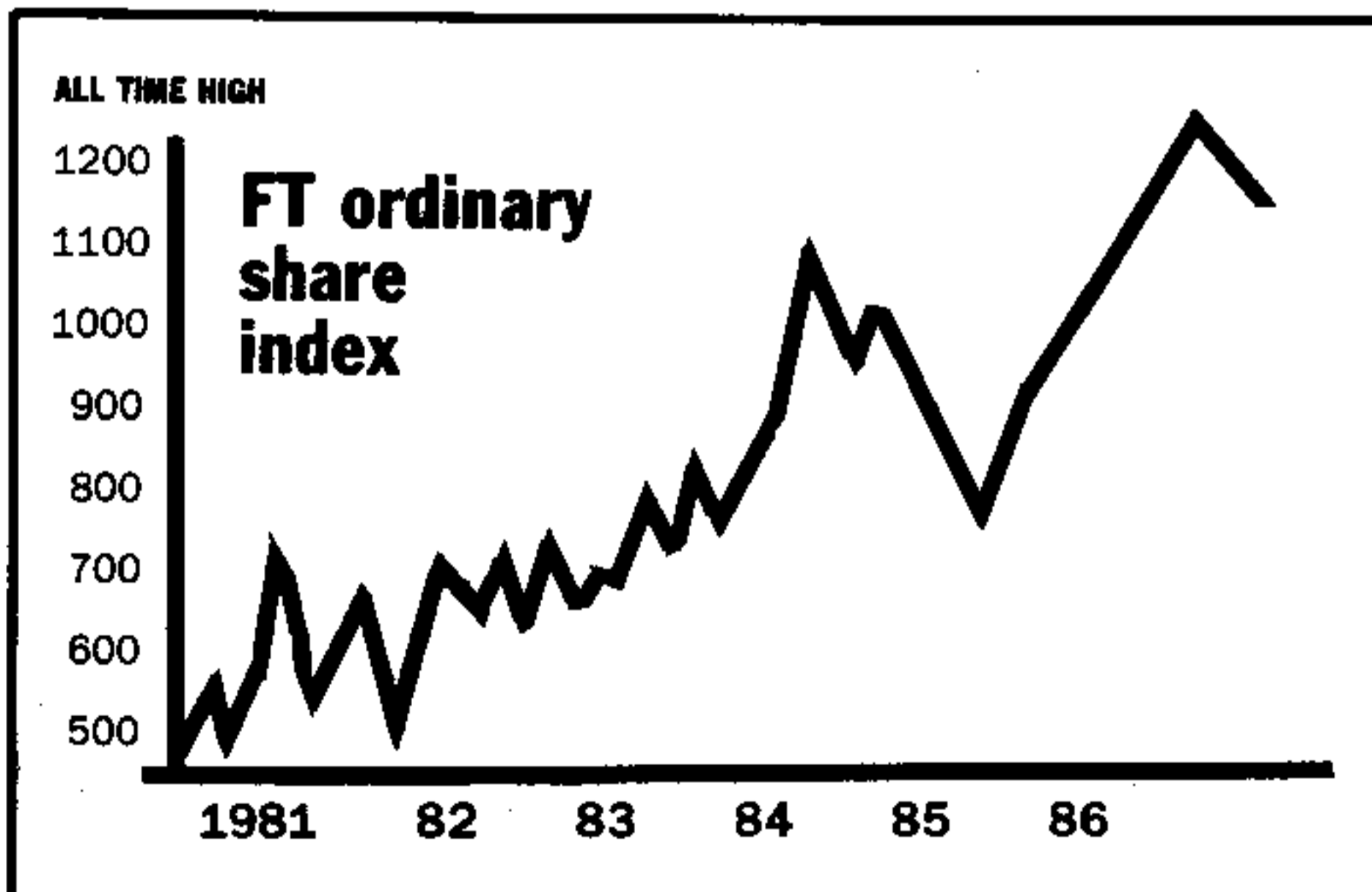
The fact that the latest CBI *Industrial Trends Survey* reports a decline in orders for the first time since 1983 will have reinforced the fears. The reactions to the Westland affair, and the sale of parts of British Leyland, is a symptom of that feeling.

Industrialists know that they are not going to stimulate the economy with their own investment. They are still unable to force down wages. They desperately want a government which will try and help them out on both counts.

Most have still not broken with the Tories, and there is still no consensus on an alternative. Some would like another social contract, hoping that the union leaders will help cut wage levels. Others simply want a bigger slice of government spending to come to them in orders for new roads, or missiles. But what none of them want is another slump like the last one.

Tory wets, the Alliance and Labour are all bidding for support as Thatcher's policies fail. But the terms of the debate are still being set by British capital. Increasing profits remain what it's all about. Yet if the world economy turns down again, there'll be little space for any sort of alternative. ■

Pete Green



# Dean and out

# SOGAT

THE press loved it when Brenda Dean was elected general secretary of SOGAT 82. She was to the right of her predecessor, Bill Keys. She was for the 'new', pragmatic approach to industrial relations. She accepted the inevitability of new technology and thought fighting was doomed to failure. And, above all, she was a woman.

She was a woman who looked respectable. She dressed right. She spoke right. She thought right. It was an example of equal opportunities—a woman who could fight her way up from the working class, and up through the union bureaucracy to become a national leader.

A similar line of thought filtered through much of the women's movement. More female decision makers would benefit womankind. Post-Thatcher, it seems a silly argument.

We did not have to wait till Dean was elected to know she would not fight for the working class. All the signs were already there.

She came from a non-political working class home in Lancaster. Her father, a British Rail inspector, sent her to Stretford Girls' High School to fulfil some of his middle class aspirations. Before leaving at the age of 16, she joined the Salvation Army.

This future labour leader decided very early that she didn't much like labouring. After quitting her first short-lived job because she found it 'boring', she went to work for the 11,000-strong Manchester branch of the National Union of Printing, Bookbinding and Paper Workers, since absorbed into SOGAT 82.

In 1972 she was elected assistant branch secretary and began to make a reputation for herself in Labour Party circles. She turned down an invitation to apply for a safe seat in the north-west and, in 1976, a job offer from the cabinet office.

Shortly afterwards the Manchester branch secretary died and Dean was elected to succeed him. There she reversed the branch's opposition to new technology in general printing and packaging, and became known for her hatred of what she termed the 'old, autocratic style of trade union leadership'.

In an interview she said: 'I remember the first time I had to instruct some of our members to come out. I thought how amazing it was to be called to the telephone and told, "You're in dispute," and be expected to obey without question.'

Her victories for president, and then for general secretary, of SOGAT 82 six months later in March 1984, were undoubtedly won on the woman's ticket. She polled 25,454 votes for general secretary in a seven horse race in a 48.8 percent return of the

union's 225,000 members, about a third of whom are women.

Somewhat ironically, she was greeted in her new £20,000-plus job with an interim report of the Equal Opportunities Commission finding two SOGAT branches in London guilty of sexual discrimination.

She had already made clear her priority as general secretary. It was not to stop such discrimination or to raise the appalling pay of the majority of her members, especially the women packaging and clerical workers. Nor was it to strengthen rank and file organisation. Rather it was to find a way to ensure that her union was not left out in the scramble for recognition with the introduction of new technology and the establishment of new operations.



**BRENDA DEAN; 'dressed right, spoke right'**

To this end she went on a 10-day tour to study the impact of new technology on North American newspaper unions. Her report was predictable. 'Opposition is not an option, it is simply a rapid road to de-unionisation.'

She noted with alarm that the once powerful International Typographical Union, the American equivalent of SOGAT, had lost two thirds of its members. With size of membership, for both financial and power reasons, being the major concern of union bureaucrats, Dean was understandably worried. 'The impact turned out to be so devastating that all of us returned somewhat shaken by what we had seen.'

Back home, membership had fallen dramatically, even before the onslaught of Fleet Street. Since 1980, 54,000 SOGAT jobs had disappeared from the paper, board and fibreboard industries. In general print over 35,000 jobs had been lost since 1977. The union was losing £2 million a year in income and was paying £1 million

unemployment benefit.

Dean responded by claiming that new technology presented opportunities which could be exploited—not by the workers or the bosses, but by the union:

'I believe we are going to have to be much more responsive, adaptable—audacious, if you like—in coming to terms with change. Let's face it, dragging our feet, resisting all the way, has not exactly been a roaring success.'

In the aftermath of Wapping and the job losses at the *Mirror*, her tactics could hardly be described as a roaring success.

Her 'responsiveness' led to continuing the inter-union fights with the other print unions, especially with the NGA. It led to her condoning the crossing of NGA picket lines in provincial and Fleet Street disputes. It resulted in a special publication of the *SOGAT Journal* in July 1985 devoted almost entirely to attacking the NGA while both unions were under attack from newspaper owners.

Her 'adaptability' led to nationwide deals accepting almost any price in exchange for union recognition. It has meant selling over 2,000 jobs at Mirror Group Newspapers after an initial walk-out had been deflated by her promises of negotiated deals.

Her 'audacity' led her to condemn any 'outsiders' who want to show solidarity with sacked News International members, and to blame them, rather than the police for violence at Wapping. It meant that she sees public opinion as more important than stopping Murdoch distributing his noxious pulp through organising mass picketing and a close-down of Fleet Street.

In fact, she is doing remarkably well for one so young (she's 42) in keeping up the worst traditions of union bureaucrats. In exchange for recognition by the bosses and government she has sold nearly every principle of trade unionism along with thousands of jobs, all within two years of becoming general secretary.

What she and the other print union leaders do not like to understand is that the wages and conditions of Fleet Street survived most of the assaults until recently because of rank and file organisational strength and confidence, despite all its sectionalism and craftism. It had nothing to do with their negotiating abilities. Dean would disagree. As she modestly put it: 'My job is to secure agreement by persuasion, cajoling, logic and sometimes force of personality based on other people's belief in my honesty and sincerity.'

These qualities have done nothing but harm to the 200,000 SOGAT members whose jobs and working conditions she is supposed to protect. ■

Clare Fermont



# The state of the struggle today

*A year after the miners' defeat, two months into the print dispute, and in the wake of Westland, socialists face many important questions. Lindsey German interviewed leading SWP member TONY CLIFF to get his assessment of the state of the class struggle today.*

**The Tories are in more trouble than they have been since Thatcher became prime minister. How significant are their problems?**

In any war you have to start with the strength and weakness of our army, the strength and weakness of the enemy army, and the balance between the two. There is always a danger that we see only our side, and so we only see our weaknesses.

The splits in the Tories have to do with the extent to which the government managed to smash the working class. Westland is a relatively small company. Two million jobs have gone in manufacturing. Do they care if another 10,000 jobs go? You can't explain it by looking at the thing by itself. It is a symptom of the failure of the Tory government to win the battles against the working class.

They won a lot of individual battles—they didn't win the war. Far from it. When Margaret Thatcher came to office in 1979 she promised to create a lean and strong economy. Now she has a lean economy—it is suffering from anorexia nervosa.

When she came to office, Britain exported £5,000 million more manufacturing goods than it imported. Now Britain imports £4,000 million more than it exports. For the first time since the industrial revolution Britain is a net importer of manufactured goods. Britain was the workshop of the world. There is nothing to show for North Sea oil. Worse they thought the money for the oil would go down slowly till the mid 1990s. It didn't go slowly—it's gone down by 40 percent in the last few months.

They are very unhappy because the key problem for them was to shift radically the balance between wages and profits. That was the aim of the operation in 1979. Real wages have risen since 1979.

Even the victories of the Tory government were not followed by a cut in real wages. In reality they didn't win on the wage front which was the key to solving all their other problems. The split in the Tories is about that—she didn't deliver. They are not in good shape.

**The Tories are in a mess. But the working class side is also in disarray, with the weakening in shopfloor organisation, the defeat of the miners, and now Wapping,**

**where Murdoch has achieved more already than Ian McGregor did in a year. How would you assess the balance of class forces today?**

In the end any war is lost to the side that loses all the battles. But the cost of victory in every single battle can affect the total results.

If one side loses and the other side wins all the fights, but wins them with fantastic losses, then they can lose the war even if they won the individual battles.

Up to now the workers have lost individual battles. Steel in 1980, hospitals and ASLEF in 1982, the NGA in 1983, the miners in 1984-5, now even worse Wapping in 1986. But it doesn't mean that the Tories are winning. By and large the unions are still there. There are still ten million trade unionists. There are still 300,000 shop stewards. So at the end of the day the ruling class is not sure that they are going to win the war.

Again, it is not simply a question of whether they use confrontation or collaboration, but what is the proportion between the two. If confrontation doesn't pay in the long run, then they will switch to co-operation. They can't wait 20 years because the British economy would disappear practically down the plughole. So then different policies would be put forward—wet Tory or right wing social democratic.

It is too simplistic to say that because they lose the individual battles they are going to lose the war. On the other hand it is also far too simplistic to say individual battles are not important.

What is necessary under such conditions? It is very important for socialists in general principle to despise the enemy—we are the many they are the few. But in terms of the specific we have to show great respect to them—because we can be the few and they are the many. So fighting for individual shop organisation, collecting money—all the small things—are terribly important. Unless you tactically respect the enemy you are lost.

The main danger for socialists is that they go from the manic to the depressive because there's very little fight.

**You talk about respecting the enemy. But in recent years many people have made fantastic concessions to the enemy. They accept the ideas of those like Hobsbawm that all you can do is move into the terrain of the right. Look at the examples round the TUC—the acceptance of the EEPTU scabbing operation at Wapping, the single union deals. How do you think these ideas will develop in the next few years?**

The defeat of 1984-5 was nothing com-



**Tony Cliff**

pared to the defeat of the General Strike in 1926, because the number of miners was much bigger then. And in 1926 everybody participated. Today, because of sectionalism, the impact of the defeat is much less. Shop organisation is also much stronger at present.

Still there is some similarity. If it was complete repetition, you don't need theory, you need memory, but there is some repetition. There has been a massive move to the right. At that time it was towards the Mond-Turner agreement—towards no strike deals and arbitration. This time it is towards the new realism or pragmatism. This will continue for the coming 18 months or two years. I don't see anything radically changing before the next election.

When it comes to a perspective there are two things a Marxist can do well—look at the very long term or the short term. If you come to the medium term—ten years—it is much more difficult to guess.

In the long term the crisis of capitalism is deeper and more fundamental than any crisis of consciousness in the class, or crisis of leadership. The crisis of leadership is important, but secondary.

What's happening in the Philippines is fantastically important for us. If the regime is too disgusting there is a massive rebellion at the end of the day. The Philippines and Egypt show us much more than any place in the world. They are on the periphery of capitalism and so the contradictions are much deeper.

In the final analysis we know there will be a rebellion of the working class. All the talk from Eric Hobsbawm that the working class is finished is stupidity. The working class today is ten times bigger in Britain than it was in 1848. Then only textile workers were in factories of over 100.

The working class today is much bigger even than it was in the twenties and thirties. The South Korean working class is bigger

than the whole working class at the time of Karl Marx.

So in the long term we know the picture. In the short term we also know. In the mid-term I never like to speculate because there are too many unknowns.

For example, will a Labour victory raise the class struggle? It will not be a repetition of 1974 because it doesn't come on the crest of the miners' strike and dockers' strike. But if they repeal some of the union laws—like secondary picketing and the right of blacking, the financial liability of the unions—will workers be more confident now they are not being fined?

And although there is a division of labour between Neil Kinnock and Ron Todd, the division is not perfect. Ernie Bevin led strikes against Ramsay MacDonald and the 1924 Labour government. The TUC opposed MacDonald's cuts in 1931. The unions didn't agree with Labour in 1969 over *In Place of Strife*.

Under such conditions will there be more strikes? The answer is probably yes. If there are then the present circumstances can change. I don't think we should speculate about it. What we can say is that there is a move to the right, but not everybody moves to the right. Our slogan should be much more stop the retreat, organise the resistance. We have to speak much more in resistant terms—not even stopping the retreat, slowing the retreat.

The manic depressive people terrify me. Instead of accepting from Gramsci optimism of the will and pessimism of the intellect, they accept optimism of the intellect and pessimism of the will. So everything's marvellous in the garden, but there's nothing we can do about it. Instead we say, everything in the garden's terrible, but there are things we can do.

Why? Because there are minorities willing to fight. It's not true the picture of the last six years is one big Tory walkover. If there was no resistance, Thatcher wouldn't have trouble with Heseltine.

We should not be pessimistic about the potential of workers in the immediacy. They are *slowing* down the process of the attack.

The analogy of the war of attrition is very useful. The war of attrition means that every little skirmish is very important.

**You talk about pessimism and optimism. We've been denounced as pessimists now for some years. A lot of that was based on the fact that most socialists saw changing the Labour Party as the way forward. The Labour left is now on the retreat. What would you say to those people who stay inside the Labour Party and what do you think is the future of the Labour left?**

We should always speak about the past. We've had nine Labour governments and we're not one step nearer to socialism. But the danger always is that people say, alright it didn't happen last time but it will happen next time. It is not proof that something happens nine times so it must happen a tenth time. There have only been nine Labour governments. People say they were



**The miners' strike Individual battles have been lost but the war isn't over**

exceptions.

It is a question of understanding the nature of the Labour Party. The key to that is understanding the role of the trade union bureaucracy as the backbone of the Labour Party.

William McLean at the second congress of the Communist International in 1920 said the Labour Party is the political expression of the trade unions. Lenin said no, it is the political expression of the trade union bureaucracy. Can you get rid of the bureaucracy this side of the socialist revolution? Can workers take over the block vote? This is what it boils down to.

Assume the SWP joined the Labour Party tomorrow. We took over all the 630 constituencies because Larry Whitty was asleep and Neil Kinnock forgot the words witch hunt. The truth is we would have 630,000 votes—Rodney Bickerstaffe or Ron Todd have more than that. Gavin Laird has more than that. Can you break the trade union bureaucracy—not this side of the socialist revolution.

The base of the bureaucracy is mobilising the passive majority against the active minority. And by and large in the majority of cases, the majority of the time this side of the revolution, the majority of workers are passive. Revolution means workers are active and come into the arena of history but otherwise they are passive.

In Russia, where the unions were very young—the printers' union was established in 1903—the Bolsheviks controlled the soviets in Petrograd and Moscow, the majority of factory committees. But when it came to the union machine the Mensheviks controlled it until after the revolution.

The Russian unions were very young. SOGAT is 203 years old. The NGA is two

and a half centuries. The AUEW is 134 years old. They are very old unions.

In Russia many of the bureaucrats finished in Siberia, here they finish in the House of Lords. In Russia they had to make the revolution to smash them. Here there is no way this side of the socialist revolution we'll smash them.

The left in the Labour Party are dreamers, utopians, completely unrealistic because they say they can use the block vote if they take it under their control.

Revolutionaries can take control over a district of a union or individual workplace organisation. They cannot take over the whole union machine. To do that you need the majority of workers to be activists and you can't expect it in a non-revolutionary situation.

The Labour Party cannot be changed. People say Neil Kinnock is the problem. He's not the problem. The problem is why does he get the support of Tom Sawyer, Rodney Bickerstaffe or Ron Todd.

The bureaucracy is like a rusty wheelbarrow—it moves if it is pushed. And there is not massive pressure on Ron Todd to move to the left. In these conditions he'll support Neil Kinnock.

The tragedy of Liverpool is that the comrades there didn't understand it. They thought that controlling the shop stewards' committee in Liverpool was very good. It would be as long as you use the minority base to fight. They waited for the majority. John Edmondson intervened and broke the minority.

**You mentioned earlier a return to consensus politics as an alternative to confrontation. But a lot of people, especially those new to socialist ideas, see the increase in policing, the way in which the unions are much more**



shackled by the law now than say ten years ago, and argue there is a much more repressive state. They say that the only way that can be changed is through the election of a Labour government to change the laws, impose democratic controls on the police and so on. What do you think about that?

The ruling class never rules by persuasion alone. But the ruling class under bourgeois democracy doesn't rule by violence alone. It's a question of the proportion between the two. With the battle of Warrington in 1983, what was the key problem? Was it the police in Warrington or the fact that Fleet Street was called back to work? No question about it, the key problem was the union bureaucracy.

The police are important as an alibi to the union bureaucracy. It is not true that because the union bureaucracy and the police both serve the same master they are friendly to one another. On the contrary two servants can hate one another. The NGA is not happy when it is fined hundreds of thousands of pounds or when the police kick the hell out of them in Wapping. There is a contradiction between them.

But we have to understand what is the relative relation between the different factors. There are situations where the police are the most important thing in the world—in Franco's Spain or in Chile. There are situations where the trade union bureaucracy is most central—for example under the Social Contract. Today the police play a bigger role than say in 1974 to 79 but still it is very secondary.

Why was Sean Geraghty only fined £350 during the hospitals dispute? If they'd sent him to prison there would have been a national strike and the implications would have been very big. In reality they are quite

pragmatic when it comes to the specific.

They talk about strong states. But when NACODS threatened to come on strike during the miners' strike, Margaret Thatcher was much more worried about that than confident in the power of the police to give hell to the miners on the picket line.

The most important thing is the policeman in the brain, the one that controls the workers' thinking. And that is not the men in blue but the Neil Kinnocks and Norman Willis.

**What does all this mean in terms of building a revolutionary party? We are often described as unrealistic. We try to build an organisation, and now have 4,000 members, but have been at that figure for some years. People say, you don't get any bigger, what do you think you are trying to achieve?**

The argument that we are unrealistic had much more echo three or four years ago in terms of our members and periphery, because the Bennites were on the march. The last few years have proved that basically we are right.

Three or four years ago, between us and the rightwing were Neil Kinnock, the soft left, then the hard left. A whole number of those have moved to the right.

Remember the 'dream ticket' of 1983—Neil Kinnock and Roy Hattersley. The argument then was Kinnock is alright, it's Hattersley who is the problem. Now both of them are in the same camp. More important the people in between are practically all in a terrible crisis. You have to ask yourself why the CP split, the WRP split, *Labour Herald* split, *Socialist Action* split.

Because of the wrong perspective about the miners' strike, expectations rose, and when those expectations were not realised then they started tearing one another to pieces. That's why they are all splitting.

So not only is there very little between us and the right wing. What there is is split and weak. To some extent people don't see it because they are in the Labour Party which is structured in such a way that people can exaggerate how much they have.

If there are five people in the room you can pass a resolution in the name of five or ten thousand. Therefore they don't know the truth about themselves. But if you know for example that the print order of the *Labour Herald* is only 2,000 then it's clear that they represent very, very little.

So despite all the ups and downs—the up of the Bennites and the down after the miners' strike—the rest were smashed; we were not smashed.

There were only two organisations that have kept intact—us and the *Militant*. The *Militant* are going to suffer much fraying at the edges because of the bankruptcy of their policy in Liverpool. They went from a demonstration of tens of thousands in Liverpool last year to only 400 after the surcharges last month. Because of that they will suffer as well.

Our prospect is the following. We are going to mark time to a large extent. What do we mean? We can increase our membership marginally. We can't increase it very much because to the extent that people say we are on the margins of the class they are right.

A revolutionary party is not an exact reflector of the class struggle but it cannot be independent from the level of class struggle. In 1972 I spoke to six or seven thousand steel workers in Scunthorpe. During the 1980 strike the biggest meeting of steel workers I spoke to was 100.

The level of struggle in terms of solidarity with the miners was much higher in 1972 than in 1984-5. Fleet Street of July 1972 during Pentonville is not Fleet Street of 1986 during Wapping. We cannot be independent of the base we relate to.

So can we grow to 6,000 instead of 4,000? Yes, but 50,000 doesn't fit the level of struggle.

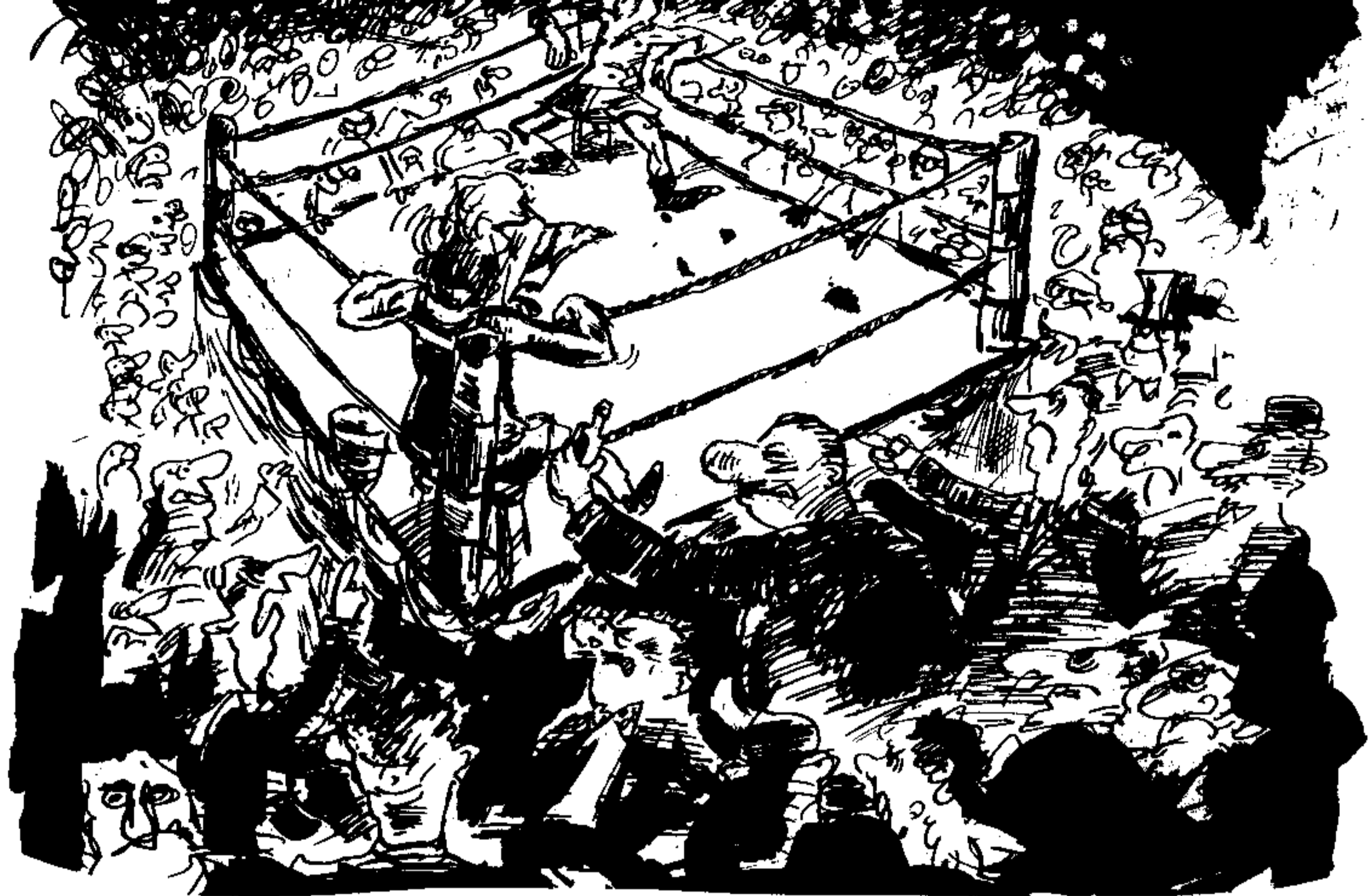
I think the organisation is in good shape because while our vision is never too low, we never make concessions on our assumption about the centrality of the working class. That remains central.

When it comes to the tactics, of course we fit ourselves to the level. We don't say unless there are 6,000 steel workers we won't speak. We'll speak to a hundred, we'll speak to fifty.

When people say we are unrealistic, I say on the contrary. We are realistic, the rest are unrealistic because the rest offer a whole number of conceptions that lead to nothing, that lead to catastrophe. That's why they disintegrate.



**Wapping—a minority will accept our analysis**



When conditions are tough, people who don't fit disintegrate. The fact that we didn't shows that we were right. It's nothing to do with psychological toughness—in terms of toughness the WRP are the toughest in the world, but they disintegrated completely because they issued statements which didn't fit the situation at all.

So what is going to happen? In Russia the Bolsheviks were shaped during the period of reaction after 1905. Things were very tough. There were ten members in Ivanovo Voznesensk in March 1917—in July, 5,440. Now there is no guarantee that the ten will turn into 5,440 because you don't know in advance there will be a revolution. But without the ten you won't get anything. Therefore you always have to judge yourself on whether you relate to the struggle that takes place.

The main danger for us is that we can become abstract propagandists. We don't simply say, capitalism is bad, socialism is good. Our statements on Wapping have been brilliant. Every issue of the paper talks about what is to be done—always very practical.

The fact is we couldn't deliver—but we still told the minority the only way to win was by getting mass picketing. Let's assume the print unions come to a compromise at Wapping.

Of course Brenda Dean will benefit from a compromise like that. And of course the majority of printers will say, we struck there for months—it's better to save a thousand jobs than none. But a minority will stay, no we could have done it, the SWP was right.

I think many people will agree with every-

thing you've said, except they'll say it's such a long way off that it isn't possible. You have already said things are going to be very tough for revolutionaries. How do people hold themselves together?

It will be tough. We are not a mass party like the Bolsheviks in 1905. They went from 40,000 in 1907 to 200 in 1910. Because the upturn was so massive—they organised an insurrection in 1905—the demoralisation after the defeat was incomparably worse than the demoralisation after the defeat of the miners' strike.

Secondly, because they had mass roots in the working class, when the periphery disappeared it pulled the members down. Our organisation is so much smaller that the events in the outside world don't help us in the way that they helped the Bolsheviks. But they also don't damage us in the same way.

You cannot build a mass party on questions. You build mass parties on action. But when it comes to small organisations, questions are very important. Why is this happening? Why is Kinnock moving to the right? Why wasn't the miners' strike victorious? The periphery of people asking questions is incomparably bigger than a year ago.

During the miners' strike, when we said there is not enough picketing or blacking, the strike is going badly, people didn't really want to hear us. There were other people—also leftwingers, supporting the miners—who said things are not so bad, they are going well.

Because of that people didn't ask questions. Now they are asking more questions. We can build the organisation on the number of people asking questions.

The trouble is, asking questions will recruit people—its not enough to keep them.

To do that you need to give them action. What do we mean by action? All the time there are strikes and activities. We have to relate to all of those. What is important is that we mustn't be sectional. Today it can be miners, then Wapping, then South Africa.

We can build the organisation. Can it become a mass party—the answer is no, not at present. Say that in 1987 or 88 there is a Labour government, with very right-wing policies. There will be disgruntlement in the Labour Party about it, and in the unions. But in terms of polarisation inside the Labour Party it is not on straight away.

If there is activity in the Labour Party we can be a bigger pole of attraction. We'll be saying we are the alternative to Kinnock. By that we don't mean we're in the same league—not at all. But our level of struggle is an alternative to the level of struggle of Kinnock. And if it comes to the specific we are even in the same league.

When it comes to getting people to Wapping, the Labour Party mobilise hundreds, we mobilise hundreds. We're not so separate in terms of leagues. Even during the miners' strike perhaps they were ten times bigger than us. They were not a hundred times bigger. When it comes to elections on the other hand, they are far more than a hundred times bigger.

It depends on the specific issue where we choose the battle. We are the alternative because on these issues we are not insignificant. Why? Because an organisation of 4,000 is not as small as all that if it intervenes correctly in the specific struggles. ■

# Rhetoric or reform?

OVER the ten days of the Soviet Communist Party Congress Mikhail Gorbachev managed to sustain a degree of enthusiasm both inside and outside Russia rarely seen.

The *Morning Star's* banner headline after Gorbachev's speech 'Socialism prepares for the 21st century' may have overstated the case but the view that something new was happening seemed to be shared not only by many western commentators but also by many Russians interviewed on the streets of Moscow.

What Gorbachev has done has been to follow the brief lead of Yuri Andropov in stressing the depth and long term nature of the problems faced by the Soviet Union. But he has done this with a frankness and openness that is unusual in Soviet politics and he has encouraged others to follow in his step.



Indeed some of the more interesting criticisms at the Congress came in the less widely reported speeches after Gorbachev had made his marathon five hour speech which all the main Soviet papers faithfully published over eight pictureless pages the next day.

The clean-up of the system has been long overdue. From the 1930s through to the 1960s the Soviet economy industrialised and urbanised rapidly by pumping capital and labour into the process of economic development.

But once the transition from a largely agricultural to an industrial economy had been made it became increasingly obvious that not only was growth slowing down but the economy was beginning to have difficulty sustaining the more modest rates of growth of its competitors.

Growth fell sharply in the 1970s and the 11th Five Year Plan for 1981-5 was the least ambitious that there had yet been. But as Gorbachev freely admitted even its more modest targets were not met. According to the official figures total output rose by only

17 percent and output per head by only 11 percent.

While these figures were higher than those for the Western OECD countries the Russian leadership has been able to take little comfort from this—not only because the figures are not calculated on a strictly comparable basis but also because the structure of the increase in output has continued to involve the expansion of sectors producing low quality and unwanted goods.

At the same time the burdens on the economy, which is of course less advanced than its western competitors, have shown no sign of diminishing. American policy is clearly aimed at keeping the pressure on through the arms race and Star Wars and the Soviet leadership is fully committed to respond to this if it cannot persuade Reagan to do a deal. Gorbachev devoted the first part of his conference speech to making this clear in the strongest possible terms.

Then the 'burdens of empire' have also to be borne. Not only are resources drained away in Afghanistan but certain Eastern European economies continue to be a drag on the Russian economy.

To sustain its role in the world and its position at home the Soviet leadership needs to increase growth and to produce a bigger surplus. But internally the economy has been trapped in a vicious circle. Labour productivity and commitment are low because there is little incentive to make an effort if there are only limited, poor quality goods available to buy.

This has long been recognised by all Soviet leaders. The difficulty has been to generate the momentum to do something about it and the rapid departure of both Andropov and Chernenko did not help matters. The fundamental difficulty here is a social one for the current system is protected by the power of vested interests at all levels of Soviet society. There is little enthusiasm for change if it has to be paid for by loss of prestige, status and power.

Under Stalin the social structure of the Soviet Union was in turmoil. At the top a class was consolidating but within it individuals had little guarantee of stability. Under Khrushchev the threat of the labour camps was no longer in the foreground but policy still lurched wildly in different directions.

It was the Brezhnev era that led to a stabilisation of the power structure at an individual level. Men (the higher up you go the more it is men) could grow old in their jobs. In this atmosphere waste and inefficiency flourished and petty and not so petty corruption became more widespread.

The cynicism that this produced was well summed up in the inevitable Russian joke. Stalin, Khrushchev and Brezhnev were all

on a train which broke down. Stalin immediately jumped up and demanded that the driver be shot to make the train go. Khrushchev insisted that the train would only start if the driver and the guard changed jobs. But Brezhnev just lay back in his seat and said, 'Why don't we all relax and pretend that the train is still going?'

Into this morass Gorbachev has tried to give the impression of descending like an avenging angel. 'He has a nice smile but steel teeth', Andrei Gromyko is reported to have said, and these teeth have already bitten some influential figures like the Moscow party bosses whose performance has been particularly bad in the past.

Gorbachev's performance at the Party Congress has to be seen as part of this campaign to shake up the system and make it more flexible and responsive in its own terms. Before the 5,000 delegates he gave the go-ahead for sharp criticism of the deficiencies that have accumulated and many were ready to follow this line in the official speeches that came later—including those who Gorbachev had himself earlier condemned.

How does Gorbachev see the problem? Like most politicians he wants a bigger surplus to solve his problems. But to achieve this two things are necessary:

Firstly the structure of the economy has to be changed. Weak sectors like agriculture and weak regions need to be pulled up to standard and dynamic sectors like engineering which are supposed to be leading the development of the economy must be made to live up to their undeserved reputation for modernity.



Secondly across the whole economy slack needs to be eliminated from the incompetent heads of government down to the drunken worker on the shop floor.

To achieve this Gorbachev spoke of the need for economic reform. The strong central control of enterprises must give way to more market-based incentives and freer prices so that consumers get the goods they want, when they want them, at the right quality.

In a sense there is little that is new here. But whereas in the past this critique has had a ritual element he has to see that it can no longer be ignored. At one point he

# GORBACHEV REVIVES THE ECONOMY..



stopped delegates applauding his criticism and told them it would have been better if they had done something about it themselves.

The significance of this does not relate to the delegates themselves. The nearest equivalent in this country to a Soviet Party Congress is the Tory Party Conference. They are both meetings of party faithful in which the delegates are expected to come and applaud. The odd dissonant voice might be raised but the discussion follows the line set by the leadership.

It would be necessary to go back to the 1920s to find the last time that sharply differing programmes were debated in front of a Congress and to Lenin's time to find a period when the leadership including Lenin were defeated by the delegates.

But like a Tory Conference the Communist Party Congress has an important propaganda purpose aimed at the watching audience outside the hall. And here there is no doubt that Gorbachev saying in public what has always been said in private struck a deep populist chord.

But what substance is there to all this? To put the problem into perspective it is possible in the abstract to consider some quite radical changes being made. If we look at Eastern Europe we find that the time when these economies were all images of one another is long past. A whole series of differing forms exist without compromising the power of the state and the leadership or their control.

At the level of theory there is no reason why the Soviet economy should not be pushed down one of these paths. Some Soviet economists have talked of the value of allowing open unemployment rather than disguising it as 'overmanning'. This has always been frowned upon officially; unofficially there have always been 'under-utilised labour reserves'. Poland has already gone some way to a more open recognition of unemployment.

But can reform actually be delivered? The history of the last decades has been a history of reforms that never were.

The power of conservatism and the defence of the status quo is more deeply

rooted in the Soviet Union than in most other advanced countries—east or west. It is sunk deep into the system and not only in terms of the bureaucracy. Because of the failure of the system to deliver the goods, people cling to the small privileges they have, whatever they are.

A change in the people at the top is only part of the answer. Gorbachev has gone a long way towards doing this much. On the Politburo most of the Brezhnev generation have now gone (although this does not mean that all of the new members think the same way).

Similarly over 50 percent of the 319 members of the Central Committee are new in 1986 compared to only 17 percent at Brezhnev's last congress. There is even a woman near the top for the first time for years. But the problem in the past has been that yesterday's 'new blood' has become today's 'Time server with a party ticket'.

For radical change to take place so as to deliver the goods it is necessary to have a surplus in the first place to offer incentives and buy off potential opposition. This leads to a vicious circle of failed reform which is difficult to break out of especially in the hostile economic climate of the 1980s. In a sense Soviet reformers may have missed the boat by failing to make more substantial changes in the 1960s when times were better.

But there is a second and related problem. The lesson of Eastern Europe is that reform needs strong control at the top not only to prevent it from getting out of hand (as it did in Czechoslovakia) but also to generate the clarity of vision and purpose to inspire the confidence that reform is actually going to be carried out.

Despite all the talk at the conference this clarity and purpose is still lacking and there were interesting differences of emphasis over what is to be done.

There is a danger that little will come of the rhetoric. No-one is really prepared to jump until they see on which side they should leap.

A good example of the caution and hedging on the ground at the moment came in a recent interview with a leading Soviet

management expert and author of a widely praised book on *Effective Management*. Asked how to distinguish between attacking bureaucracy from a socialist and an 'anti-soviet position' he could only reply that 'Lenin unmistakably drew a far from simple distinction between fighting bureaucracy for the benefit of socialist management and onslaughts on the socialist system under the guise of attacking bureaucracy.'

Now the answer is 'unmistakably far from simple' partly because Lenin in what has been called his last deathbed struggle came to fear himself that the bureaucracy was out of control.

'If we take that huge bureaucratic machine, that gigantic heap, we must ask: Who is directing whom? I doubt very much whether it can truthfully be said that the Communists are directing that heap. To tell the truth, they are not directing, they are being directed ...'

On the basis of comments like these, Lenin was beginning to develop a critique that went far beyond a concern with bureaucratic inefficiency to question the nature of the bureaucracy altogether. In these terms it would not be difficult to convict Lenin himself of being the author of what the current leadership would see as 'onslaughts on the socialist system'.

In this situation what is needed is an indication from above of how far it is possible to go. Until the leadership gives this, the 'effective manager' on the ground will look after his own and wait to see which way the wind is blowing. There is no incentive to encourage radical reform, innovation and outspoken criticism if it turns out that you have picked the wrong lines to stake your reputation and position on. It is far better to wait for someone to invent 'Lenin's unmistakably clear distinction' for you.

In the light of this it is useful to look at the targets for the new 12th Five Year Plan for 1986-1990. Of recent guideline documents this must be one of the more pious with promises to improve performance in every conceivable area (including dealing with 'the pressing

problems of dialectical and historical materialism').

But if we cut through this what again stands out is the modesty of the targets. The hope is that GNP will rise by 19-22 percent and per capita income by 13-15 percent—both figures only marginally more than what was achieved in the previous plan. The hope is that the rate of growth will slightly increase in the 1990s allowing an increase in per capita income of 60-80 percent by the year 2000. This works out at a growth rate of around 4 percent. Within this the broad division of the economy between defence, heavy industry and consumer industry would remain much the same.

In consumption the aim appears to be to solve the problem of shortages and low quality in some of the most visible consumer bottlenecks. Stress is laid on areas like improving the availability of car and house repairs, colour televisions, telephones, the building programme and improving the situation of women and child-care (to keep up population growth).

This would suggest that the leadership wants to have highly visible individual achievements even if the overall level of consumption does not rise by as much as they would like.

This may be a more realistic approach than has been shown in the past. One view is that the targets are modest to allow for the frictions of reform. Another, and perhaps more realistic one, is that they are modest because the leadership hopes that by tightening up efficiency (and perhaps allowing more scope for small scale private trade and enterprise in the area of consumer goods) it will be possible to squeeze sufficient efficiency out of the economy to have a low but respectable rate of growth in a world of generally low growth rates.

The policies will certainly not be enough if they do not deliver even these rates of growth in the short term, though removing the slack should produce some improvement. At the moment however, the evidence is lacking that the pressure for more substantial reform is there. One way to see this is to consider the position of Gorbachev himself and his newly promoted colleagues.

If the demand to get rid of timeservers in favour of new blood is serious it is interesting to speculate whether, health permitting, these people will still be in charge in 2000. In most situations 15 years at the top would be more than long enough to crush any impulse to innovation and the time for peaceful retirement would be long past.

The chances are, however, that all other things being equal Russia will be guided into the twenty-first century by this generation of politicians, many of whom will then be past retirement age. The ghost of Brezhnev may yet disturb Mikhail Gorbachev's sleep—we will have to wait and see whether it spurs him on or he finds he can live with it. ■

Mike Haynes

## PHILIPPINES

# Riding a tiger

WE WERE reminded of how a revolution can unfold as the events in the Philippines overthrew the Marcos dictatorship. It was 'people power'—the power of the working class which poured into the streets of Manila—which decisively tipped the balance against Marcos, forcing the vacillating elements within the Filipino ruling class and the American government to ditch their ally of twenty years.

The heights of class struggle were reached as the ruling class was forced to cut open its own state machinery in order to replace its personnel. When bone and blood pits itself against bullets and tanks, it is proof that without exception, the history of the Philippines is a history of class struggle—but what is the balance of class relations in the Philippines today?

Temporarily, the bourgeoisie has rallied behind Aquino's government. Resumption of trading on the Manila Stock Exchange, the day after Marcos's departure saw such a resounding leap in prices that the market had to be suspended.

Indeed, Aquino's cabinet appointment met with the approval of the Americans, who commented: 'The Cabinet has a firmly middle class, moderate cast that is reflective of Aquino's background.'

One of the key political slogans of the left was for the dismantling of the US-Marcos dictatorship. The removal of the Subic Naval Base and the Clarke Air Base was linked to the removal of Marcos. Through Aquino, the American government has successfully engineered the retention of their military bases and the removal of the one focus of popular resistance—Marcos.

Its future plan is to isolate and defeat the New People's Army. Economic and political reforms are a necessary part of their strategy. Ramos himself has acknowledged that 'the narrowing of the gap between rich and poor' is central to defeating the NPA.

Ramos and Enrile were both principle architects of martial law (1972-1981), Enrile amassed a fortune in the coconut industry, and as minister of defence was responsible for the murders and imprisonment of activists and trade unionists.

Ramos is a 'professional soldier'. In other words, he is believed to be more able to militarily defeat the NPA than his predecessor, who was an ex-chauffeur of Marcos.

Not only have Ramos and Enrile served under the Marcos regime, but so too have the governor of the central bank, the minister of natural resources, and the head of the presidential commission on government reorganisation. The cabinet reflects the regional power bases of the appointees and is a mixture of former KBL (Marcos's 'New Society Movement') stal-

warts, owners of big business, and politicians of the traditional opposition parties who have entered Aquino's coalition.

Cory Aquino herself, is politically unaligned. She has a powerful ally in the Catholic church, which urged people to vote both in the 1984 Batasang Pambansa (National Assembly elections) and in the presidential election in the face of the left boycott campaign.

The Church possesses a nationwide radio station and newspaper, and it uses its influence to play an important mediating role between the factions in her government. It will also have to channel expectations towards reformist directions and provide a moral legitimacy to Aquino's government. In the countryside it will try to persuade the guerrillas to abandon their armed struggle.

The unity of the different factions within the ruling class depends crucially on their ability to deliver the necessary reforms. No amount of populist rhetoric can hide the crisis in the capitalist system; the pressures for land reform, for wage increases, for jobs, and for retribution against KBL supporters, have all exploded since the overthrow of Marcos.

At the same time, the policies Aquino will have to pursue are those of her class; she must drive wages down, close unprofitable sectors, and to further rationalise agricultural production so as to compete in the world market.

Land reform to Aquino means two goals—greater productivity, and equitable sharing of the benefits and the ownership of land. But the drive for greater productivity has itself resulted in the landlessness, and the poverty of the peasants.

Reforms in the Labour laws should 'minimise workers' exploitation' and ensure that wages are determined through collective bargaining. The 'minimum' right



Cory Aquino

to employment and 'bargaining for higher wages,' are the exact opposite of the policies which have to be followed before the IMF, and the international banks, will bail out the Philippine bourgeoisie.

Predictably, in this period of increased confidence and expectations for change, amongst the working class and the peasantry, Aquino has remained silent on the important details of land reform and labour legislation.

People have taken their new found confidence and expectations with them back to work. One thousand workers at the metropolitan waterworks and sewerage system have threatened to walk out because of the promotion of a former KBL campaign manager by the new minister of public works.

Employees at the Development Bank of Philippines are opposing the retention of the chairman. On the 8 March 9000 workers struck at the Philippines Long Distance Telephone Company burning trucks and smashing windscreens.

According to the Philippine Daily

*Inquirer*, the process of weeding out Marcos' aides is 'spawning wildfires in every corner of this island-nation.' For example, 128 medical officers in the army have petitioned Aquino for the removal of their surgeon-general.

All of the left, without reservations, have pledged their support for Aquino.

BAYAN (New Patriotic Federation), a radical-nationalist movement with 1½ million members has 'decided to give its vigilant and principled support to the administration of Ms Aquino.' At the same time, BAYAN also intends to 'pursue political actions aimed at giving the marginalised sectors of Philippine society—the farmers and workers—their just share in law.' Strikes and protest actions are to continue, but only as pressure on Aquino, in order to ensure a democratic constitution which can guarantee the rights of the people. The class nature of the state is not questioned; the integrity of its personnel is.

This strategy flows from the politics of the Communist Party of the Philippines. It seeks to set up popular fronts with the

sections of the bourgeoisie who were against Marcos. It analyses the Philippines as a neo-colony dominated by American imperialism which has local puppets (the 'comprador bourgeoisie'). There are, they argue, sections within the ruling class whose interests lead them to fight against imperialism and to favour a path of national industrialisation.

The world knows that the Filipino bourgeoisie is split between reformers and reactionaries. But no sincere bourgeois reformist can be expected to turn on their own class and advance the interests of workers and peasants.

The pledges of support for Aquino by the left are, in fact, agreements to a truce in the war of classes at a time when the people have overthrown a dictator.

The situation in the Philippines has swung massively to the left. Although the state and the economy is still firmly in the hands of the ruling class, the glimpse of 'people's power' could put workers' power on to the agenda in the Philippines. ■

Lawrence Wong

## SOUTH AFRICA

# Botha's balancing act

THE Botha regime ended the state of emergency it first proclaimed last summer on 7 March. But the crisis which led to the emergency is not over. Two recent episodes confirmed that South African capitalism faces what Gramsci called an 'organic crisis', in which 'incurable structural contradictions have revealed themselves.'

First there was president P W Botha's speech to Parliament on 31 January followed by unprecedented television and press appeals to the black majority. The tone was quite different from Botha's speech last August, which precipitated so severe a run on the Rand that Pretoria had to suspend debt repayments to western bankers.

Now by comparison all was sweetness and light. Botha proclaimed the death of 'the outdated concept of apartheid' and told black TV viewers that 'my government wants ... to speak to you and your leaders in a spirit of co-operation.'

Botha said that he would soon establish Regional Service Councils replacing the present provincial system of government. Black as well as white local authorities will be represented on the new bodies. The black middle class will be given a greater stake in the state. Nationally, however, political power will remain in white hands, although Botha promised a 'National Statutory Council' on which African leaders would sit alongside government representatives.

How much difference this would make to the lives of the black masses wasn't clear. Botha did say that 'the pass system will be scrapped by 1 July this year.' Getting rid of

the pass laws would be a real reform, and it is supported by one wing of South African capital. However, Botha also spoke of 'measures to facilitate orderly urbanisation', which could simply mean the pass laws under another name.

The whole performance was indeed yet another balancing act on Botha's part, in which he sought to appease a number of very different constituencies—foreign investors and bankers, the ruling National Party's white petty-bourgeois and working class base, 'moderate' black leaders. Within a few days this latest attempt to square the circle had failed.

Botha himself blew it, when he stormed into parliament to denounce his own foreign minister, his namesake Pik, for telling foreign journalists that he would be prepared to serve under a black president. Pik Botha's role has for many years been to promise foreign opinion more radical changes than the regime is prepared to envisage. Indeed, he so oversold the Natal speech last year that the result was the Rand crisis. This time he had gone too far.

The crisis in white politics was underlined when Frederick van Zyl Slabbert resigned as leader of the opposition.

Slabbert is a prominent Afrikaner intellectual who was chosen to head the opposition Progressive Federal Party because its chief backers, the English-speaking capitalists, believed that he could help bring about a realignment. This would unite the PFP and the *verlig* ('enlightened') wing of the Nationalists as the voice of the South African bourgeoisie. Slabbert has



P W Botha

thrown in the towel, sick of what he regards as Botha's cynical refusal to adopt a serious reform strategy.

The upshot was that the most important leader of the tribal Homelands, Chief Gatsha Buthelezi of Kwa Zulu refused to participate in Botha's proposed 'National Statutory Council'. Buthelezi had welcomed Botha's original speech as 'a courageous break with the past', but the humiliation of Pik Botha caused him to backtrack. Buthelezi clearly decided that it wasn't worth (literally) risking his neck for so miserly a package.



Even if Botha's speech failed to win over the black middle class, it went down well on Wall Street and in the City of London. Fritz Leutweiler, the Swiss mediator between Pretoria and the western banks, succeeded in persuading South Africa's creditors to roll over repayments of its debt for a further year.

The second episode was the uprising in Johannesburg's Alexandra township in mid-February, during which the security forces killed 80 people. This was slaughter on an even greater scale than the Sharpeville massacre.

The difference is that what happened in Alexandra was something close to an insurrection against the South African state. Alexandra, nine miles from the centre of Johannesburg, is an unusual black township. It is one of the oldest in the area, and is not far from the smart white suburbs of northern Johannesburg. For many years it was one of the few urban areas where Africans had freehold rights, although the Nationalists abolished these after they came to power in 1948.

Alexandra also has a long history of struggle. Its residents staged two famous bus-boycotts against wartime fare-rises, in August 1943 and November 1944. Another boycott, in early 1957, ended in complete victory for the residents. Over 150,000 people live in Alex, twice the official estimate — a gap which reflects overcrowding and penury.

The Alex rising began with the murder on 10 February of a local leader of the black-consciousness Azanian People's Organisation (AZAPO), Jerry Kumuka. His funeral was the spark for widespread rioting, led by youths known as 'the comrades'. The most detailed report, based on an interview with an Alex resident, was in *Socialist Worker* (1 March 1986). He described how the 'comrades' first set fire to several of the factories adjoining the township, and then the following Monday captured a Hippo armoured personnel carrier, killing its six police occupants.

*Newsweek* confirmed the ambush of the Hippo, describing how it tipped over after swerving to avoid a giant trench specially dug for the purpose.

For a period it seems as if the South African state lost control of Alexandra. The 'comrades' were able to arm themselves, presumably with the weapons of the policemen they killed. It took mass shootings, the encirclement of Alex by the South African Defence Force, and the intervention of 'moderate' leaders of the main resistance organisation, the United Democratic Front to calm the situation.

Bishop Desmond Tutu succeeded in preventing a march to the nearest police station, but after a meeting with deputy law and order minister Adrian Vlok produced nothing, the bishop was shouted down by a furious mass meeting of 40,000 Alex residents. 'It's not enough! The death of our people must be avenged!' they cried.

The whole affair worried *Newsweek*.

'The violence that swept Alexandra and other black areas last week underlined

an increasingly perilous reality: the young radicals have virtually taken over South Africa's black townships. It also belied the government's claim that the militants have no weapons; in different areas they use automatic rifles, grenades, land mines and homemade "napalm" bombs.'

Without falling into the sort of conspiracy theory beloved of *Newsweek* and its like, it is difficult not to detect the influence of the African National Congress in the Alexandra uprising. The 'comrades' themselves explicitly identified with the ANC. Moreover, the episode reflected the sort of strategy to which the ANC leadership has swung in the past year. They have sought to move beyond the sabotage campaign of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) to a 'people's war' based on the creation of 'revolutionary base areas' in the townships, and the arming of the masses.

It doesn't follow that the rising was ordered by the MK high command in Zambia. The rising had all the features of a spontaneous explosion. But the 'comrades' undoubtedly had been subjected to ANC propaganda calling for such actions: a regular theme of this propaganda has been the idea of arming the masses by attacks on the security forces. The street committees formed in Alex resemble those in such ANC strongholds in the Eastern Cape as Creadock.

The rising also underlines the limitations of ANC strategy. The SADF had surrounded the township, and were patrolling it with helicopter gunships. Had it come to an all-out firefight between the army and the 'comrades' the latter would have been wiped out.

Nevertheless, the rising is an indication of the growing strength of the ANC. There

are others. The security forces claimed in early March to have killed seven MK guerrillas in Cape Town's Guguletu township, thousands of miles from their Zambian home bases.

Also in early March, the entire executive of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and leaders of the National Union of Mineworkers met ANC representatives in Lusaka. This is a reflection of the pressure from ANC supporters within the independent unions demanding that the new federation align itself openly with Congress and the UDF.

This in turn reflects the absence of any organised political alternative to the ANC's populism, in its attempt to build a 'broad alliance' of black workers and capitalists. There are various socialist currents who want to see workers' power and not just the black majority rule which is Congress's goal.

Indeed, there is an old left tradition in Alex, represented in recent years in the now defunct Alexandra Workers' Group. One of South Africa's best known socialists, Moses Mayekiso, Transvaal secretary of the Metal and Allied Workers Union, lives in Alex. Mayekiso (interviewed in last October's *SWR*) was detained during the rising but released when the state of emergency ended.

But unless these left currents crystallise into socialist political organisation, the ANC is likely completely to dominate the mass movement against apartheid. The result is all too likely to be, at best, majority rule which, as in Zimbabwe, eliminates the form of white supremacy, but preserves its substance, a low-wage economy in which the mass of black people live in abject poverty. ■

Alex Callinicos

# THE WESTERN SOVIETS

WORKERS' COUNCILS  
VERSUS  
PARLIAMENT  
1915-1920



Donny Gluckstein

Parliamentary channels have proved incapable of defending workers against mass unemployment and falling living standards — but what is the alternative? East European-style dictatorship certainly has nothing to offer. But history provides another way. In the years 1915-20 workers all over Europe set up their own alternative, their own mass democracy. In Germany, Britain, Italy and Russia workers' councils — or *soviets*, to use their Russian name — challenged the existing order. This book brings together a wealth of information which is more relevant today than ever.

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# All hail to the mob

## Labour, Nationality and Religion

James Connolly  
New Books £0.50

The rapid growth of socialism in Ireland in the first decade of this century alarmed many who defended the old order. The increasing power of Larkin's union and the spread of socialist ideas prompted a Jesuit priest, one Father Kane, to devote his Lenten lectures to its denunciation.

That a leading cleric should feel it necessary to devote an entire series of sermons to the denunciation of the workers' movement is significant. Bearing in mind the importance of the church in ideological terms, you could say it is the equivalent of the *Daily Mirror* devoting three or four pages to a reasoned and serious argument about the rights and wrongs of Marxist theory—what a wonderful opportunity to debate!

The surprising thing is that the arguments put forward by Father Kane have changed so little in the intervening 75 years.

The Irish socialists decided to write a reply and James Connolly, recently returned from the United States, where he had been involved in the socialist and trade union movement, was asked to do so. The result was *Labour, Nationality and Religion*, a pamphlet of a mere 50 pages which concentrates some of the most powerful and entertaining Marxist polemic.

Father Kane begins his argument by attacking the materialist conception of history. Although his understanding of the theory is surprisingly thorough, his arguments against it are weak. They are based—not surprisingly—on the conclusion that belief in this view means a denial of the existence of God, of free will and so on.

Connolly's explanation of the materialist conception of history is not restricted to that conclusion. What does this theory mean?

'That all the politics of the world resolve themselves in the last analysis into a struggle for the possession of that portion of the fruits of labour which labour creates, but does not enjoy, ie rent, interest, profit.'

But, more than that, Connolly also attacks the idea of a static 'human nature'. Integral to the Marxist view of history is the notion that the prevalent ideas in society change with economic and social changes. As Connolly puts it:

'The philosophers of ancient Asia have never been surpassed and seldom equalled in brain power in the modern world; but the most subtle, acute and powerful mind of the ancient world could not even understand the terms of the social, political or moral problems which are intelligently understood by

the average day labourer.'

Expanding this theme further, he proceeds to give a potted history of slavery through the ages—not neglecting in the process to point out the Catholic church's changing attitudes towards the morality of the issue. He sums up this argument with a beautiful little anecdote about the forces at play in the transition between one type of class society and another: a slave is told by his master to go and mend the roof on his house:

'"Boss," says he, "If I fall down and get killed you will lose the 500 dollars you paid for me; but if you send up that Irish labourer and he falls down and breaks his neck you won't even have to bury him, and can easily get another for two dollars a day." Moral: slavery is immoral because slaves cost too much.'

The second basic idea which Father Kane attacks is the labour theory of value. The labour theory of value says that what determines the exchange value of a commodity is the amount of labour embodied in it, including the labour embodied in raw materials, machinery, transportation, and so on. Father Kane raises two examples to disprove the theory—the difference in price between good and bad wine, and the case of 'a pair of boots carved out of wood with long and careful toil [which] will fetch less in the market than a simple pair of brogues'.

'Wine kept in vaults for years commands higher prices than new wine, but could chemists give new wine the same flavour as is possessed by stored-up wine, then the new would bring down the price of the old to a price governed by the amount of labour embodied by the new.'

As for Father Kane's boots:

'In discussing the economic question, we discuss governing conditions, not exceptions. Hence the exchange value of boots such as those instanced by Father Kane is as problematical as the moral value of his hair splitting...ask a Dublin master builder to tell you what factors he takes into account when he gives you an estimate for building an altar. If he is a Catholic he will give answer the same as if he were a Protestant—he will count the cost of the labour, including the cost of labour embodied in the raw material... Altars, shoes, books, all articles upon the market, except a politician's conscience, have their exchange value determined in like manner.'

The most powerful section of this pamphlet is that section entitled 'The Rights of Man'. Father Kane defends the right to private property, by which he means the rights of landlords to own lands,

capitalists to own factories and so on.

The right to ownership, he argues, is permanent:

'The man who has tilled a field through winter and spring has a right to own the harvest which he has earned...when man spends the keenness of his mind and strength of his body in winning the fruits of nature, he thereby makes his own that spot which he tills.'

Although Father Kane is defending landlordism in this passage, you can easily see how these arguments can be translated into the words of Thatcher, when she praises one of her favourite 'entrepreneurs' or extols the virtues of property-owning capitalism.

Connolly turns the argument on its head: 'Socialists do not propose to interfere with any man's right to hold what he has earned; but they do emphatically insist that such a man shall not be compelled to give up the greater part, or any, of what he has "earned" to an idle class who "toil not, neither do they spin", but who have attained their hold upon the nation's property by ruthless force, spoliation and fraud.'

So, Connolly argues, if a man has a right to take the means to live, and to exclude others from their use, it means denying the right of others to live—except if a capitalist can see his way to make a profit out of him. The natural rights of man meant for 32,000 families in Dublin the right to live in one room per family. Connolly goes on:

'The working class have made everything in the world their own—its land, factories, ships, houses...everything has been consecrated by the labour of the working class and, since these cannot be divided into pieces, they must be owned in common.'

Connolly argues many other questions in similar vein. To allegations of 'compulsory equality', 'no freedom of speech', 'the rule of the mob', he makes replies which not only throw light on the realities of Irish history and class struggle, but are full of the wit, style and sheer humanity of a great orator and impassioned believer in socialism.

When Father Kane says that socialism means 'the rule of the mob', Connolly replies:

'There was a time when the mob was without power and influence, when power was concentrated in the hands of kings, nobles and the hierarchy. That was the blackest period in human history.'

He then details the appalling realities of feudal life and recounts how the mob has, with the growth of its power sent 'with one sweep of its grimy, toil-worn hand', religious persecution, the death

penalty, the rack, the thumbscrew, child labour, into the oblivion of history. 'All hail, then, to the mob—the incarnation of progress', he ends.

If *Labour, Nationality and Religion* displays some of Connolly at his best, some sections of it also raise questions about the extent to which he translated Marxist theory into the society in which he lived.

In the third of his lectures, Father Kane enters into a vivid description of 'the socialist doctrine of divorce'. Connolly says 'socialists as such have no doctrine of divorce', but his attack on Father Kane is illuminating. His polemic, on the one hand, is powerful and hard-hitting. Father Kane says: 'Divorce in the socialist sense means that women would be willing to stoop to be the mistress of one man after another.' To which Connolly replies:

'A more unscrupulous slander upon womanhood was never uttered or penned...do you not wonder that some Irishwomen—some persons of the same sex as the slanderer's mother—did not get up and hurl the lie back in his teeth.'

This is followed by a biting attack on the church's attitude towards women throughout history:

'It recalls to mind the fact that, in the sixth century, the council of the church debated the question as to whether women had or had not a soul...'

He then goes on to explain the role of the state in a socialist society in terms of providing for the care, education, mental and physical development of the child, and in freeing womanhood from the burdens which she currently endures.

On the other hand, Connolly's views on the question of divorce are ambiguous at best:

'The divorce evil of today [my emphasis] arises not out of socialist teaching, but out of that capitalist system, whose morals and philosophy are based upon the idea of individualism, and the cash nexus as the sole bond in society. Such teaching destroys the sanctity of the marriage bond.'

It could be said that this quote is merely a device of argument, turning Father Kane's proposition upon the system he defends. I think that rather it shows a weakness in Connolly's politics. His attitude towards the Catholic church is still a matter of debate. But certainly, throughout *Labour, Nationality and Religion* his attacks upon the church, vicious and powerful as they are, are directed very much towards the actions of the clergy in 'interfering' in politics. Indeed the quote which introduces the pamphlet, and from which the tone of Connolly's argument is drawn, tends towards this position. It is from the Reverend John England, Catholic Bishop of Charleston, USA, who says:

'We deny to pope and council any power to interfere with one title of our political rights, as firmly as we deny the power of interfering with our spiritual rights to the President and Congress. We will obey each in its proper place.'

There are too many arguments that Connolly takes up in the remainder of the

pamphlet for me to illustrate them all. But throughout, many of those arguments are still being had today: the simplicity of, and the need for, a socialist planned economy; the open and free debate central to the operation of the socialist republic; the massive changes in human nature which can be wrought by a fairer and more equal society; the basic morality of the common people; the question of patriotism.

*Labour, Nationality and Religion* succeeds throughout in two respects. Firstly, it manages to present the complex ideas of Marxism in a simple, readable, and entertaining fashion. In doing so, it gives an insider's view of the Ireland of the early years of this century. In doing so it manages to show the real human face of socialism, not just as a theory, but as a

movement for the uplifting of humanity, for the abolition of the degradation and misery of working class life.

But secondly, *Labour, Nationality and Religion* is a brilliant and scathing attack on the hypocrisy of the church which is:

'Ever counselling humility, but sitting in the seats of the mighty; ever patching up the diseased and broken wrecks of an unjust social system but blessing the system which made the wrecks and spread the disease; ever running divine discontent and pity into the ground as the lightning rod runs and dissipates lightning, instead of gathering it and directing it for social righteousness as the electric battery generates and directs for social use.' ■

Bill Thompson

EDUCATION  
for Socialists

## Packing it in

IN LAST month's *SWR* Chris Harman argued the importance of education for revolutionaries. He also introduced a series of education packs. The first of these (Marxist View of the Modern World) is now available.

As it is too early to judge the effect the packs will have, it's worth looking at the experience of party branches in Sheffield and Leeds.

In Sheffield in the last three months there have been two basic courses for new members. Each was five weeks long and identical in format. This was so those who couldn't attend first or joined subsequently could take part. The course was five subjects: Reformism, Women, Permanent Revolution, Revolutionary Trade Unionism, Party and Class. A selection of pamphlets were used such as *Labour Party: Myth and Reality*. Three branches were involved, the attendance averaging 15 to 20 a week. There is always a gap of two or three weeks between each series to avoid the educationals becoming just a routine without proper work being done for them.

At the same time as the basic courses, a series was organised around Duncan Hallas's book *The Comintern*. This was for members who had been in the party two years or more. Another was based on the first eight chapters of Cliff's *Lenin*.

Once again based on three branches these four week courses were attended by around ten people.

The courses were lead by comrades with years of experience in the party. This had a very good effect, invigorating older comrades and getting them involved with newer members.

The main difficulty was encouraging people to read and getting the level of the questions right. One course had suffered because questions had been too

long and complicated.

In Leeds there are quite a lot of new comrades who do not know our traditions. A district new members' course involving seven comrades every week for five weeks based on *How Marxism Works* took a lot of hard work to maintain, but was successful. A general basic course used a collection of photocopied articles from past reviews. The organisers are thankful that the education packs will make this part of education work easier in future.

Leeds also did a course based on *The Comintern*. Learning from Sheffield's mistake, they carefully worked out the questions: why did Socialist Parties fail the test of the first world war? What were the main errors of the ultra left?

Recently, on a Sunday, a total of 28 comrades attended three different educationals. Ideally groups are split up into five or six. Once again comrades who have been in the party a long time have been central to organising and introducing the educationals.

Both areas have seen the confidence of new comrades increase visibly. They have become more confident in arguing our politics with outsiders. In Sheffield there has been 20 new recruits since January, 18 have stayed. Dave Hayes, the local organiser believes this is a direct benefit. He has also found that the branch that has responded best to the educationals, is also the best at recruiting in the area.

Mark Perry's experience in Leeds has been identical. The comrades who attended educationals last summer are now playing a key role in the branches. It has also meant that comrades have a far better understanding of the movement around them, and are able to analyse defeats and difficulties without demoralisation. ■

Andy Strouthous

# The new opium?

EVERY SO OFTEN someone raises the question of why socialist papers like *Socialist Worker* and *Socialist Worker Review* do not carry more on 'culture'. Unfortunately, it is often a misdirected question. For those who put it have rarely thought through what is meant by 'culture' and what socialist activity in this field can achieve.

What is culture?

There is a sense in which it is something which is not separable from life as a whole. For it is the totality of the ideas, language, attitudes and ways of seeing the world which guide people's behaviour in any society.

The criticism of culture is then the criticism of social life as a whole.

But there is also a narrower sense in which the word is used. In any society there are people who display an ability to tell stories, make songs and poems, to create artefacts, which get a response from their fellows.

There is a close relation between culture in this narrow definition, meaning popular art, and culture in the wider sense. People listen to stories, like songs, admire paintings or laugh at jokes because these relate in some way or other to their everyday lives. The story holds their attention because its elements provide a heightened representation of their own fears and hopes; the poem or song expresses feelings which they cannot express themselves; the joke is funny because it pushes aspects of normal life to the point at which they appear ludicrous.

But popular art does not simply express people's wider experiences. It also influences how they react to these: stories, songs, poems or jokes help shape the frameworks through which they interpret their interaction with each other and with the natural world. It is a determinant of the 'common sense' which guides the behaviour of the mass of people in any society.

Control over this 'common sense' is a vital part of any ruling class defence. It has to attempt to find mechanisms which can incorporate certain elements in popular art and ban others. In feudal society the church hierarchy continually strove to integrate popular festivals into a religious framework which could control them. The rise of capitalism was accompanied by a conscious attempt by the puritan protagonists of the new social order to restructure, and if necessary to stamp out, old forms of popular entertainment. And in mature capitalism the control is pushed to its utmost limit, with a specialised sector of the economy producing 'popular

culture' (radio, TV, film, newspapers and magazines, pop music, sport) in just the same way that other commodities are produced.

There is always some degree of contradiction involved in such attempts at control. You cannot shape people's experiences unless you relate to them. And in a class society, some of those experiences are of greater or lesser degrees of class struggle. The medieval Catholic church had to relate to the feeling of impoverishment and oppression of the mass of peasants if it was to explain to them that such poverty and oppression was part of heaven's plan. The modern day popular newspaper has to talk about strikes and protests if it is to condemn them. Popular culture is always a combination of contradictory elements—of people's immediately lived experience of life in class society on the one hand, and of a general set of ideas which justify existing society on the other. The ablest practitioners of popular arts are those most able to deal with this contradictory situation.

**'People listen to stories, like songs, admire paintings or laugh at jokes because these relate to their everyday lives'**

It is not only the popular art of the masses that has to face up to such problems. So does that of the ruling class. Its members too need to be bolstered up by ideological certainty, by an account of society that justifies their role to themselves, by an art that soothes over the painful dilemmas they face.

Any successful ruling class attempts, by patronage, to draw to itself the ablest artists. This accomplishes three tasks for it: it provides itself with the best, most aesthetically satisfying or most entertaining art; it enables it to feel that it itself is the guardian of all civilised values; and it provides a mechanism for ensuring that the ablest practitioners of popular art see that their own advance depends upon not challenging the ruling ideology.

Ideology in general is always propagated by a hierarchy of practitioners. At the most popular level there are those who repeat as truisms isolated fragments of the ruling ideology ('there will always be rulers', 'human nature means things cannot be



## MARXISM & CULTURE

different', 'the wealthy provide work for the mass of us', and so on). Above those there are the low level professionals who are continually putting across such ideas in newspapers, on TV programmes or through the educational system. Finally, at the highest level there are the 'intellectuals' proper, whose 'learned' discussions in books, articles and lecture halls justify the arguments put across by those below.

The same hierarchy operates within the arts. There is 'high art', popular art and the culture of ordinary life.

The relationship between the three is not as simple as that in other areas of ideology.

On the one hand, the high degree of division of labour in an advanced capitalist society means that high art can become so specialised as hardly to relate at all to popular art: while the books of the right wing philosophy professor, Roger Scruton can act as a reference point for the *Sun's* most rabid political columnists, the works of a composer like Stockhausen hardly do the same for its popular music columnists.

On the other, the need of art to give expressions to the contradictions within people's lives means that even art aimed mainly at the upper classes can challenge certain aspects of existing society.

There are important consequences for revolutionary socialists from this hierarchical structuring of art.

First, most of the time the sheer scale of resources at the disposal of the ruling class compared with those on our side mean that the ruling class have no great difficulty in pulling the great majority of practitioners of popular culture into their orbit. Again and again, young writers, musicians, playwrights or comedians emerge who put across a message of defiant hostility to the status quo, only to 'mature' into tame entertainers and artists for it.

This is not only because the ruling class controls the funds which alone can enable people to have the time to specialise in artistic production or because it controls the means by which they can find expression (the TV channels, film studios or publishing houses). It is also because in a society which is not in a state of pre-revolutionary ferment, most people take the main structures of ruling class power

for granted and art which is going to be popular is art which does the same.

It is only when there is a great upsurge of class struggle that there is any great pull upon the mass of artists to move in a different direction—as was seen in 1917 and, on a much smaller scale, in 1968 in France or during the miners' strike.

It is complete voluntarist nonsense for socialists to imagine that on the terrain of a long drawn out defensive struggle by the working class (a war of attrition, or what Gramsci called 'a war of positions') we can somehow match the ruling class's resources by our own efforts and counter their domination in the field of popular culture.

Of course, particular socialist artists will do their best to wage their little bit of the struggle. They will try to attract other artists to what they are doing. But they will also have to recognise that until the working class as a whole makes a massive move forward, their own efforts will hardly make more than a dent in the defences of the other side. And even the dent they make will reflect the limitations of the defensive war of attrition: they will find it much easier to give expression to the horrors of existing society than to the idea that working class self activity is the answer to these.

Most of us are not artists. We are socialists who have to argue with people influenced by existing popular culture (and with the prejudices and stereotypes which it implants in our own consciousnesses). The best that *Socialist Worker* and *Socialist Worker Review* can do is to help us in this task.

Here the most important thing will usually be stringent examination and criticism of things that popular culture expects us to take for granted. This means, for instance, looking at the covert assumptions that lie behind the representation of people's lives in soap operas, pointing out the hidden (often very reactionary) message of some of the most popular films or pop songs, being iconoclastic towards the most fashionable trends in comedy or music.

The point is not that we can win the battle against the mystifying effects of popular culture. Today it fulfils some of the tasks which religion played in the days of the young Marx. And, as he insisted, the only way to challenge such mystification completely was to challenge in practice the society that produced it. However, such considerations did not lead Marx to drop his atheism and join the church, nor should they lead socialists today to drop a critical attitude towards most of the products of popular culture and to join in its fan clubs.

The second consequence of the hierarchical structuring of art concerns our attitude to certain 'high art'.

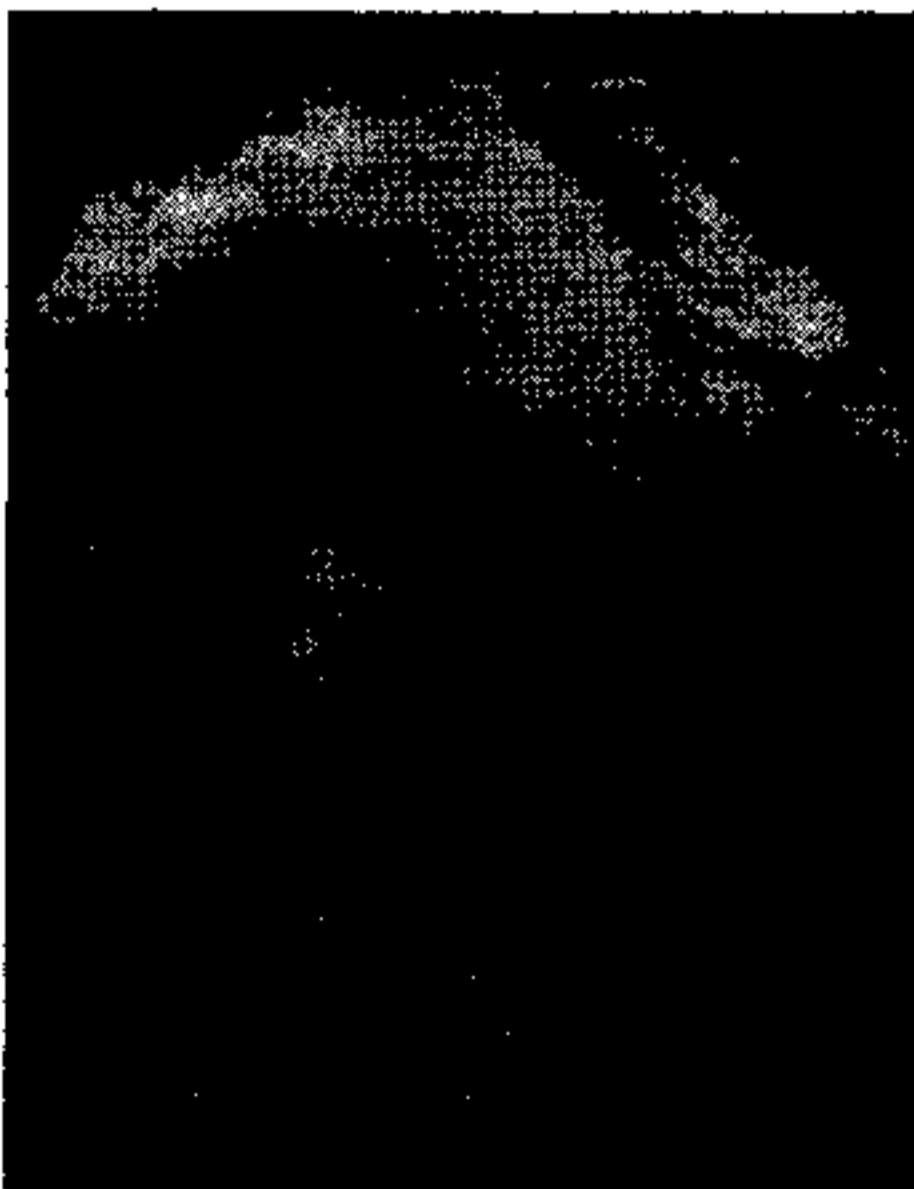
This, by definition, is usually art which is well out of the reach of the great mass of workers. Bourgeois society provides them with neither the time nor the education to

partake in it. From that it is easy to draw the conclusion that it is an elite product that we should not have anything to do with.

Again and again people say the socialist press should not deal with films that are only shown at art cinemas, with serious novels or with Channel Four programmes. Why talk about Tolstoy, the argument goes, when most people are watching Tottenham?

The argument is wrong—and not just because only three per cent of adults go to football matches as opposed to more than 50 per cent who read books (according to *Social Trends*, 1986). Much more importantly, the best of 'high' art attempts to provide an overall expression of the society in which we live. It can deepen your insight into that society and into the problems of people who live in it.

This by no means applies to all 'high art'. Much of it is self-indulgent crap, expressing no more than a mystified view of bourgeois angst. But some of it is much more than this.



**Tottenham or Tolstoy**

For instance, when the bourgeoisie was struggling against the old feudal order, much of the art provided an insight into the clash of great social forces which still remains fascinating today. This is true of the plays of Shakespeare, the novels of Walter Scott, Stendhal or Balzac, and the music of Beethoven.

Or again, look at some of the novels produced in the 1920s and 1930s, when even whole sections of the bourgeoisie felt existing society was slipping into barbarism. The best writings of Dos Passos, of Dreiser, of Malraux, of Sartre, of Silone, of Steinbeck, of James T Farrell, all attempted to come to terms with this state of affairs and in doing so provided insights which any socialist can still benefit from.

A rounded revolutionary socialist is not one who will simply dismiss out of hand such advances in understanding. He or she will, in principle, want to gain access to them, even if in practice time and other

commitments do not make this possible.

This does not mean, let me hasten to add, that socialists adopt a school teacherish, superior attitude to other workers. We are not in the business of telling them they are ignorant because they have not read certain books. But it does mean that we encourage people to read rather than not to read, that we reject any form of workerist philistinism which rejoices in the denial to workers of the gains made by some bourgeois high art.

If we look at things in this way, we are in a position to see what publications like *Socialist Worker* and *Socialist Worker Review* can and cannot do.

We can attempt to puncture the various cultural fads and fashions, showing how they encourage people to take for granted things that should be questioned.

We can direct people to the most relevant and accessible bits of 'high culture'. This, for instance, has been what *Socialist Worker Review* has quite rightly done in the case of novelists with its 'Writers Reviewed' series. It is what *Socialist Worker* occasionally does when it reviews an art cinema film or a Channel Four series.

Here very much the same considerations apply as in the putting across of socialist ideas. We have to begin, in *Socialist Worker* with those things which are most accessible for people who are new to socialist discussion and argument, and then move on in *Socialist Worker Review* to those that are more difficult.

Finally, we can give publicity to those few, socialist artists who try to go further with some sort of artistic representation of the contradictions of existing society.

But in all this we have to understand our achievements will be modest. Our criticism will leave the bulk of culture, whether 'popular' or 'high' untouched. We will only have the most marginal of successes when it comes to overcoming the way in which capitalist society cuts the mass of people off from the advances of 'high culture'. Our socialist artists will only make small advances on to the vast terrain occupied by the bourgeoisie.

It is nonsense to talk of creating a 'counter-hegemonic' culture under capitalism. We will never have the resources to do that this side of the socialist revolution. What we can do is aim at a much more limited goal - to build on those experiences of struggle which lead people to begin to envisage a different sort of society. Such building involves challenging all the ideological presuppositions of existing society, including those embodied in both popular and high culture. But we cannot go beyond this to begin to create a socialist mass culture which will be a component in the 'common sense' of the mass of people until the bourgeoisie has been beaten in the economic and political struggle.

Let's do what we can do with our meagre resources, and not make the mistake of embarking upon grandiose schemes that lead nowhere. ■

**Chris Harman**

# Reality, not the myth

## Marxism and Trade Union Struggle The General Strike of 1926

Tony Cliff and Donny Gluckstein  
*Bookmarks* £6.25

'THE General Strike itself was a textbook demonstration of bureaucratic methods and the harm they can do. The path that led to this catastrophic defeat posed the problem of how a revolutionary party should function in a non-revolutionary situation and orientate towards trade unionism.'

This book goes deeply into both questions, starting with the nature of trade unionism. Naturally this cannot be reduced to a rigid formula. There are enormous differences between the unions created in the violent upsurges of the eighteen-thirties and forties in Britain, the craft societies that were the core of British trade unionism from the fifties to the eighties and beyond, and the big organisations of more or less unskilled and semi-skilled workers that had become numerically dominant by 1926.

The differences are compounded by the fact that two very important sectors of nineteenth and early twentieth century unionism in Britain, textiles and mining, were decidedly atypical. At one level these differences are expressed in forms of organisation: craft, trade (which is by no means always the same thing), industrial and general. Organisational forms matter. But they matter less than the context in which they operate, a fact commonly underestimated by left wing militants.

Thus the 'revolutionary' unionism of the early period had a similar structure to that of the general unions which, in the twenties and right through to the sixties, were regarded by the left (with some justification) as pillars of conservatism. Conversely, the NUR, 'the model industrial union', was more consistently class collaborationist than the craft society of locomotive engineers and firemen—the opposite outcome to that expected by the militant fighters for industrial unionism.

The key questions are, as this book vividly demonstrates, the conditions in which the unions were formed and consolidated (or typically not consolidated in the period before 1850), the intensity of the class struggle, and the role of the labour bureaucracies.

'The trade union bureaucracy is a distinct, basically conservative, social formation. Like the god Janus it presents two faces: it balances between the employers and the workers. It holds back and controls the workers' struggle, but it has a vital interest not to push the collaboration with employers and state to a point where it makes the unions completely impotent...'

The authors go on to look at the different pressures on the bureaucracy.

'The trade union official balances between different sections of the unions' own memberships. He keeps in check the advanced sections of the union who are the more active and rebellious by relying on those who are more passive, apathetic or ignorant...'

But there are also the conflicts between internal and external pressures. Here the authors argue that:

'The relative strength of the internal and external forces bearing upon the union shifts and fluctuates. In certain periods the pressure from below is of overriding effect; in others the pressure from the capitalists and the state predominates. On occasions both sets of pressure may be comparatively weak, allowing a large measure of autonomy to the trade union bureaucrat. At other times both may be powerful and the bureaucracy appears trapped between irreconcilable forces...'

## 'The criminally wrong slogan "All power to the General Council" was adopted'

The authors see a very important factor emerging from all this:

'The *fundamental* fact, overriding all differences between bureaucrats, is that they belong to a conservative social stratum which, especially at times of radical crisis—as in the 1926 General Strike—make the differences between left and right bureaucrats secondary. At such times *all* sections of the bureaucracy seek to curb and control workers' militancy.'

The key question for revolutionaries is how to relate to and, under favourable circumstances, transform this state of affairs. *Nothing* is more important for revolutionaries in a country like Britain.

The first requirement is to recognise the problem. Unfortunately many on the left do not recognise it but talk glibly about the 'labour movement' inexorably going forward.

Others do understand something of the role of bureaucracies, often from bitter experience, but see the solution largely in terms of changing the personnel. The experience of the General Strike—the reality, not the myths—is invaluable here.

Given the nature of the bureaucracies, its defeat was inevitable *unless* the revolutionary party (the Communist Party at this time) had been able to *understand* the

social nature of the bureaucracies, to *exploit* its divisions and to *overcome* its leadership. It failed. In practise the CP came to pursue a policy of near-total reliance on 'left' bureaucrats—with disastrous results.

Why? There is no doubt that the party's own theoretical heritage was weak, a fact amply demonstrated in this book, and not to be underestimated. Yet it was not without some strengths. The CPGB had, at least, emancipated itself (with the help of the early Comintern) from the passive, sectarian, propagandistic tradition of pre-1920 British Marxism and that was a considerable advance.

It was more or less free, in this period, from parliamentary cretinism and had at least some insight into the dialectical relationship between the 'economic' and the 'political', the struggle within the system and the struggle to transform the system.

Nevertheless a major, probably *the* major, influence on the party's course in the crucial years 1924 to 1926, was the line of the Comintern. That body, especially after the formation of the Anglo-Soviet Trade Union Committee (between the TUC and the Russian union centre) in September 1924, pushed strongly towards reliance on those 'friends of the Soviet Union', the left-wing officials temporarily dominant on the General Council of the TUC.

The CP was politically disarmed. The criminally wrong slogan 'All Power to the General Council' was adopted. The CP ceased to act as a force *independent* of the bureaucracies.

There is some very interesting material in this book about the weakness of the Comintern leadership's grasp of trade union problems even in its best days under Lenin's personal guidance, a weakness rooted, say the authors, in the relative lack of experience of entrenched labour bureaucracies in pre-1917 Russia.

Yet there is a qualitative difference between the mistakes of the Comintern in the period of the first four Congresses and the wooing of left officials, 'progressive' nationalists, etc, in and after 1924-25 as the Russian bureaucracy under Stalin gained strength.

No doubt the new line met a ready response from much of the CPGB leadership. That in no way diminishes the responsibility of Stalinism. The Stalinists, more or less in control of the Comintern by 1926, could have pulled the CPGB leftwards. Instead they pushed it hard to the right.

The detailed description of the course of events, up to and after the debacle of May 1926, given in this book is excellent. Even those familiar with the period can learn a good deal from it. It is the integration of this material combined with a sustained and sophisticated analysis that makes *Marxism and Trade Union Struggle* indispensable reading. For, of course, the book is a guide to action for today. ■

Duncan Hallas

# Perspective for change

## Ireland's Permanent Revolution

Chris Bambery  
Bookmarks £2.50

LAST month's Unionist strike against the Anglo-Irish deal has illustrated again the truth of James Connolly's prophetic comment that any partition of Ireland would result in 'a carnival of reaction both North and South'.

This thoroughly reactionary strike merely underlies the true nature of Northern Ireland—the dominance of Loyalist ideology in a viciously repressive, sectarian, artificially created state whose base is and has been since inception systematic discrimination against the Catholic minority of the population.

Difficult arguments—and there are no more difficult to carry in the British working class than those on Ireland—demand of socialists clear analysis, understanding, and a perspective for change.

Chris Bambery has given us, in this little book, an indispensable weapon. In writing a concise and stimulating account of Ireland's political development from a revolutionary socialist standpoint Chris has filled a long-standing gap in the literature of the SWP.

To grasp the current crisis, as Chris shows, it is necessary to locate Ireland within the framework of Britain's developing capitalism and thus as her first colony.

The very settlement of Ireland's population, its agriculture, its industry, its civil institutions, were fashioned by the needs of the British ruling class from their drive to accumulate.

Even the infamous potato famine of 1845, with the resulting two million deaths, was the consequence not of natural blight but of colonial rule. Plentiful supplies of grain and livestock flooded Britain while the Irish starved.

For the 20th century the legacy of British sovereignty was the emergence of a divided Ireland, split between the advanced industrial north east (integrally connected to British capitalism), and the rest of Ireland, driven backwards by the experience of imperialism.

Nor is sectarianism the product of an irrational desire by the Irish to continue the religious wars of the 16th century. Religious divisions, fostered by Britain through plantations, became rooted in industrial society in the 19th century.

For Belfast's Protestant industrialists, cementing the Unionist alliance with Protestant workers through the Orange lodges provided an essential bulwark against home rule and gave the added advantage of dividing the working class in order to prevent any united challenge to their rule and profits.

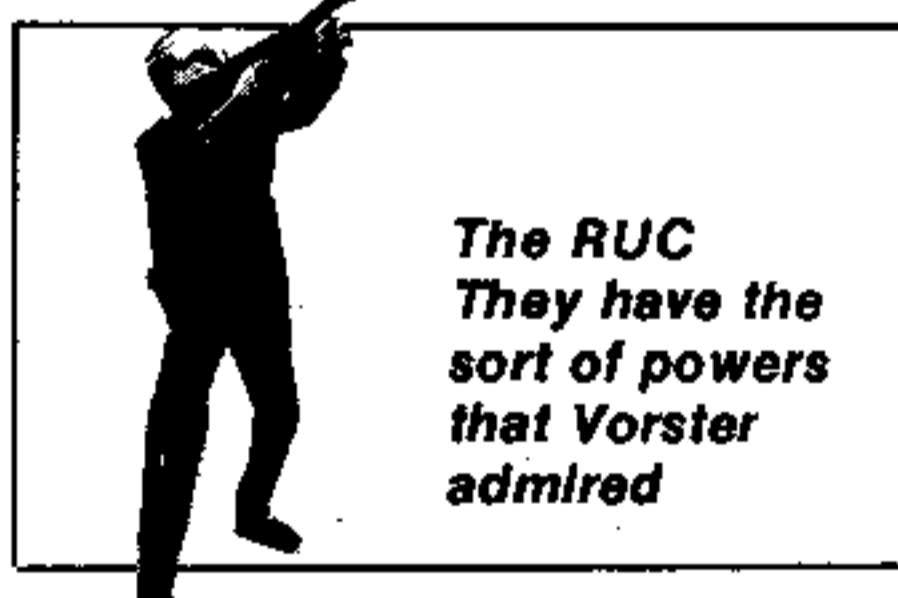
In return marginal privileges, access to slightly better slum housing, and the slightly better paid and skilled jobs in ship-building and engineering were given to Protestant workers. Sectarianism in its contemporary form was created by capitalism.

The division between the material interests of a Protestant ruling class in the North and a Catholic national ruling class in the South was formalised by the partition treaty of 1921.

Sectarianism was built into the new Northern state. The minority Catholic population faced a battery of special powers and ultimately the naked force of 50,000 members of the RUC and B-Specials designed to guarantee Protestant ascendancy. This unreformable monstrosity with powers admired by ex-president Vorster of South Africa is what, in all essentials, exists today.

The history of Ireland is also one of struggles against British imperialism. From the United Irishmen of the 1790s there has existed a tradition of republican struggle.

Today the Provisional IRA are the main force fighting the British army and state and therefore unconditionally deserve the support of socialists.



The origins of the present IRA, in the aftermath of the civil rights movement, as an elementary organisation of defence of the nationalist communities against the repression of the invading British troops, give the lie to a common argument on the left that the provos split the working class or somehow are 'green fascists'.

But while the prime responsibility of socialists has always to be to condemn British imperialism and to demand the withdrawal of British troops, we cannot suspend our critical faculties.

Republicanism as a cross-class alliance is incapable of bringing fundamental change, and by its nature imposes limitations on the struggle. In 1981, during the hunger strikes, much of the Provos' strategy centred on mobilising Catholic bishops and Fianna Fail MPs to pressure Thatcher.

Nor can a military strategy ultimately succeed. Almost seventeen years after James Callaghan sent the troops in, Britain still cannot defeat the IRA with its support

in the Catholic ghettos. But neither can the IRA defeat the British army. And certainly no strategy that leaves the fighting to a few hundred armed experts or a number of elected councillors can liberate Ireland for the people.

There is a key to unlocking this stalemate. It is a political perspective that brings with it an understanding of the political power of a united working class to sweep away both states North and South.

Both working classes suffer from unemployment and low wages and are denied basic rights. The continuing world economic crisis will deepen these harsh realities.

It is out of the partial struggles of the working class against the system that a confidence and consciousness of the common interest in overthrowing the bosses can develop.

But is not the Protestant working class inevitably tied to the Orange bosses and the British state? As Chris reminds us, those who argue this inevitably fail to take account of those dramatic episodes—in 1907, 1919, 1932—when an astonishing unity was forged in struggle across the sectarian divide and society split across class lines. In recent years the more modest examples in the North of De Lorean, the hospital workers and even the miners indicate the potential for class unity.

An idea of how backward ideas can break down in the course of struggle is a precondition for approaching that minority of Protestant workers who can and are prepared to break from Unionism. This the Provisionals cannot do.

Perhaps Chris's greatest contribution has been to highlight the relevance of Leon Trotsky's conception of permanent revolution to Ireland.

At a distance, and quite independently, it was James Connolly's perspective too. He wrote in 1897: 'The Irish working class must emancipate itself, and in emancipating itself must, perforce, free its own country.' In other words, the struggle to liberate Ireland cannot be separated from the struggle by the working class for socialism.

Of necessity that must involve the vast mass of the working class and of necessity it means that the struggle cannot be limited to stages.

'Partition serves the interests of the ruling class North and South of the border. In stark terms, it can be ended only by workers' power, by a struggle in which workers grasp their common interest in ousting the bosses' class along with the institutions and divisions it has created. Sectarianism will disappear in the process of achieving such a movement.'

Perhaps the greatest of Ireland's tragedies has been the historical failure, shared by James Connolly, to build a revolutionary socialist organisation with this perspective. Chris's book will have contributed to the urgent task of building that organisation in today's conditions. ■  
Phil Taylor

# Men of metal

Working in Metal  
Chris McGuffie  
Merlin £17.50

CAPITALISM is continually changing its production methods. That involves a corresponding transformation in the working class. Old workforces with established traditions and forms of organisation give way to new workforces with different ways of working and organising.

This has happened in Britain on a huge scale at least three times in the last century. At the turn of the century there was the relative decline of the industry of the industrial revolution, textiles, and the rise of heavy industry. In the inter-war years there was the relative decline of heavy industry and the rise of light engineering and motors. Finally, in the last two decades there has been the relative decline of heavy industry, mining and railways and the rise of mainly white collar work in the so-called 'service' sector.

This book looks at the second series of changes. They led in a period of about 20 years to a doubling of the output and the workforce in engineering and other metal industries. Their work was quite central to the whole capitalist system by the time the First World War broke out. The metal workers of Berlin and the Ruhr, of Petrograd, of Turin, of Glasgow and Sheffield, of Pittsburgh, were to occupy a central role that would have been unimaginable a generation earlier.

But, the author argues, the changes which took place have been subject to two great confusions.

The first was 'the myth of national peculiarity', of the 'relative failure of managerial and scientific endeavours in Britain and France', of 'an aristocratic ruling class' and a 'traditional social structure'. This is a myth which has been much pushed in this country by Marxists associated with *New Left Review* (although they are not referred to in this book). McGuffie shows that, in fact, the British industrial capitalists were far from amateurs.

What was true was that the slow, organic development of heavy industry in Britain enabled there to be an equally slow absorption of the techniques of management—including an understanding of the production process as a whole—by both the owners and the lower level supervisors.

By contrast, in the US until the last decade of the nineteenth century, the owners tended to leave the details of production to an independent 'petty bourgeoisie' (the author's term) of contractors who controlled the workforce. They had to develop a whole new system of formal training in

management and engineering methods to assert their own control and achieve maximum profits from the high investments of the 1890s. In Germany, equally formal methods had to be used because of the late industrialisation of the country and the shortage of personnel to run the huge new factories.

It was not 'amateurism', but rather a much earlier element of professional competence which resulted in a less formal approach in Britain.

The second confusion concerns what happened to the skills of the workforce. Some people have argued that the expansion of the workforce turned and raised the skill levels of the workforce by transforming unskilled labourers into skilled and semi-skilled workers. Others have argued that 'craft' workers saw their skills degraded as they were transformed into a homogeneous, semi-skilled mass.



McGuffie argues that neither account grasps what really happened, because they misunderstand what the skills of a 'skilled' worker were.

In Britain the all-round craftsman, understanding and overseeing all the elements of the production process, was already on his way out at the beginning of the nineteenth century. By the mid-nineteenth century he had disappeared everywhere in the metal and engineering industries except in machine building.

In his place were workers whose 'skill' consisted in being able to do only one small part of the overall process, but to do it very quickly and ably. This was shown by the fact that workers often had difficulty using the 'skills' they had learnt in one firm for any other firm and by the way those who aspired to all-round skills could only get them by moving from firm to firm, learning a different specific skill in each.

This was obscured by the way the unions used the craft ideology in their efforts to reduce the influx of cheap labour into the

plants. They talked about the need for apprenticeships, craft training and so on. But, in fact, apprentices were cheap labour, used for the most menial of jobs for several years before eventually learning to do a specific 'skilled' task. The 'skill' they then learnt was that of doing one particular job very quickly, rather than any all-round craft knowledge.

Where the unions were successful in exercising control over entry into the workforce, they did ensure that such specific tasks were done by adult union members on full wage rates and not by teenagers working on low wages. It was these successes which were challenged by the pressures towards dilution and Taylorism which provoked the great engineering struggles of World War One and after.

In Germany and the US the later and faster growth of the industry created a shortage of such workers, such as never existed in Britain. This could only be catered for by an enormous effort to train a mass of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe to accept the discipline of factory work and to learn specific techniques.

In each case, however, it is wrong to see the metal and engineering workers of the turn of the century as 'craftsmen' and 'labour aristocrats' who were then replaced with the growth of semi-skilled work. Rather, many of them were already doing work which could have been done by the 'semi-skilled' but for union opposition.

This suggests that the real 'labour aristocrats' were those who controlled the way in which the different specific parts of the labour process slotted together—supervisors, foremen and contractors, rather than 'skilled craftsmen'.

There was not a change from a 'golden age' of craft production to a new era of semi-skilled production, as some writers seem to imply—any more than the changes in the working class today involve further such changes. What there was, however, was a concerted attempt by management to increase profitability by breaking union controls over the supply of labour and the speed of production.

It was here that techniques such as those associated with the American, Taylor, played a vital role. He insisted that new production methods had to break each task down into as many single actions as possible, each performed many hundreds of times a day by a single worker who could quickly acquire the necessary 'skill'. This replacement of one set of specific skills by a new set would break any resistance from the old workforce.

But such changes could only work if management themselves had enough detailed knowledge of the specific techniques to make sure they were done at maximum speed and the ability to integrate them all into a single production process. That put a premium on increasing the skill levels of all levels of management. To this end the educational system had to be extended to provide both an 'NCO class' of supervisors



and junior managers which had some years of secondary education and an 'officer class' of top and middle managers that had higher technical education.

McGuffie's book confirms the basic account of the degradation of work provided by Harry Braverman's classic, *Labour and Monopoly Capital*. But it challenges the tendency of Braverman and his followers to romanticise a golden age of skilled labour. And it extends the analysis to show changes in both the character of management and the educational system. It is useful reading for anyone who wants to come to terms with the changes in the material basis of the class struggle in the last century. ■

Colin Humphries

## The right resistance

From Munich to the Liberation

J P Azéma

Cambridge University Press

THE SHADOW of the German occupation still lies heavy on the French political scene. The Gaullists trace their legitimacy from the war-time leader of the Free French. Francois Mitterrand began his political career in a resistance organisation for escaped prisoners. Even Le Pen's organisation, the National Front, bears the same name as the body set up by the French Communist Party to fight for the 'independence of France'.

Azéma's history of France from 1938 to 1944 contains some illuminating insights into the period and its implications. One can only write really good history by taking sides, and although Azéma clearly believes, like Albert Camus, that 'one cannot be on the side of concentration camps', he generally retreats into a stance of academic objectivity. Nonetheless, his scrupulously documented account contains much of the raw material for an analysis.

World War II was a conflict between rival imperialisms which the allied side succeeded in passing off as an anti-fascist struggle. The situation that enabled them to sell that swindle has deep and complex roots. Azéma shows how, by 1938, the traditional left/right line-up on war had become thoroughly confused.

The Communist Party was invoking the spirit of Joan of Arc in its call for military resistance to Hitler, while the nationalist extreme right—the sort who chanted 'Death to the Jews' in the chamber of deputies—had adopted a 'pacifist' line on the grounds that war would help the Communists. As a result, when the war came, it was seen, quite falsely, as a 'left wing' cause.

The contradictions continued with the defeat of France in 1940 and the establishment of the Vichy state under

Marshal Pétain. Azéma shows in some detail that Vichy enjoyed considerable independence from its Nazi patrons. All its crimes cannot simply be blamed on the foreign invader. For example, the Vichy measures against Jews were taken entirely on the initiative of home-grown French anti-semites, without any pressure from the German occupiers.

The classic French right rallied to Vichy. The traditional nationalists became the most fervent apologists for the Germans. But Vichy also drew on many other sources. A whole group of technocrats believed Vichy offered the opportunity for economic modernisation without any worries about democracy. Others simply believed that the 'enemy within' (the working class) was a greater threat to their interests than Hitler. And Vichy did not lack 'left-wing' support. Three quarters of the Socialist Party deputies voted for Pétain in 1940, and numerous ex-Communists and ex-syndicalists offered their services to the marshal. Azéma reminds us just how many so-called 'democrats' will flock to the banner of fascism if it suits their book.

The resistance was, equally, a contradictory body. Many individual right-wing nationalists joined it out of commitment to French patriotism. But when they turned to those of their own class for financial support, they got short shrift. And it was, of course, the working class who suffered the main burdens of the war—hunger and cuts in real wages.

It was above all the politics of the French Communist Party that ensured that the resistance did not become a class-based movement, but was harnessed to the cause of military victory for the allies. In so doing, they produced the final paradox. The left's war against fascism paved the way for Charles de Gaulle to take over at the war's end, guaranteeing the survival of French capitalism. Yet de Gaulle had more in common with the classic right, even though he could on occasion adopt a bit of radical rhetoric.

In World War I the organisations of the left betrayed the workers openly and callously. In World War II they did it more subtly but no less disastrously. ■

Ian Birchall

## Obscuring Marx

The Political Economy of Marx

M Howard and J King

Longman £7.95

IT'S A sign of the times perhaps that the textbook market in 'hatchet' jobs on Marxism is flourishing. Of course, the operations are more sophisticated than they were back in the cold war era of the

1950s. Today they are usually written by ex-Marxists who, like these, are 'sympathetic but critical'.

That means that as long as Marx's concepts are vague and general, like 'alienation' or even 'class', they are acceptable, but as soon as they become tools to expose the internal dynamic of the system they must be rejected.

The original edition of this book appeared ten years ago. Everything in the real world that has happened since to justify what Marx said is ignored. So are all the interesting works by revolutionaries which try to explain what is distinctive about the current crisis.

Instead we have a lot of pseudo-scientific claptrap dressed up with mathematical formulae and references to obscure articles in academic journals.

Anyone with money to spare for a thorough introduction to Marxist economics should try instead John Weeks' *Capital and Exploitation*, or Fine and Harris' *Rereading Capital*, or Ernest Mandel's *Introduction*, or even Sweezy's forty year old *Theory of Capitalist Development* for all its under-consumptionist errors. ■

Pete Green

## Good gang

Sandinista—a novel of Nicaragua

Maria Jackober

New Star Books

THIS NOVEL is set in Nicaragua in 1977. It is about the coming revolution and a group of people who make up a cell of Sandinistas.

It is written by a Canadian writer who went to stay in Nicaragua in 1982 and 1984 to 'research' the book. From those few facts reproduced on the back and the cover I thought it would be awful. I was wrong; it's actually a good read.

The politics of the writer are more or less what you would expect, left-liberal with a hint of socialism, the writing is not—it's good.

The group that makes up the gang are taken from a cross section of society, the idealistic young rich girl, the poor gifted slum boy etc.

The novel shows the Sandinistas being recruited from all classes, which I suspect was not the case but the writing rises above the clichés and carries you through the confused politics.

Influenced I suspect by the writings of B Traven, but without his hatred of the system and revolutionary bite, the novel has enough insight to hold your attention without so much sentimentality that it becomes irritating. ■

Ray Cox

## The ties that bind

IF JOE AUSTIN is correct (February *SWR*) then we are in for a depressing time.

He tells us that the division between Protestant and Catholic workers will continue until the British are forced out of Ireland.

And the Loyalist community 'don't have strikes' over low pay and unemployment. Austin claims that there are no such issues—as any 'rocking the boat' is easily becalmed by the threat of giving 'the Republicans or the communists an opportunity'.

Thus we are told that the majority of workers in the North are tied on almost all issues to their ruling class. As recent events have shown this may be true for most of the time. But it leaves Austin unable to explain the likes of the Outdoor Relief dispute. To him, it is just a freak—a 'March hare'.

The opposite needs of wage labour and capital exist in the six counties as anywhere else. It is this conflict of interests that makes some form of class struggle inevitable.

Even solid beds of Orangeism, such as the shipyards and other engineering works in Belfast came out on mass strikes in 1919 and 1944. On both occasions defying the state's forces and laws were a direct consequence.

The Orange monolith, in that situation was cracked. In reality the cross-class alliance of Orangeism had been broken—but that, of itself, did not mean that the old ideas had changed.

This applied to the Outdoor Relief dispute in 1932. Catholic and Protestant workers rioted together against the police, for higher unemployment benefit.

The lesson is that when workers' struggle rises up there are Protestant militants who break from traditional Orangeism. The problem is to hold and develop that break. For this to be done an organisation is required.

Not a 'non-sectarian Labour Party' or a reformist body simply campaigning against discrimination—these will not work. The relative advantages which bind Protestant workers to Orangeism undercut the basis for a stable, reformist organisation in the North.

We need to point out the absolute disadvantage of workers, be they Protestant or Catholic, North or South, from the

existence of the Orange State. More importantly we must emphasise the power of those workers to overcome scarcity.

For Republicans to dismiss the class struggle helps lengthen the time before Britain is forced out of Ireland. The March hares may not breed like rabbits—they may be rare, but it is by making the connection between the national struggle and the class struggle in Ireland that the key lies to beating the boss class.■

Mike Thompson  
South London

## Not ourselves alone

THE recent interview with Sinn Fein's Joe Austin provides opportunity to discuss what the response of the anti-imperialist movement should be to the latest treaty between the Irish and the British ruling class.

Few Irish Republican socialists today would deny that the present Sinn Fein is a completely different political force from the party formed by Arthur Griffiths. However the Republican movement has so far failed to define its socialism, as Connolly did, as placing workers in control of the 'means of production, distribution and exchange'.

The 'acid-test' for revolutionary socialists must be the position they adopt in respect of the relationship between workers, their labour and product. Those unwilling to advance this goal must forfeit the right to be regarded as revolutionary. Without this fundamental commitment, however 'radical' a party, they are destined to compromise the class interests of the workers.

I would like to address Joe's response to the question of how much damage the Hillsborough Accord could do the Republican movement. He correctly states his movement 'only reflects an aspiration (they) are not the custodians of it'. Later in reply to Pat Stack's observation that the Dublin regime have 'successfully managed' capitalist interests in the Southern state he alleges this is due to 'SF being weak in the South'.

While both statements taken individually are true they combine to reveal a gap in Sinn Fein's thinking. The latter assertion runs the risk of counter-opposing SF

for an unorganised and misdirected working class in the South. Joe's former claim not to be the (sole) custodians of the national and class struggles in Ireland carries with it the implicit need to forge a realignment of revolutionary forces. To date Sinn Fein has been particularly wary of such a proposal. This reflects a lack of political confidence and reveals an area of insecurity which must be overcome in struggle if it is not to slow down the future rate of development within the nationalist working class North and South.

Joe claims Sinn Fein are engaged in 'creating an atmosphere of dialogue around the accord'. To date, other than the tactical offer of an electoral pact with the SDLP during the recent Westminster by-elections, no concrete form of dialogue has been extended to embrace other anti-imperialist forces opposed to the pact.

Sinn Fein identify the Accord as the first time since partition the British and Irish ruling classes 'have really come together' in defence of their interests. But they abdicate their role in seeking a new realignment of revolutionary forces and leave the question of any meaningful response by anti-imperialists throughout the country hanging in mid-air.

If Sinn Fein hope to become 'politically relevant' to those normally unconcerned with the national question they must state how they propose to relate to the progressive forces within the working class. Are such forces to be seen as allies, competitors or worse still as irrelevant? This ambiguity currently affects many socialists outside the Republican movement and demands attention.

The honesty with which Joe admits '(some) past positions we had quite clearly were wrong' is encouraging. However, as one currently re-appraising the situation in the light of repeated 'false dreams' within the IRSP, mere abstract individual encouragement is not enough.

Many revolutionary socialists in the Republican tradition outside Sinn Fein seek more tangible proof that the elitism and chauvinism which characterised the old 'ourselves alone' mentality of the early seventies no longer exists.

The present Anglo-Irish Accord represents an embryonic strategy for the future stability of Ireland inside a capitalist framework. If Sinn Fein are to be effective in building socialism in Ireland their theory and practice—once more guided by Connolly—must reflect the new realities which call for greater

anti-imperialist unity around the banner of revolutionary Republican socialism.■

Jimmy Brown  
H Blocks

## Irish myths

LAST MONTH'S interview with Joe Austin of Sinn Fein was a mine of information for anybody in Britain attempting to understand the 'Irish Problem'. It provides plenty of ammunition for any SWP member who has to confront the main myths about Ireland prevalent amongst British socialists.

By far the most widespread and dangerous of these myths is that the Provos are 'sectarian gangsters'. One argument which unites virtually the entire Labour Party—from extreme right wingers like Don Concannon of UDM fame, through to 'hard left' socialists in Militant—is that the Republican movement is a 'Green Catholic Mafia'.

Yet nobody in their right mind could read this interview and conclude that Joe Austin is a sort of Belfast Godfather. Several times Austin argues for a 'democratic socialist republic', and it is clear that he genuinely wants 'an alternative strategy to capitalism in the South'.

Austin's personal opposition to the recent anti-abortion amendment also deals a blow to the myth that all Republicans are hard line Catholics. And I'd be interested to see how any Labour left-winger could characterise someone who supported the miners' strike and canvasses for Labour Party candidates as an enemy of the working class.

The interview also provides an answer to the (much less influential) argument that we should offer uncritical support to the Provos, or that Sinn Fein is virtually a revolutionary socialist party.

In fact what is striking is the similarities between left Republicanism and left reformism in Britain. (Although the Provos, of course, have a far healthier attitude to the violence of the oppressed). Thus Joe Austin is not clear about how to get socialism—he's 'unsure' about whether there is a parliamentary road to socialism. This weakness is reflected in Sinn Fein's political practice.

For example, in theory Joe

Austin rejects an alliance with middle class nationalists. Yet he also says, 'we would have preferred it if the by-elections were fought on a platform of nationalist interest'.

In other words, Sinn Fein wanted an electoral pact with the SDLP—a middle class organisation which is neither 'democratic' nor socialist.

Yet in reality parties like Fianna Fail and the SDLP *always* line up with British imperialism on fundamental issues.

Dialogue with Sinn Fein is both necessary and useful. But at the same time we must be honest about our differences. In order to achieve their aims — the defeat of British imperialism and a socialist republic—they will have to make a complete break from a tradition based on the revolutionary politics of the 18th century (Wolfe Tone, the founder of Republicanism, based his ideas on the French and American Revolutions).

Only the revolutionary politics of the 20th century—Marxism—points a way out of the current deadlock. ■

Pat Walsh  
Burnley

## Criticism too

THE interview with Joe Austin (February *SWR*) clearly demonstrates why socialists should oppose the Anglo-Irish deal. It offers nothing to the majority of Catholics in the Northern state. The aim of the deal is to win back middle class Catholics sympathetic to Sinn Fein and the armed struggle, while simultaneously increasing repression in the working class Catholic ghettos.

There has been no effort to improve living standards and root out discrimination against Catholics in housing, jobs and the legal system. Proposed concessions to Catholic national identity—street names in Irish, Irish language schools, legal display of the tricolour, Catholic judges in terrorist trials and more funds to the Fair Employment Agency (which monitors discrimination in jobs) are purely superficial.

However we can't oppose the deal simply on nationalist grounds. We give open and unconditional support to Sinn Fein and the Provisionals in their struggle against the discrimination and bigotry of the Orange State, but we criticise

their nationalist politics. Only once during the interview did Pat Stack give any suggestion of criticism of Republican politics.

Sinn Fein are above all a nationalist party, class politics are secondary. Although Austin denies that Sinn Fein court support from middle class nationalists, they call for unity with Fianna Fail over the Anglo Irish deal, and electoral pacts with the SDLP.

The price of an all class alliance is a high one. SDLP councillor Brian Feeny has attacked community centres in West Belfast and Derry alleging that they are run by paramilitaries and calling for the British government to cease their funding. This gives credence to the wild rants of Unionist MPs that the centres are Provo fronts and gives the British the excuse they need to stop the grants.

If we don't criticise Sinn Fein's nationalist politics then we don't defend the interests of the working class. Only the working class has a real interest in smashing the Northern state and uniting Ireland free from British rule. ■

V J Wass  
Socialist Workers Movement

## Party time

DON Watson (March *SWR*) makes a number of serious mistakes.

The victory of socialism, he insists is inevitable. This notion appears to me pretty dangerous. If you are assured of socialism's necessary victory, then the activity of socialists who wish to change the course of history becomes superfluous, or rather less urgent.

The classical Marxists put the matter differently. There is a *tendency* to collapse within capitalism, because of the internal contradictions of the system. Similarly, workers *tend* to develop class consciousness. But all sorts of things can offset these tendencies. Ultimately, only one thing assures the final victory of socialism, a class-conscious revolutionary proletariat emancipating itself through its own activity.

Watson's original theoretical confusion leads to an undervaluing of the revolutionary party. The 'independent activity of all sections of that class' is *not* decisive. The unevenness of the class under capitalism ensures that. What is decisive is the

collective organisation of the vanguard of the working class in a revolutionary party. ■

Alan Gibbons  
Liverpool

## Spheres of confusion

CLR JAMES and his political ideas need an article at least, rather than a short letter, if they are to be adequately analysed. But a few points from Don Watson's letter (March *SWR*) need to be examined.

Firstly, Marxists support *all* struggles against exploitation and oppression unconditionally. But this principle is also complemented by a duty to show how those struggles can be developed sufficiently to smash capitalism.

CLR James was one of the very few socialists who, in those years between the rise of fascism in Germany and the shattering of the post-war consensus in 1968, kept alive the idea of the self-activity of the working class. But it seems to me that his rejection of democratic centralist organisation (ie the revolutionary party) and his advocacy of movements independent of the working class for blacks, women and youth represented a move away from Marxism.

For just as the working class can be dominated by a minuscule reformist bureaucracy, so blacks, women and youth can be predominantly working class, but see their movements dominated by the ideas and personnel of the middle class.

The revolutionary party is organised on a democratic centralist basis because of the reality of the centralised state machine ranged against the working class and the oppressed. A rejection of this form of organisation, it seems to me, leads to a lack of appreciation of the need to smash the state and how to do it.

So, CLR James in an essay 'Spheres of Existence' gives unconditional and uncritical support for the black power movement. The heroism of many of the best black revolutionaries in the USA was wasted in futile shoot-outs with the US state. That is our loss. But is also our responsibility to say loudly and clearly that it could not succeed because it was separate from the working class.

Socialism is necessary, but not inevitable. Our only chance of

success is through the combination of working class self-activity and a revolutionary party with deep roots in the working class.

It is a tragedy that belief in the inevitability of socialism prevents people like Don Watson from contributing towards the building of such an organisation. And a tragedy, too, that the writings of CLR James can be used to justify that position. ■

Chris Glenn  
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## In defence of the Redskins

I THINK Julie Waterson's article in last month's *SWR* was wrong on a number of points. Red Wedge is one of the ways by which Kinnock is trying to get the vote for the next election.

It is *not* a forum for the left of the Labour Party, it is *not* an anti-Kinnock grouping. It is pro-Kinnock, the effect of which could be to outflank Militant's influence in the Young Socialists.

The speakers they have been having at the day meetings are the likes of Denis Healey and Roy Hattersley! It may not be the intention of those in Red Wedge but the end result of the thing ties in with Labour's move to the centre which is why the right of the LP are so keen on it. This does not mean that we should ignore it. We need to be there intervening, but from the outside.

It is one thing to be outside the Red Wedge concerts or if they let you, inside, selling *Socialist Worker* and the *SWR*; quite another to be part of the whole thing on stage. The whole purpose of the Red Wedge is to promote electoralism. It is totally alien to the idea of self-activity.

It means that we have to intervene, leafletting, selling the paper etc, for all the reasons that Julie says; the confusion of ideas, the radicalisation of the miners' strike, the example of South Africa etc. But it would be like saying that for us to intervene in the next election we should appear on Labour Party platforms whipping up votes or canvassing.

The Redskins are right not to be part of it just as local branches are right to go to sell the paper and leaflet. ■

Noel Halifax  
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# Goodyear for workers

FIFTY years ago this month a series of sit-down strikes were spreading throughout the town of Akron, Ohio. Akron was a major centre for rubber workers and tyre factories in the United States. The pay in these factories was poor. There was continual speed-up on the production line and working conditions were inhuman.

It was in these conditions that workers began to flock to the unions, and eventually take part in the sitdown strikes. The sitdown developed in part as a response to the violent treatment of picket lines by cops and company thugs. The sit-down is in effect a factory occupation. These tactics were to lead to the growth of the United Rubber Workers union (URW). From June 1934 through to June 1938 Akron rubber workers wielded the sit-downs repeatedly for a variety of reasons; to protest about management discipline, to change the pace of work, even to protest against racist intimidation.

It starts when workers stop work. Rather than leaving the plant to set up picket lines, the workers 'occupy' the plant until their demands are met. The plant is thus shut down and bosses risk destroying their buildings and machines if they attempt to expel the workers. The sitdown tactic raises workers' leverage against the bosses.

The Akron movement's origins may seem modest. At a 1934 company-sponsored baseball game in a city park, the teams, composed of rubber workers, sat down on the field refusing to play, because the umpire was not a union man. They demanded the non-union umpire be replaced with a unionised umpire.

The workers, who produced two-thirds of all rubber made in the US, soon brought the tactic from the sports field into the factories. In June 1934, the president of the American Federation of Labor's URW local at the General Tire Company plant called for a sitdown. After 18 hours, union officials called off the sitdown to set up a more conventional picket line outside the plant.

The 1934 strike was the last sitdown called by a union official. In the militant 1936-7 period, URW officials either begrudgingly accepted sitdowns initiated by the rank and file or worked actively to stop them.

Between early 1936 and late 1937, at least 62 sitdowns rolled through Akron plants. The 'first CIO strike', the five-week sit-down at Goodyear in February-March 1936, capped the movement in the Akron tyre industry. Thereafter, the tactic spread to other industries.

A three-day sitdown at the Firestone plant in late January 1936 rekindled the URW's struggle against the tyre bosses. Firestone had assigned a non-union 'rate-buster' into the tyre shop to increase the pace of piece-rate work. When union workers criticised the rate-buster for helping the bosses, he challenged a union worker to a fist fight.

The union worker won the fight, prompting the rate-buster to complain to the supervisor. The supervisor suspended the

URW member. In response, his workmates sat down. Three days later, the company reinstated the union worker and paid the strikers for the time they lost during the strike!

In early February, the sitdowns spread to the Goodrich and Goodyear plants as workers fought pay cuts. On 14 February a Goodyear foreman walked through the plant, informing workers that some of them would be laid off. As the foreman moved through the plant, workers stopped to hear the news. They did not resume work for five weeks, launching a sitdown that day.

Workers elected three URW rank and filers to form a committee to bargain with the bosses. When the committee received no satisfaction from management, they called for an extension of the sitdown. In the course of the strike, URW Local 2, which organised only 5 percent of the Goodyear workforce at the beginning of the strike, was able to build its ranks to include nearly all Goodyear employees.

The strike, which won major concessions from the company, was important for another reason: it was the first major battle of industrial workers fought under the banner of the Congress of Industrial Organisations (CIO).

With the Goodyear settlement on 21 March 1936, the sitdown tactic spread to non-tyre rubber workers and to other groups of workers in the area. Workers not only struck over wages and conditions, but also struck to protest against both business

intimidation of local trade unionists and a cross-burning near the Goodyear plant.

With the sitdowns spreading, union officials became openly hostile to the tactic. Sherman H Dalrymple, the URW president whose beating by anti-union thugs in 1936 provoked sitdowns throughout Akron, threatened to expel sitdown leaders from the union as early as May 1936.

He was responsible for the 1936 URW convention resolution which authorised expulsion for 'a stoppage of work...without having the consent of the local union or its executive board'.

John L Lewis, the CIO's president, sent organisers to Akron to build the URW and more importantly, to channel its militant strikes into the New Deal labour relations machinery.

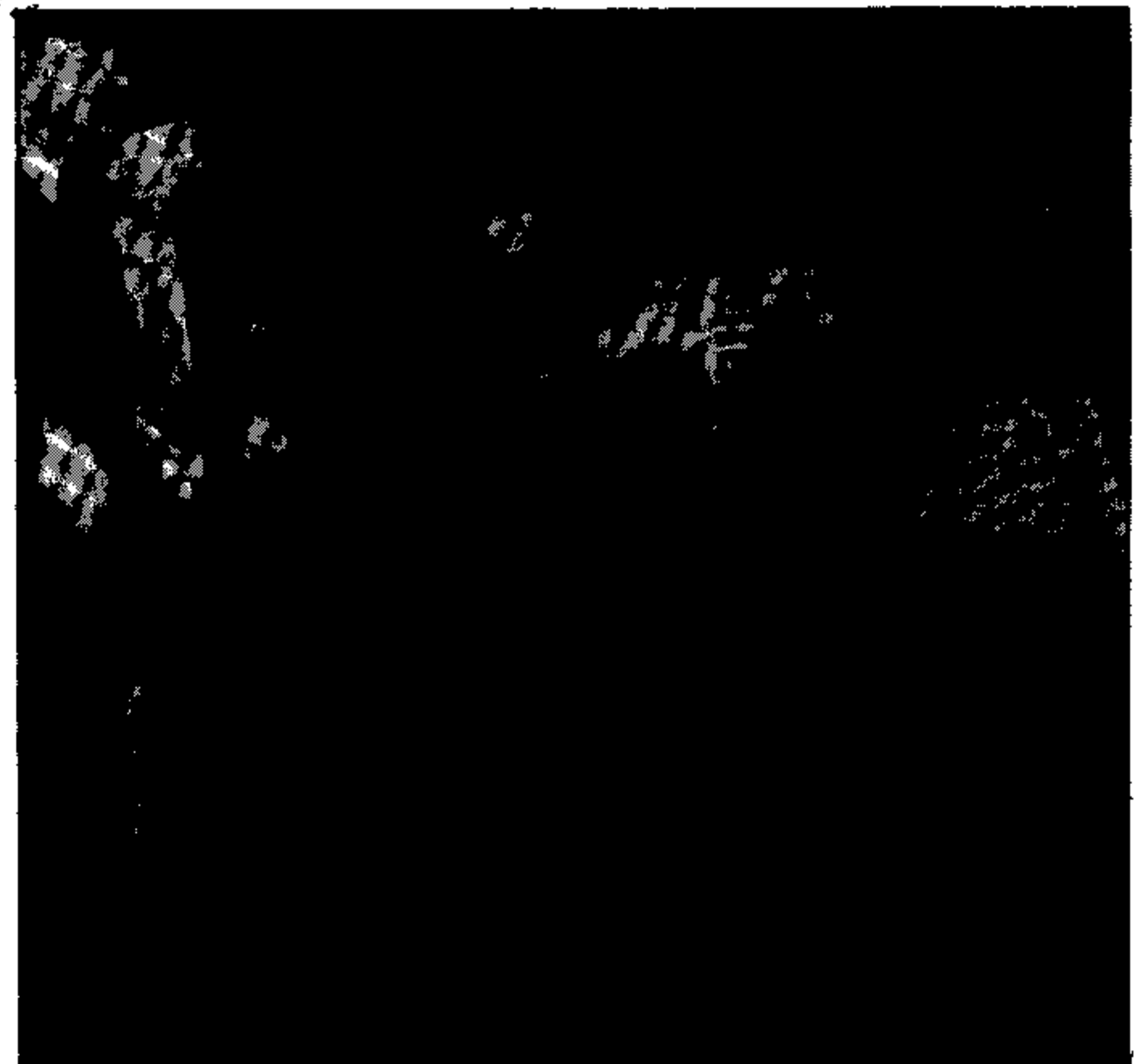
Both Lewis and Dalrymple feared that the sitdown, a tactic initiated by rank and filers, would disrupt their own 'sound labor relations' with the rubber companies and their image as 'Labor statesmen' with the Roosevelt government.

By 1937 the URW officials had gained control of the sitdown movement, agreeing to form a joint labour-management grievance council at Goodyear as a device to short-circuit rank and file militancy.

As the movement subsided, the police were much more able to isolate and to defeat strikers. The last Goodyear sitdown, in May 1938, provoked a bloody three-hour battle with police which drove the workers from the plant.

Though the Akron movement lost steam, workers like those in the Flint, Michigan auto plants followed its example. The sitdown strike became an essential weapon in the American working class's fight to build unions. ■

Lance Selfa



Sitdowns were partly a response to police violence against pickets