socialist worker
Review

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HUNGARY 1956

SHATTERED ILLUSIONS

- Interview with Hungarian dissidents
- Briefing on the 'Big Bang'
- Plight of the low paid

socialist worker
Review

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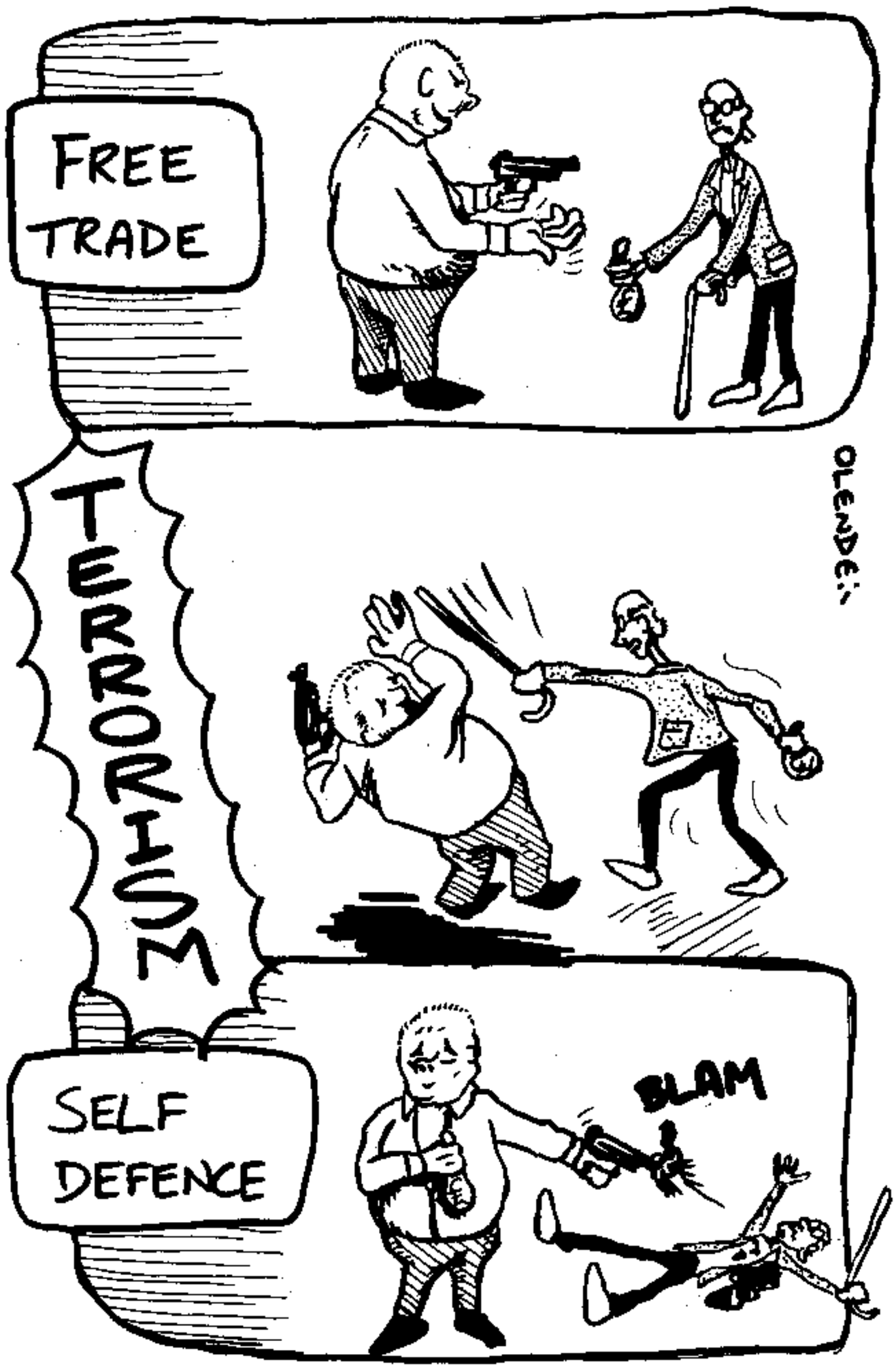

NOTES of the month

TERRORISM

Short cut to nowhere

OVER THE course of the past month, acts of terrorism have once again hit the headlines.

Twenty three Jews were killed while worshipping in a synagogue in Istanbul. Many were left dead and injured following the Karachi hijack. There have been a series of explosions in France, and there's the ever rising death toll in Northern Ireland.

Such events are always greeted by howls of outrage in the press and by politicians of every shade ot opinion. It is also true, however, that many ordinary people are horrified by these incidents.

What are the issues involved?

Firstly the outrage of the right amounts to little more than hypocrisy. Reagan and Thatcher's abhorrence of violence is very selective.

What really matters for them, and ruling classes everywhere, is not whether violence is used, but why it's used.

For socialists then, it is very important that we look at the reasons behind the action and not merely at the action itself.

We need to understand why Palestinians are willing to kill and be killed, what is it that drives the IRA to carry out their actions, and why, despite their actions, they still receive genuine levels of popular support.

Groups willing to use terrorist methods often enjoy genuine popular support in countries where the bankruptcy of reformism is most evident.

For the Palestinian people, driven from their homelands, the Israeli parliament can offer no solution. Either the Israeli state is smashed or the Palestinians remain a dispossessed people. In such circumstances reformism has little to offer and so individual terror can seem very attractive.

The same is true for Northern Ireland—where a border was specifically drawn up to ensure that Catholics would be a minority of the population—or of South Africa where Blacks are disenfranchised.

In each of these cases the forces most identified with terrorism—the IRA, ANC and PLO—are fighting against repression. Socialists should not hesitate to support them, regardless of individual actions which they carry out.

But why has there been an increase in violent and terrorist acts?

In the Middle East the American ruling class has moved away from attempted 'political' solutions, such as the Camp David agreement, towards brutal aggression and uncritical support of Israeli military might.

Those within the PLO who believed that Yasser Arrafat being feted at the UN represented a step towards Palestinian freedom have seen their illusions shattered. Simultaneously their organisation has splintered into a number of feuding factions. In such circumstances the increased violence is almost a cry of desperation with no apparent alternative road.

Similarly the high point of self confidence in Irish Republicanism followed the 1981 hunger strike. The bullet and ballot strategy, the increased friendship with sections of the Labour left, seemed on the face of it to represent real progress.

Now after almost 12 months of the Anglo Irish deal the Republicans seem once again at an impasse. Increased military activity once more begins to look attractive, despite its failure up to now to bring Irish freedom any nearer.

How then should socialists respond to these specific events, and what is our attitude to terrorism as a whole?

If we start with the overall use of individual terror, the first thing to say is that it is not the question of violence that is crucial.

A central tenet of revolutionary socialism is that capitalist society is defended by violence, and that the ruling class will not surrender their power and privilege without a fight.

The crucial point about revolutionary violence, however, is that it must be the

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mass action of the majority of workers who through their own experience and activity recognise the need to smash the state.

Individual terror is in reality a short cut. The emancipation of the working class, far from being the act of the working class, becomes the act of heroic individuals.

So there is a general disagreement over the use of terror as a means of achieving a goal. But what of specific individual acts?

It is clear that certain actions are more counterproductive than others, that sometimes the action highlights the weakness and political backwardness of those involved.

Certain acts provoke revulsion amongst even those whom the terrorist looks to for support.

Take the synagogue bombing: we do not believe that being a Jew makes you a legitimate target; to believe that is ultimately reactionary.

In this country the IRA's Brighton bomb was nowhere near as unpopular as the infamous Birmingham bomb. Socialist response to Birmingham had to be more critical.

The bomb itself was targetted against ordinary British workers, created a most bitter anti-Irish atmosphere, and showed up the weakness in a Republican ideology which made no distinction between members of the British ruling class and British workers.

Similarly, the recent death threat to all workers whose work directly or indirectly services the security forces in Ireland strengthened the hand of those who wish to portray the Provisionals as merely another set of sectarian murderers.

In reality, it represents on the Provos' part political backwardness and tactical stupidity. For socialists, having goods or buildings blacked means winning the majority of workers involved to the idea, and using the coercion of the picket line to enforce it.

For the individual terrorist the problem can apparently be solved much more simply: merely shoot the workers involved.

It is not that the IRA are sectarian murderers (they are not). But in this case their actions play into the hands of those who want to see the sectarian state and the sectarian divisions between workers strengthened.

At the end of the day the tactic is anti-working class and has to be totally condemned.

The left, then, has a duty to respond to recent events in a principled way, yet the tendency is always to err in one of two directions.

The first and most common response is to merely join the howls of moral outrage. Groups such as the Communist Party and *Militant* often sound just like Neil Kinnock in the way they respond to these events—a problem, since Kinnock usually echoes Thatcher on such questions.

The left's failure to differentiate itself from the right means that far from looking at the issues involved and the motives behind the actions, the action itself becomes all-important.

And so whole sections of the left dive for cover, forgetting all principles as they seek to dissociate themselves from the IRA, PLO or whatever.

The other tendency on the left is merely to tail end the terrorists, refusing to criticise their methods or actions.

The most common argument from left wingers who take this stand is that if you criticise then you fail to support the struggles or those leading them.

The opposite is the truth. We do support the IRA against British imperialism, the PLO against the Zionist state, the ANC against apartheid. It is precisely because we do, that we have to argue about the shortcomings of terrorism.■

LABOUR PARTY

Preparing for power?

IT IS HARD to work up much enthusiasm for the SDP or Liberal conferences. This year's were no exception—apart from the debate on nuclear defence policy. On this issue the fudge on what to replace Polaris with or whether to replace it at all threatens to be an electoral liability for the Alliance.

Possibly, as some have argued, Owen's hawkishness on nuclear weapons is designed to exclude a coalition with Labour. The problem there, however, is to assume that Labour would have any hesitation in junking its non-nuclear policy if to do so would exclude it from office.

One other notable feature of the SDP conference was the way that David Owen's speeches were shadowed by those of Roy Hattersley. Every time Owen spoke, or so it seemed, Hattersley would make a speech or statement on a similar subject. The point of this exercise was, of course, to show that Hattersley and the shadow cabinet could be as moderate, reasonable and pro-capitalist as anything Owen could promise.

Hattersley's time in recent months has been much occupied with achieving this aim. He has spent many hours in City dining rooms convincing businessmen that a future Labour government will do no harm to their profits. He recently flew to New York at the invitation of US businessmen to convince them of the same thing.

It is not simply among big businessmen that declarations of respectability are made. All the Labour leadership's efforts are being put into convincing what they regard as the respectable middle ground that mortgage holders, those with investments and the higher paid have nothing to fear from Labour. To do so, the party is prepared to adopt much of the mantle of conservatism—concern for law and order, the family (as Neil Kinnock stated in the *Sunday Mirror*, he is a 'reactionary' where his kids are concerned) and the rights of the individual.

Part of the drive towards respectability is the attempt to stifle any left wing within the party. This has been remarkably successful. We go to press before Labour's conference takes place. But it looks like Kinnock will get his way on most things at the conference.

Conveniently for him, the expulsions of *Militant* members in Liverpool should be all over bar the shouting by then. Appeals to the conference are likely to fall on deaf ears. That doesn't mean all Kinnock's problems are over. On the question of the witch hunt, he still has the Labour Party Young Socialists to contend with—although its merger with National Organisation of Labour Students looks like ensuring a

We'll sing the Red Flag once a year

more pro-Kinnock stance. There is also the case of Scally and Khan, whose expulsion from Hattersley's Sparkbrook constituency Labour Party has caused widespread protest.

But hardly any resolutions against the witch hunt have found their way onto the agenda paper for the conference.

In fact the overwhelmingly largest number of resolutions are on nuclear power and the related weapons. Defence threatens to become a major issue now that the Liberal Assembly's anti-nuclear revolt against the leadership has jeopardised the Alliance compromise.

The nuclear power resolutions reflect the deep concern over issues like Chernobyl and the bombing of Libya, as well as fears over Sellafield and the dumping of nuclear waste by Nirex. These concerns may well lead to a resolution being adopted which calls on Labour to phase out nuclear power stations.

Such an outcome would be unwelcome for Kinnock and would lead no doubt to an outcry in the press. But it is unlikely that it would find its way into the manifesto, and even less likely that a future Labour government would implement it. In any case, the resolution does not call for the shutting down of power stations.

So the conference is likely to go Kinnock's way, at least on most things. What then? Most of the things we have predicted in this *Review* and in *Socialist Worker* look like taking place.

The left has been defeated. The right is well in control. The likelihood now is that the Labour Party will maintain a Kinnockite consensus up to and probably at least a bit past the next election.

Of course, there is no guarantee that Kinnock will win the next election. The Alliance and the Tories are still doing reasonably well in the opinion polls. The ruling class may be attracted to Labour's solution to the crisis and want to exploit Labour's close links with the trade union bureaucracy. But they are not in a position to ensure Labour's victory in the next election.

Even if Labour does get in, there isn't any guarantee either that Kinnock will be able to manage the crisis to the satisfaction of the British ruling class. The gamble is that Kinnock will be able to use some sort of incomes policy (run by the TUC) to push down wages.

The ruling class are desperately in need of an offensive against wages since the prospect of recession (and rising inflation in a year's time) threatens to make their international competitive position even weaker than it is now. But since trade union organisation remains intact, major battles loom ahead in respect of any employers' offensive (whether under Labour or not) to reduce wage costs.

Few big surprises may occur at this year's Labour conference. Kinnock's ascendancy in the party may be total. But the intractable nature of the capitalist crisis means that the present lull in the class struggle cannot last forever.■

SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

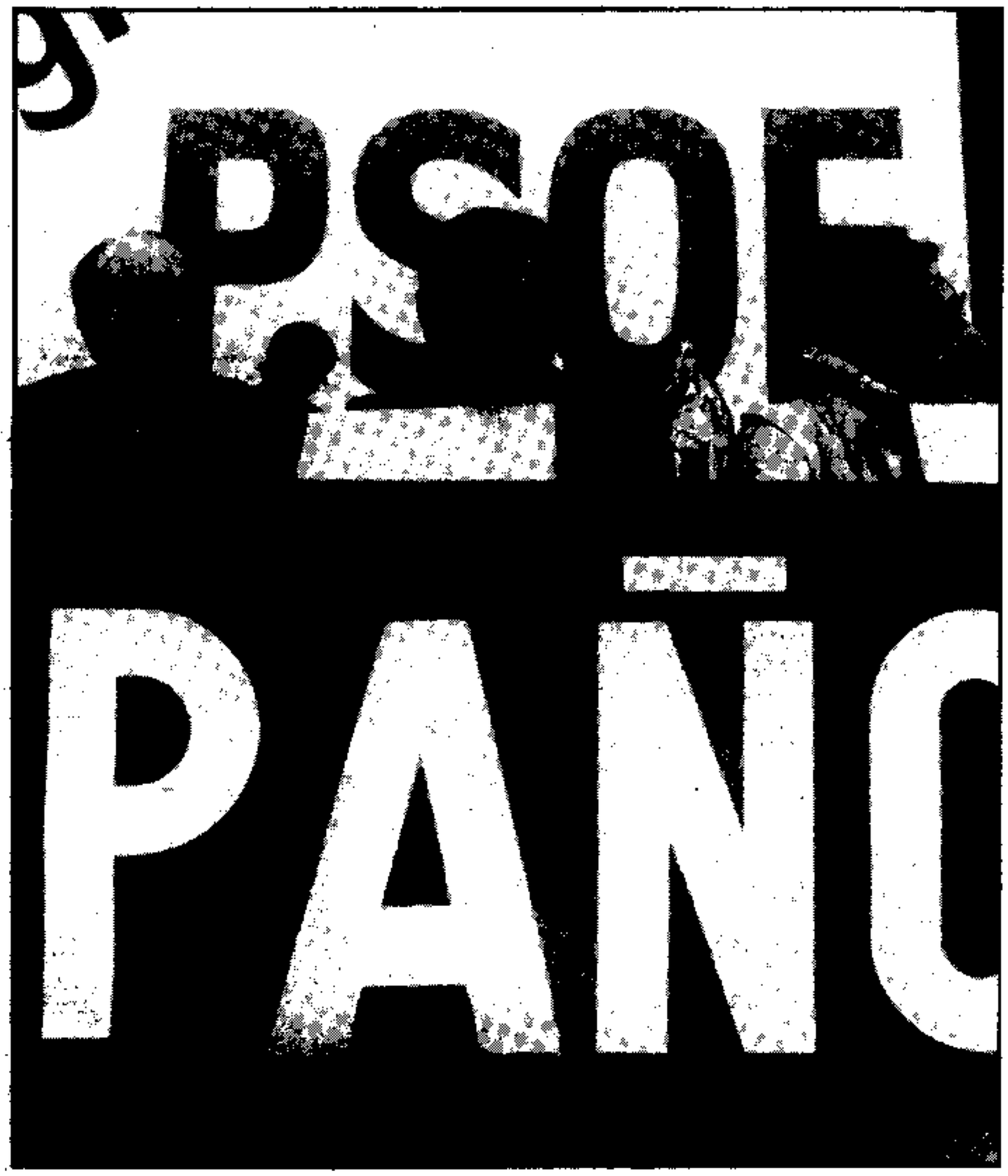
Spanish lessons

NOTES of the month

FOR Neil Kinnock, the Spanish government of Felipe Gonzalez's Socialist Party is a model of modern reformism. For the Labour left it ought to be another dreadful warning of what is going to happen if their party takes office after the next general election.

The Spanish equivalent of the Labour Party, the PSOE (which unfortunately means the Socialist Workers Party of Spain) is very much the party of Felipe just as the Labour Party these days belongs to Neil. Indeed Kinnock's witch hunt is almost a carbon copy of the purge of the left carried out in the PSOE. The two leaders evidently get on: Kinnock made a special trip to Spain to make a speech in favour of NATO during the recent referendum campaign on which Gonzalez had staked his authority.

The vote in favour of NATO has ensured the PSOE's continued support from the Spanish ruling class as the party most able to control the crisis (unemployment has increased to 20 percent despite Gonzalez's rather familiar promise that he would create 800,000 jobs). But it is as the upholder of law and order that Spain's 'socialist' government should be most notorious. Two recent developments have



Felipe Gonzalez at the PSOE's Congress

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set standards for Kinnock to live up to.

The first concerns land occupations in the southern province of Andalucia. Day labourers led by Communist Party and 'Maoist' union organisations have been taking over unworked land rather than remain unemployed. But this is illegal under legislation introduced under fascism and some 600 workers have been convicted and the general secretary of their union sentenced to a month in prison. The workers travelled to Madrid to petition the government, but in vain. Neither Gonzalez nor his ministers would see them, and the government issued a pious statement that the law of the land must be obeyed. The protesters were bodily removed from the parliamentary precincts.

The very same day, however, the law was being invoked in a different cause.

A public prosecutor in Bilbao decided that 90 members of the Civil Guard should attend indentification parades in a case arising from the torture of the father of a Basque militant. The torture actually took place in 1981, but prosecution has persistently been obstructed by the authorities on the grounds that it would 'undermine the fight against terrorism and lower morale among the security forces'.

As soon as the judge's decision was made known there was an outcry in the right wing press. No public statement was forthcoming from the government, but an internal document leaked to the press (almost certainly by the judicial authorities) made it absolutely clear that the Ministry of the Interior was determined to prevent the Civil Guards appearing before the courts. The terms of the document—full of references to the 'Government of the Nation'—indicated that it came from the highest levels within the state machine.

The grotesque hypocrisy of the Gonzalez government and the Spanish state has thus been neatly exposed—and not for the first time. But unfortunately they will almost certainly get away with it again. The agitation on the land in Andalucia is a very isolated campaign. There is apparently no prospect of spreading the struggle. And the level of working class militancy is in general very low.

Meanwhile the Basque movement is going through a crisis. The left is now campaigning for negotiations between the ETA fighters and the Madrid government, arguing that the increase in the vote to 200,000 for Herri Batasuna (the major pro-ETA political organisation) means that the government must talk. At the same time the right wing Basque nationalist party, the PNV, has split: essentially because one faction wishes to reclaim the mantle of more militant nationalism which Herri Batasuna has successfully claimed.

ETA has escalated its military activity, directed exclusively against the security forces, but is faced with a crisis because of the increased level of cooperation between the Spanish and French governments against ETA members. Dozens of people have been exiled from France to as far away as Ecuador, central Africa or the Caribbean.

This doesn't mean that the struggle for Basque independence is going to disappear, but it means a crisis for the politics of the 'ballot and the bullet' which have essentially dominated the struggle for years.

Revolutionaries in Spain argue that the Basque struggle can be the catalyst for a general upturn in other parts of the state. But this has not happened. Instead the politics of Herri Batasuna dominate the left—essentially moderate reformism with a militant nationalist gloss.■

PHILIPPINES

Cory on a hook

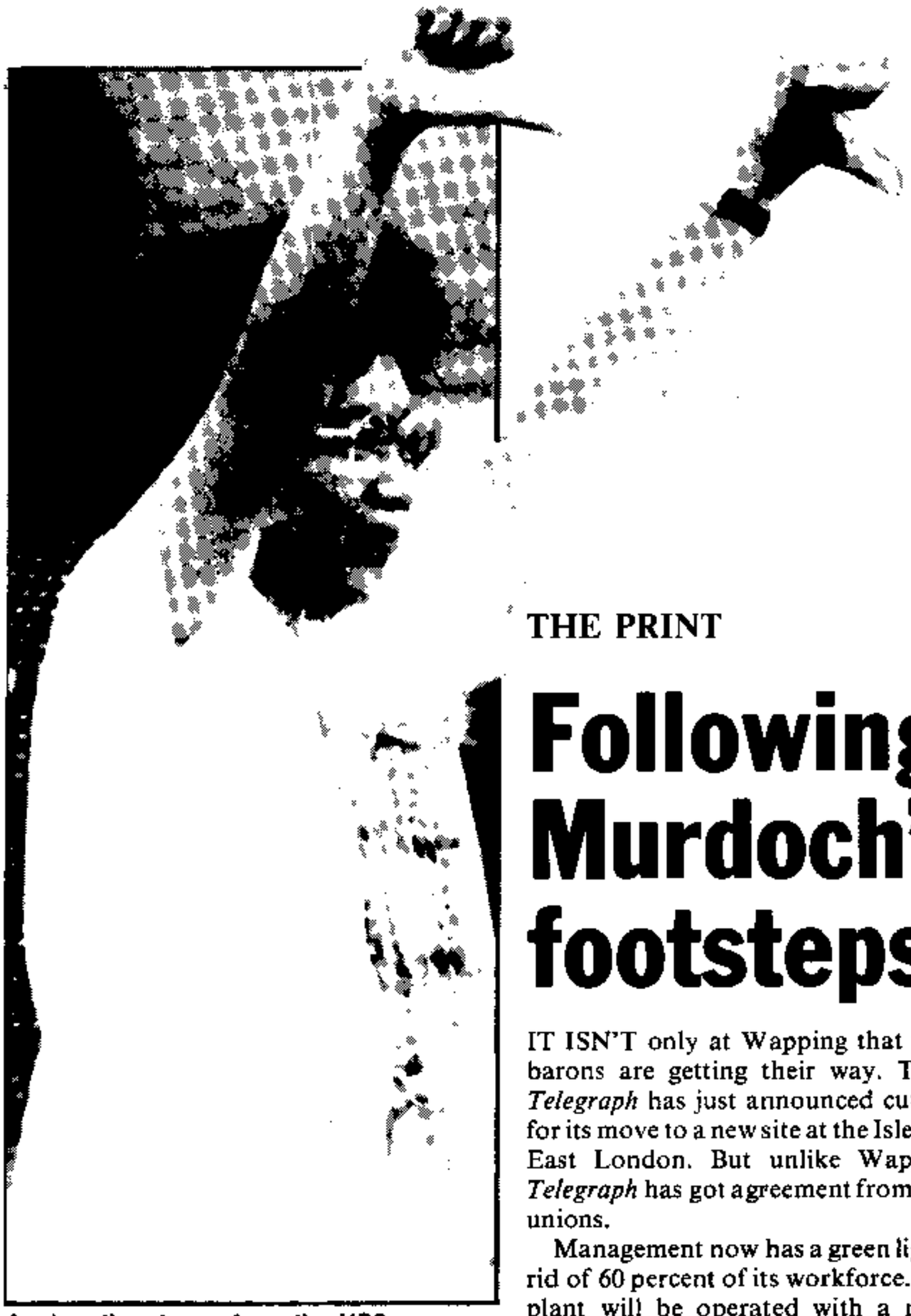
PRESIDENT MARCOS of the Philippines may have been overthrown. But the recent trip by his replacement, Corazon Aquino, to the US underlined the close links which still remain between the two countries.

American Congressman Stephen Solarz likened Aquino's speech to Congress to Churchill's 'historic' address. In return for Aquino eulogising about America as a defender of democracy, Congress was moved to the sum of $20 million—a paltry contribution towards the $26 *billion* debt which the Philippines owe to the international banks.

At every turn of events, the coincidence of interests between the capitalists in the Philippines and those in America has influenced how the Aquino government should behave. There was not a murmur of protest from Aquino during the American bombing of Libya, when other South East Asian governments had to express some concern. The decision that US bases need to be reviewed and the agreement renegotiated in 1991 creates few real worries for the Americans, since they are the original terms of the Bases Treaty itself.

With regard to the Communist guerilla resistance, Aquino has reiterated that hers is a 'Filipino and nationalist' solution and has referred to the defeat of the Huk rebellion as her model.

The rebellion was an attempt to continue the wartime resistance against the Japanese occupation by turning it into a national liberation war against American imperialism. Reforms and American aid played a major part in undermining the support of the peasantry for the guerillas.



THE PRINT

Following Murdoch's footsteps

IT ISN'T only at Wapping that the press barons are getting their way. The *Daily Telegraph* has just announced cuts in jobs for its move to a new site at the Isle of Dogs, East London. But unlike Wapping the *Telegraph* has got agreement from the print unions.

Management now has a green light to get rid of 60 percent of its workforce. The new plant will be operated with a mere 670 workers compared with the 1,680 who worked the old Fleet Street presses.

Worse still, the union has signed away most of the safeguards it used to have. Demarcation disappears: the manning levels will depend on 'technical requirements'. Arbitration is compulsory; there is an undertaking to avoid disputes; and all this will be included in individual contracts of employment that are legally binding.

The attack follows on from recent moves by the *Observer* to move their printing out of London altogether. There are signs of an even more serious and wideranging attack at the *Mirror*. Robert Maxwell plans to open a new paper, treating it as a 'green field' site—with completely new union agreements.

Every paper in Fleet Street has used Murdoch's attacks at Wapping to shed thousands of jobs.

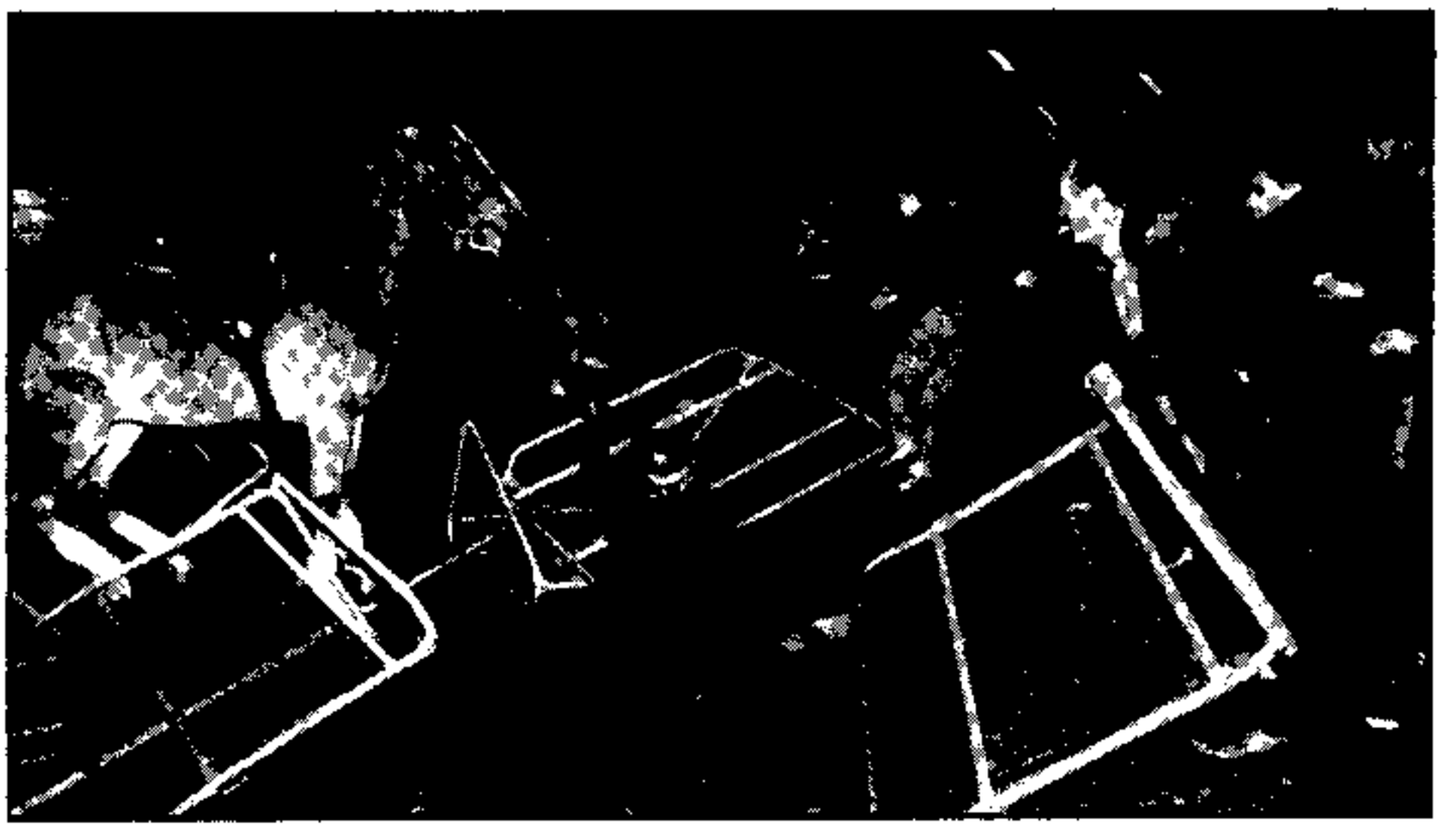
The response of the print union leaders to these increasing attacks has been feeble, if predictable.

SOGAT 82 seems to have been in indecent haste to sign the *Telegraph* agreement. Bill Miles—who signed on behalf of the union (Brenda Dean couldn't make it)—put the emphasis on making the *Telegraph* a going concern and on avoiding a repetition of 'the folly of Wapping'.

In other words, providing SOGAT can be in on the act, the union is perfectly prepared to give management the kind of deal Murdoch wanted—and has not yet got.

As we go to press, the outcome of the ballot over Murdoch's 'final offer' is not yet clear. Whatever the result, what is clear is that the print unions' strategy is a total disaster. They have not been willing or able to take on Murdoch.

And as their behaviour in the rest of Fleet Street shows, they are quite prepared to pave the way for a further decline in union power as the other press barons move in for the kill.■



Murdoch's mayhem

Aquino: thumbs up from the US?

However that was against the background of expanding world trade and increasing demand for primary products.

This time round Aquino's promises are made under a collapsed market for raw materials. Unemployment and poverty are the rule for sugar workers (one of Philippine's key exports), because the price of sugar is less than the cost of production. It is these pressures which will determine whether the army and big business continue to support Aquino's reformist policies There are signs that sections of the army are once again looking to a military takeover.

The left continues to refuse to give a political focus to the outbreaks of strikes—by August the number of strikes had passed the 1985 record. Instead, it is preoccupied with the conflict in Aquino's cabinet and the details of the conflict in Aquino's cabinet and the details of the constitution.

The irony is that the working class organised to fight seriously could force concessions from the liberal wing of the ruling class. The defusing of that militancy under some spurious notion of supporting one wing of the bourgeoisie results only in the strengthening of the right—the army and former Marcos supporters.■

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NIGEL HARRIS

Trading faces

THE journal of the Institute of Directors wants to privatise the royal family and end all their subsidies. Under this government, it is entirely appropriate that issues of national dignity should be made the subject of market forces. The same ought to apply, as it did in the Middle Ages, to the police, the armed forces and the judiciary, then we would all know where we were.

Of course, love has a long history of being a marketable good. Now, with the integration of the world market, both demand and supply are vastly magnified and new networks of distribution opened. It is not simply the sex tours of Japanese men to Korea, Taiwan and South East Asia. That still flourishes despite government attempts—spurred on by the Japanese women's movement—to curb it.

'We're still advertising the exotic pleasures of male paradises like Manila and Seoul,' one tour operator claimed after the last official crackdown. On the road from the airport to Manila, one hotel claims to be able to display 200 Filipinas per 100 Japanese males, at $60 each (advertised as 'honeymoon tours'). Tour guides take 40 percent of the fee. In Bombay, there are package tours available for rich Saudis, catering to their well known delicacy by offering them marriage on arrival and divorce on departure.

Nor is it the innovation—package tours to Barbados which include the fulltime services of a young man for New York women tourists. These holiday schemes fall into a conventional trade that countless generations of sailors have used. It is just that pimping has assumed a mass character over larger geographical areas.

There seem to be more innovations in the opposite phenomenon, the supply of the commodity rather than moving demand. Take, for example, Karachi which seems to be a focal point in the trade networks supplying the Middle East. In February 1983, the Pakistani press reported a police raid on a 'sex slave market'. Girls abducted in Calcutta, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and other parts of south Asia, were assembled in groups in India and then shipped into Pakistan for auctions among the 100 or so trading agents. The cost per girl was then said to be between £600 and £675.

Karachi seems to be an important distribution point, but it is not alone in its involvement in this market. Three years ago, the Polish police made arrests in a theatrical agency which had induced between 1,000 and 1,500 Polish girls to sign contracts to work as dancers in Italian nightclubs.

On arriving in Italy, their passports were removed, they were driven into debt and forced into prostitution. Most of the girls were too terrified of the threat of violence in a foreign country to complain to the police. Something similar happened to a party of novice nuns from Kerala who thought they were bound for seminary training in Italy but ended in brothels.

A little while later, the French police claimed to have broken up a distribution network with its centre in Paris. Women from France, Italy, Spain and Portugal were forcibly inducted into prostitution, and then sold to 'Eros Centres' in West Germany and brothels in Belgium, Luxemburg and the Netherlands. The press reports said the gangsters involved despatched 'difficult women' to Latin America if they seemed likely to talk.

These are the fragments of newspaper reports. We have no way of knowing what the base of the iceberg looks like. But as the price of female labour power changes and the costs of air movement fall in real terms, it is likely that new divisions of labour will emerge internationally—indeed, harlotry could become associated with particular nationalities much as other trades have.

The cost per girl was then said to be between £600 and £675'

It is not only the object of sexual love that is internationally tradeable. So is the object of maternal love, and increasingly so. A couple of Calcutta orphanages have a special deal to supply Italian parents, and infants are know to be exported from Bombay, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Indonesia.

In 1980 the Portugese police claimed to have broken up a racket to buy infants. Impoverished mothers were offered free medical care and convalescence with a small bonus of £450, to give up their infants. A couple of years ago, the Colombian police claimed to have apprehended a gang that had sold 500 babies to agents in the United States and Europe at $7,500 each.

And in June of this year police in south Brazil broke up a racket that had sold 200 babies to foreigners, mostly Israelis (at between $5,000 and $7,000 each). Twenty-two Israeli couples were discovered staying at hotels in a nearby beach resort, each with a new born baby and applications for adoption. The racketeers operated through a charitable trust that maintained its own maternity hospital (run by nuns) and advertised free medical and hospital treatment for poor pregnant women.

Of course, the sale of children as workers—rather than love objects—is as old as wage labour. Poor Chinese peasant families traditionally sold their girl children in time of famine.

In Thailand agencies still buy up the children of poor peasants in the impoverished north-east of the country in the off season and sell them at Hualampong railway station or the northern bus station in Bangkok.

The Anti-Slavery Society has documented the conditions of child labour among the 150,000 employed to make matches by hand in the villages of India's Tamilnad state, of the seven year olds who weave Morocco's carpets for 72 hours a week. And everyone knows of the couple of a million underaged workers in Italy's black economy. Again, as the world economy's resources are stretched to the limits, children become increasingly important in the competitive battle for the survival of backward segments of capital, nowhere more so than in East London's garment trades.

Much of the argument about the rights and wrongs of surrogate motherhood is bunkum in the real world. From conception to breeding, it is already an established part of the market. Of course, it always was so within particular countries. The only new feature is internationalisation. Who knows? If harlotry becomes associated with the women of only some countries, perhaps motherhood will also become the market specialisation of only some countries. Think of the horrifying oppressions there.

However, this trade is only, as the Filipinos put it, in 'warm bodies', since warmth seems associated with love. But there is another trade—in corpses, limbs and bodily organs. Just as the demand for love has outrun supply in certain countries, so the world's hospitals are exhausting the world's resources of 'healthy corpses' and components.

Sure enough, as soon as the demand made itself felt, the mighty energy of the world market was set to the task of securing the globe for the bits and pieces of human cadavers.

Women and babies must be stolen, and violence employed to make the market forces work. You can imagine what this means in the case of cadavers—grave stealing, fraud in the crematoriums, a wink and a promise in the geriatric wards, and if all else fails, there are parts of the world where corpses can be created without too much difficulty.

Watch out for more stories of the marvels of market forces and the world economy.■

Crocodile tears

WHERE is the TUC going?

Membership of the TUC has fallen steadily since the advent of the Thatcher government in 1979. In that year it reached its post-war record, 12.2 million, probably as a result of the expansion of trade union organisation into white collar areas of employment. Now it stands at 9.5 million.

Other statistics are important. The percentage of the labour force in TUC unions has also fallen. In 1979 over 50 percent belonged; now it is less than 40 percent.

The obvious explanation is that the recession has hit the trade unions hard. As unemployment has increased so membership has declined.

For example in construction, one of the major victims of the Thatcher years, membership has plummeted by 28 percent.

But other factors have been brought in to explain the decline. For instance, falls in membership have consistently outstripped falls in unemployment (in 1981 and 1982, membership fell by 11.6 percent, employment by 5.5 percent). So claims *Marxism Today* (September 1986).

In addition, the TUC has failed to expand into the new growth areas of the economy—high-tech, for example, or private sector service industries.

The conclusion to be drawn, then, is that the TUC has become stuck in the past, lumbered with a set of strategies which may have been appropriate when their base was the traditional heavy industry core but inappropriate now that the core has contracted and the economy has taken off in different directions. People don't want to be in unions because unions no longer offer them anything.

The implication is that industrial action, the kind of action traditionally associated with the trade union movement, also needs to be replaced. The fact that the number of strikes is at its lowest since 1938 and that the number of days 'lost' in strikes is at its lowest since the war, is offered as proof that workers themselves are rejecting this particular weapon.

The only success story seems to be that of the EETPU. Their controversial no-strike deals ('signing up members by signing up managements', as the *Financial Times* puts it) have been successful in breaking into the new growth areas of the British economy.

But the EETPU also seems to be the unacceptable face of trade unionism—successful by pandering to backward ideas and American-style business unionism.

The analysis is misleading in a number of respects. Despite the notoriety of no-strike deals, their spread has been very limited. They probably cover no more than 20 UK plants with around 20,000 employees. Nor are they very different from many traditional disputes procedures designed to exclude strike action except as a last resort—they are just more explicit about the need to achieve concensus.

More importantly, no-strike deals have been broken. The *Guardian* (28 August 1986) quotes the example of a Harlow firm producing mirrors where, despite a no-strike deal with the EETPU, workers struck for two weeks over the sacking of a steward. In a later dispute, pendulum arbitration (ie choosing either the union's position or the management's) decided in favour of the union. As the *Guardian* ironically put it:

> 'It cannot have been a coincidence that the only decision by pendulum arbitration to find in favour of a workforce came after the only strike under a no-strike deal.'

A more progressive alternative to decline may seem to lie with expansion into service industries. Trade union leaders—notably John Edmonds of the GMBATU—have made much of this. He stressed at the TUC, and has stressed since, that trade union thinking has to adapt to the needs of the new subclass that has arisen in this area: part-time workers, the temporarily employed, often women, often drawn from ethnic minorities.

Marxism Today (September 1986), in an interview with Edmonds, makes the same point more explicitly:

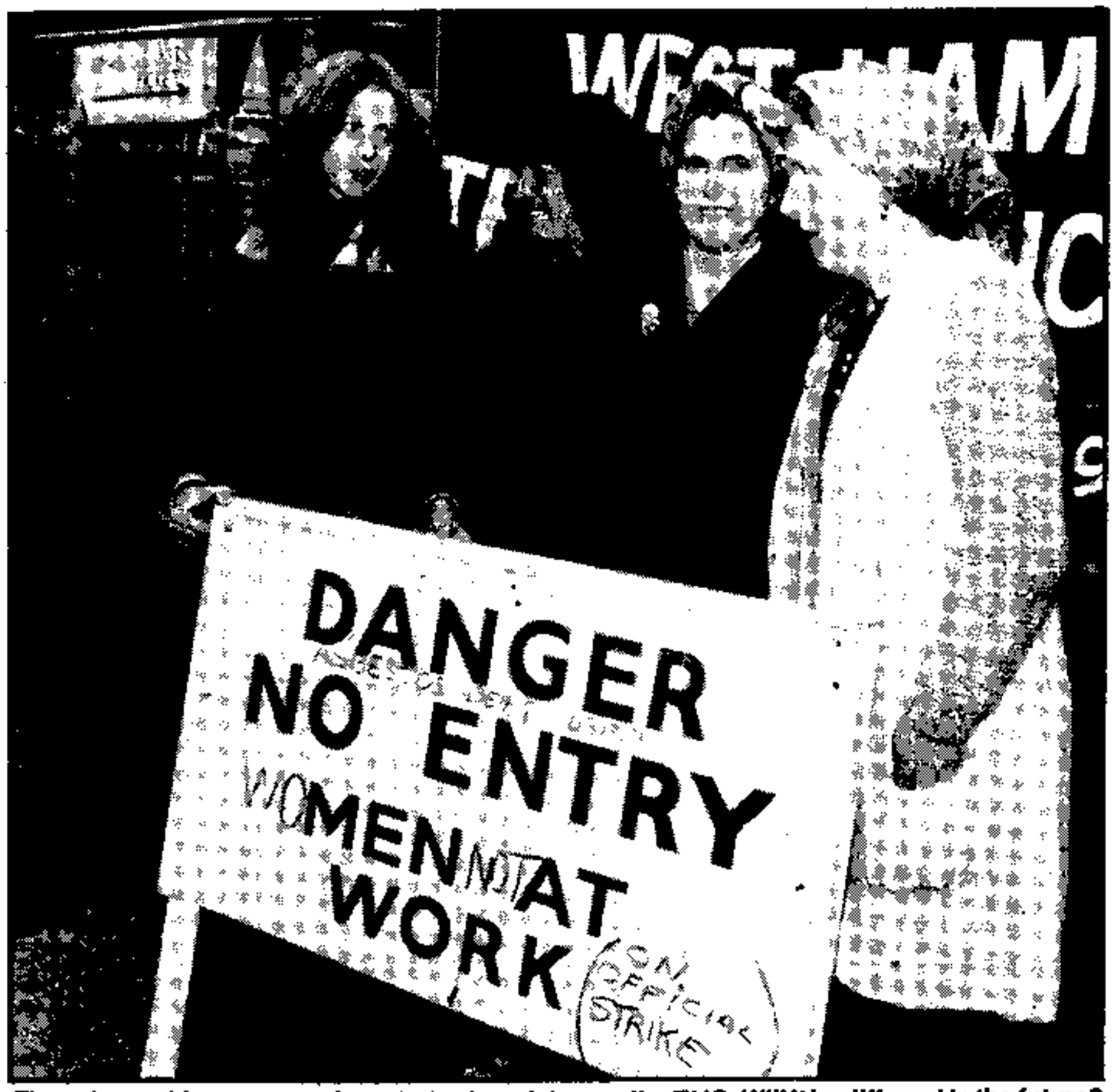
> 'The British economy continues to shift away from the manufacturing heartlands of traditional unionism, and towards services—largely virgin, or barren territory for the unions. New technology is changing the character of work skills and the traditional demarcation upon which so much union organisation rests. And many of the jobs which are being created are being taken by married women, working part-time—organising and representing this new periphery of workers demands a new approach from the unions.'

That part-time work and female employment will increase is true. The Employment Research Unit at Warwick University reckons that over the next six years the number of men employed will fall by about 600,000 while that of women will rise by about 400,000. A million full-time jobs will go, but 900,000 part-time jobs will be created.

There will be a 11.2 percent expansion in insurance employment, 10 percent in health, and 17.1 percent in general services like hotels, restaurants and garages.

However, the rest of the argument—the implication that 'old fashioned' methods of organisation and struggle no longer apply—does not follow.

For one thing, there has always been a subclass of service workers (domestic servants are the obvious example) which have always been outside the trade unions.



These low paid women made no gains by relying on the TUC. Will it be different in the future?

What is happening is that the decline of manufacturing and the increase of service industries, together with the pulling into the workforce of more women, is making this subclass more visible—and in all probability more open in the long term to organisation.

Also, the idea that high technology employment is resistant to trade unionism is contradicted by the fact that union density in firms like British Telecom, British Aerospace, Marconi, Plessey, GEC etc, remains as high as ever.

There is no reason to suppose that in principle new technology is impossible to organise into unions by 'traditional' methods.

In effect, these very real changes in employment serve as a cover for the trade union leadership's 'new realism'. The arguments of people like Edmonds focus attention away from the TUC's continuing refusal to challenge the Tories' offensive against trade unions. They are designed to show that militancy is no longer central to trade unionism nor ought to be.

These arguments also pave the way for acceptance of the next Labour government's strategy towards the working class.

The TUC is shifting effortlessly from compliance with the Tories' anti-trade union laws to advocating the 'positive' use of the law to guard 'individual' rights.

They have abandoned any token fight to preserve the overall standard of living of the working class, instead relying on parliamentary action to protect the low-paid and the jobless. At the end of that road looms a new version of the Social Contract.

In other words, it is politics, and not statistics, that counts. Nothing could illustrate the point more clearly than the debate at Conference over the call for a statutory minimum wage.

Speaker after speaker followed Rodney Bickerstaffe of NUPE to the rostrum arguing that a new approach was needed, that traditional forms of collective bargaining had proved inadequate and that consequently only legal intervention could remedy the plight of the low paid.

Behind this concern for their plight lurked the spectre of an incomes policy. No speaker declared themselves in favour of one. But their response at best was ambiguous.

Many concentrated on saying how negative the 1974-9 Labour government's Social Contract had been, thereby leaving open the possibility of their supporting a 'positive' one next time round.

A number of unions raised doubts. Ron Todd, for example, opposed the call for a statutory minimum wage. He pointed out that traditionally the TUC had always resisted the idea precisely for fear that the movement would be trapped into supporting an incomes policy. But his opposition was half-hearted.

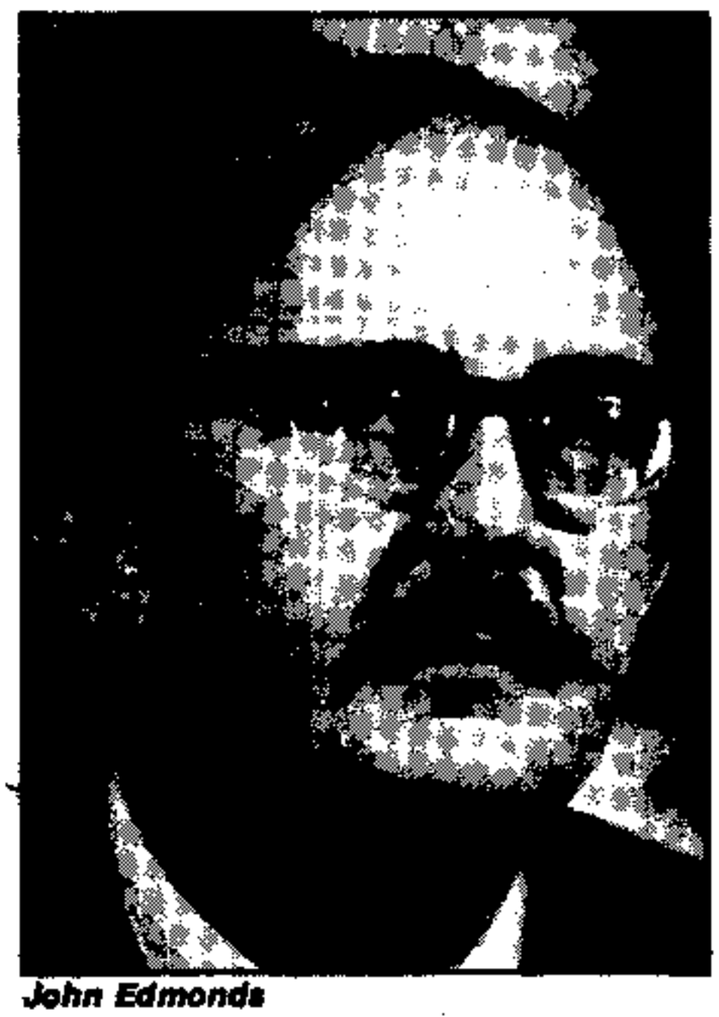
Other unions, like TASS, ducked the question of the effect of a statutory minimum by simply reaffirming the TUC's commitment to collective bargaining.

It was the hard right, in the shape of Hammond of the EETPU, which opposed the call root and branch. Alone of all the trade union leaders, he picked out of the TUC-Labour Party Liaison Committee document the key phrase that gives the game away:

> 'It is impossible to eradicate low pay without inflationary consequences, unless there is a redistribution of income in which high earners, including those outside the scope of collective bargaining, receive smaller increases than the low paid.'

Of course, Hammond is opposed to the idea because he wants to keep his hands free to negotiate deals with management.

A statutory minimum wage is now—for the first time—official TUC policy. That means that the TUC leaders have struck their bargain with the next Labour government. What have they got out of it?



John Edmonds

The statutory minimum wage amounts to very little. As last month's *SWR* pointed out, the figure chosen (£80) is ludicrously low. It would cover about one million full-time adult workers (300,000 men, 700,000 women); about two million adult part-time workers (paid less than £2 per hour); up to 300,000 full-time young workers; and a significant but unquantifiable number of part-time young workers.

The effect is likely to be enormous on those other low-paid workers earning just above the minimum wage. Employers will argue against any adjustment upwards for these workers if at the same time they have to honour a legal requirement. They are also likely to shed labour on the grounds of pressure on their profits.

The TUC Labour Party Liaison Committee document talks about 'time' to sort all this out (including a year to pass legislation through parliament). Meanwhile, presumably, normal negotiations over wages will be 'frozen'. And if, as is all too likely, the employers do all in their power to obstruct, who knows what form a statutory minimum will take or how long it will take to put into effect?

We need to add other features to this scenario. There will be the retention and strengthening of pre-strike ballots, this time officially sanctioned by the TU leaders. We shall be returning to the kind of strategy Harold Wilson's government wanted to introduce in 1969 but was unable to because of trade union hostility.

That won't prevent walkouts or spontaneous strike action, but it will disorient any generalised rank and file attempt to resist wage control.

There will also be the backdrop of a deteriorating economic situation. If Kinnock is committed to reducing unemployment by a million over two years (the only really firm commitment he gave in his speech at the TUC), he will probably say that he cannot do something for the unemployed at the same time as letting wages rip to compensate for rising inflation.

That was the clear message of his Brighton speech. Nothing except unemployment was a priority. In the circumstances a minimum wage policy would be the perfect excuse for restraining wages generally.

So, all in all, the TUC is likely to get very little. In exchange it has shackled itself to policing an incomes policy of one sort or another. Worse, however, is that in so doing it has undoubtedly confused many trade union activists. They are not going to be tempted to line up behind arch-reactionaries like Hammond in opposing a statutory minimum wage.

On the other hand, soft left leaders like Ron Todd aren't going to be giving a lead. Their opposition is half-hearted—just like their opposition to incomes policies.

There was one topic about which the TUC leaders maintained a deafening silence at Brighton. And that was wages.

Despite the decline in members and the record low in strikes, wages have not been depressed. The astonishing thing is that average earnings are rising at an unprecedented three times the inflation rate. As Alistair Hatchett pointed out in the *Guardian* (18 June 1986), we now have annual increases in average earnings running at 7.5 percent a year while inflation is down to an annual official rate of 2.8 percent.

How do we explain this contradiction?

The reality is that the employers themselves are under pressure from international competition. So although they may be tempted to use the state of the labour market against the unions they are reluctant to do so for fear of triggering off a strike that may worsen their already precarious trading position.

The other side of the coin is the state of union organisation. All the evidence suggests that formally at least it is stronger than it was five yars ago. Also, far from new technology diminishing the influence of unions within the workforce, the contrary is the case. The trade-off for higher pay and greater control has been letting jobs go.

This in turn may help us understand the

paradox of there being few strikes yet union strength remaining intact. Just as employers have often been reluctant to provoke strike action, so trade unions have been unwilling to risk all-out war which might result in unions being devastatingly crippled if they lose.

They have therefore preferred to go along with initiatives which although to the overall benefit of management at least give them certain advantages that their organisation can exploit.

So, action like working to rule and overtime bans, which would not show up in the strike figures, may well be the chief weapon currently being used by unions.

The case should not be overstated. Nobody is suggesting that unions have regained the confidence and militancy that characterised the rank and file a decade ago. But neither should anyone assume that membership figures or the strike record means that the unions as we knew them are finished. That would be to echo the kind of arguments used by the trade union leaders to justify their abject conduct.

On the contrary, it strengthens the indictment we can make of the TUC bureaucracy. The troops are not wasting away, neither are they fundamentally giving up the struggle (the excuse many leaders use to justify their refusal to fight).

What we can say is that the political crisis—as expressed in the triumph of Kinnockism at the TUC—runs very deep in the movement and is unable to mount a challenge to the trade union leaders. If we are to rebuild the kind of confidence that was evident in the early seventies, then we have to do it on a political basis. And that means a long hard haul by socialists to create a revolutionary organisation rooted in the workplace.■

Gareth Jenkins

Strikebreak hotels

THE IDEA that militancy doesn't fit the outlook of black, female, unskilled, part-time workers is false. The history of service industries shows repeated struggles to gain union recognition. These struggles have been defeated not because strikes in service industries are hopeless, but because they have been sabotaged by trade union leaders.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the wave of strikes that hit the hotel and catering trades in the late seventies. Trust House Forte was the scene of bitter struggles in 1976, 1977 and again in 1979. And Garners restaurants witnessed a strike of over a year, starting in late 1977.

These strikes were important not just in their own right. Victory could have been a sign of things to come in a changing industry. Although many catering workers worked in very small places, employing less than 20 people and so notoriously difficult to organise, more and more were in sizeable chain groups like Garners.

In hotels the same tendency could be seen. In 1978 it was estimated that a quarter of a million workers were employed in establishments of more than 50 staff.

With workers increasingly concentrated into larger workforces, a start could have been made by the trade unions to end the super-exploitation of the many blacks and immigrants making up the labour force. Victory in these recognition disputes could have paved the way for signing up many service workers in similar situations.

Even *during* the strikes membership went up as workers in hotels and catering drew inspiration from the struggle. In 1977 the catering membership of the G&M went up from 13,000 to 22,000. The publicity round the Garners dispute led to a flood of new members into the TGWU. It recruited nearly 5,000 catering members in the first six months of 1978 (compared with a total catering membership of 4,000 the previous year).

Time and again, the strikers found themselves having to fight not just the bosses but the union officials who would drag their heels over giving recognition or when recognition was granted over picketing and blacking.

In 1977, for example, strikes broke out in hotels and restaurants in Oxford, Sheffield and Birmingham, owned by Trust House Forte (the largest hotel and catering group in Britain). They were over the sacking of shop stewards and other trade union members.

The tragedy was that management's ruthlessness was not met by equal ruthlessness on the part of the union involved, the giant TGWU. Action to cripple Trust House Forte would not have been difficult. The Midlands region of the TGWU showed what could be done: the motorway service stations owned by THF were blacked by TGWU lorry drivers.

The Garners strike in 1978

But the general secretary, Jack Jones, and the executive refused to organise national blacking.

In late 1977 another hotel strike broke out, this time at the Metropole in London. The claim was for a minimum of £50 a week (take-home pay for a chambermaid doing a 40-hour week, with £10.50 deducted for a shared room, was £19.80). Once again, it was the union—this time the G&M—which sabotaged the dispute.

The official in charge (negotiations with other hotels was for a 10 percent increase and a productivity deal) refused to make the Metropole strike official. The effect of this was to demoralise some of the workers into going back to work.

Not surprisingly the strike was lost after 12 weeks.

The role of the TGWU during the year-long Garners strike in 1978 was even more treacherous to the strikers.

Some workers at Garners had been there for ten years. The majority were black or foreign workers. The average wage was £26 for a 55 to 60-hour week. Eighty percent had been in the union for the previous year.

Jack Dromey, spokesman for the Grunwicks strikers, refused to have anything to do with a regional levy. A meeting of the 1/647 branch carried a demand for a £36 a week minimum strike pay, which was opposed by the union official responsible.

Ron Todd, the national organiser of the union, told a thousand-strong demonstration in May that year that mass picketing was not the way to win. Blacking was. The only problem was that he did nothing about it.

One official attempted to limit the size of the picket line at Garners to six, despite there being no legal requirement.

Things reached farcical proportions during the Grosvenor House Hotel strike (once again against Trust House Forte) when, a month after Thatcher's election victory in 1979, the FTAT official told the chambermaids that they should mount an 'invisible picket'.

The year 1979 was the high-water mark for post-war trade union membership.

The failure of these strikes meant that the trade unions failed to consolidate themselves there.

Now, when the trade union bureaucracy hope everyone has forgotten, they are trying to turn their vices into virtues. But those struggles by downtrodden chambermaids and subservient waiters should remind us that there *is* an alternative to the 'new realism'.■

The enemy within?

THE CURRENT agitation in the mines for an overtime ban has slightly lifted the state of siege at the Sheffield headquarters of the National Union of Mineworkers.

The attacks from the government and British Coal are obvious. The union is still struggling to sort its finances out after sequestration. There have been wholesale pit closures and redundancies in every area and the union has little muscle with which to resist. Hundreds of miners remain sacked after the 1984-5 strike. The breakaway Union of Democratic Miners, though not taking off as its backers predicted, still saps the strength of the NUM.

But there is another line of attack too. This comes from some area leaders of the NUM.

The dominant Broad Left block on the NUM executive was openly split during the miners' strike with the leaders of Yorkshire, South Wales and Scotland repeatedly undermining the militant picketing tactics proposed by Arthur Scargill. In the 18 months since the end of the strike, those area leaders have resisted few opportunities to knife Arthur Scargill in the back. They are restrained only by Scargill's enduring popularity among rank and file miners.

The most spectacular, and most politically important attack on Arthur Scargill came at the TUC conference in Brighton last month.

There, the NUM executive forced Scargill to withdraw the union's amendment to a resolution embracing ballots and 'positive rights' for unions.

The explanation given was that Arthur Scargill had submitted the amendment on his own, without consulting the rest of the union's executive.

This is exactly what happened. However it is also traditional for the NUM president to submit amendments to the TUC, based on policy decided by the union conference. The union's executive missed a meeting in the summer at the only time when amendments could be discussed.

Of course, there is a political reason behind such a feeble, bureaucratic excuse. The NUM executive ditched the only amendment to the TUC which put a class position—because of the 'new realism'.

The initiative to drop the amendment came from South Wales. They were supported by Scargill's former Broad Left colleagues from Yorkshire and Scotland.

The TUC debacle followed the overt criticism of Arthur Scargill's presidential speech at the union's annual conference. Scargill's insistence that the miners would be forced to take industrial action again to recover ground lost by the 1984-5 defeat, was met with derision.

For the first time in many years, Mick McGahey, Scottish miners' president and vice-president of the national NUM, attacked Scargill from the platform.

McGahey first attacked Scargill over the question of how to deal with the scab UDM.

The second attack followed Scargill's ritual and justified attack on the 'media jackals'. The jackals, said McGahey, were vital to the NUM if it were to get its case across.

It was the new realism, viewed through Eurocommunist lenses.

The miners' union is probably the last union where the Communist Party can still claim real power and influence.

And the Eurocommunists have control over the remains of a once powerful political machine.

It was the Eurocommunists who made the running towards the end of the 1984-5 strike and it has been the Eurocommunists who have provided the intellectual justification for a hard right turn by every single area leadership.

Hopes that the election of Des Dutfield as South Wales miners' president would stop the rot in the area have proved unfounded.

Dutfield was elected precisely because he was regarded as a 'Scargill man' and was not associated with the disgraceful manoeuvres from South Wales near the end of the great strike.

Sadly, he has quickly adapted to the right wing norm of the South Wales executive.

Occasionally, the South Wales miners' leaders complain that they are unjustly abused by Scargill loyalists within the union.

Yet both Scargill and NUM General Secretary Peter Heathfield have repeatedly asked to meet the South Wales executive to sort out any problems. Both have been repeatedly turned down flat.

This is part of an agreed policy worked out by the once left wing area leaders to keep the union's national officials out of the areas.

The most public example of this was the failure to invite Arthur Scargill to this year's Yorkshire Miners Gala.

Scargill did turn up, to a hero's welcome, but did not speak.

A less blatant but more damaging attack on 'Scargillism' has been the effective denunciation of all industrial action in the Yorkshire mines.

There have been repeated sporadic stoppages in Yorkshire since the end of the 1984-5 strike, mainly over victimisations and attacks on conditions.

Jack Taylor and the Yorkshire leadership have tried to end them all, saying that industrial action upsets their painstaking negotiations with the coal board.

Jack Taylor and many of the Yorkshire delegates openly express the 'wait for Kinnock' attitude. This can be seen over their manoeuvrings on the overtime ban.

There is a mood for some action in the Yorkshire pits since coal board chief Robert Haslam imposed a pay award on the miners and stole nine months' back pay.

But Taylor has tried to delay calling action, urging the Yorkshire Area Council to wait until after the NUM national executive's meeting with Haslam.

He is also trying to resist pressure for Yorkshire to 'go it alone', arguing that rather than the NUM's strongest area giving a lead, any proposed action should be put to a national ballot.

Overall, the picture inside the NUM is of rampant Kinnockism. The area leaders and many pit level officials look to a future Labour government for salvation. It would also be folly not to recognise that most rank and file miners do so too.

The area leaders are using the strike defeat to re-assert their own control over the areas. The federalism that has plagued the British miners for generations is re-asserting itself.

But this could hardly be happening at a more dangerous time. It plays into the hands of Robert Haslam who makes no secret of his attempt to make all future pay rises productivity-based.

He wants to do to the miners what he did to the steel workers and bargain, area by area and even pit by pit, until every extra pound in the pay packet is bought through a job loss or more sweat.

However, the area leaders aren't having it all their own way. Conditions in the pits are so bad that miners are forced to take action. In addition, British Coal management are so cocky that some of the area leaders feel that a bit of sabre rattling is necessary.

The new mood in the pits is a relief both to Arthur Scargill and rank and file militants. Scargill certainly sees it as a vindication of his call to arms at the NUM annual conference.

He was expected to call for action at the NUM national executive meeting held immediately after Haslam imposed his pay award, but he didn't. Instead Scargill challenged the area leaders to call the shots.

This may seem like a clever manoeuvre to force the area leaders to take some responsibility for the flack that may fly, but it is also very dangerous.

The leaders of Yorkshire, South Wales and Scotland are unlikely to call for more than token action. And, unless Arthur Scargill issues a clear call and campaigns for it, rank and file militants will be hard pressed to move their leaders.

And no one should have any illusions that the present anger in the pits can be squandered. If that happens, the attacks on Scargill and every other militant in the mining industry will return with a vengeance. ■

Mike Simons

HUNGARY

'The great crowd then marched to the Stalin monument. Ropes were wound round the statue's neck, and, to cheers, the crowd attempted to topple the statue. But it would not budge. They finally managed to melt Stalin's knees by using welding torches.'

THIRTY years ago Hungarian workers destroyed the myth that the Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe were totalitarian societies where change was impossible.

The revolution began on 23 October. A demonstration, 100,000-strong, in solidarity with workers in Poland who had taken strike action and made an insurrection in the previous months, marched through Budapest. The massive statue of Stalin was destroyed by the crowd.

The political police opened fire on the demonstrators, who fought back with stones, petrol bombs and guns. Russian tanks moved in immediately. Hungarian army units went over to the insurgents or remained neutral. Workers' councils were created in factories all over Hungary.

After a day the regime fell. The Hungarian army had disintegrated, revolutionary councils governed in the localities and the factories. The ordinary police often joined the insurgents and the political police ran for cover. After eight days the Russian tanks disappeared off the streets. The new government under Imre Nagy proclaimed Hungarian neutrality on 1 November and declared its intention to leave the Warsaw Pact.

On 4 November the Russian tanks moved in for a second time. Ordinary troops were not used initially because the Russians feared their 'contamination' by the revolutionary workers. More than 20,000 people were murdered.

This second Russian intervention led to a situation of dual power. Industrial production had stopped, electricity supplies were cut, and workers controlled the telephone lines and food distribution.

Then, on 14 November, the first real soviet seen in Europe for almost 40 years was set up. The district workers' councils in the capital created the Central Workers' Council of Greater Budapest.

Despite the presence of 200,000 troops and 3,000 tanks, Hungarian workers went on general strike for 15 days. The Central Workers' Council called another lasting 48 hours after 21 November in protest against the government banning a national meeting of workers' councils. There was a further two-day general strike on 11 December after all the delegates to the Central Workers' Council were arrested.

In the end the workers were defeated by force of arms. Politicians in the West shed crocodile tears for the murdered freedom fighters. In fact, they allowed the Russians to re-assert order in their back yard.

HUNGARY

1956—Shattered illusions

The events in Hungary caused turmoil throughout the Western Communist Parties. Lindsey German looks at their impact in Britain.

HARRY POLLITT, general secretary of the Communist Party of Great Britain, is reputed to have said in the late 1940s that we may have lost out here, but we've won China. He wasn't simply suffering from delusions of grandeur. He was part of a solid world movement which appeared to be going from strength to strength. Already a third of the world's population lived under regimes that claimed to be Communist. In the West, the Italian and French CPs were mass workers' organisations. Even in Britain, the CP numbered 40,000 members and had real influence in many workplaces and in some localities.

Those sickened by continuing austerity in Britain only had to look to the east, and especially to the USSR led by Joseph Stalin, to see the model of an ideal society. Anyone who said differently, or who talked about show trials, purges or labour camps was simply repeating the lies and inventions of Western imperialism. As the cold war developed, defence of Russia, and calls from the CP for peaceful coexistence with the Eastern bloc, became stonger.

When Stalin died in 1953, he was mourned in the Communist Parties as second only to Lenin in theoretical understanding, as the great leader who had industrialised Russia and won the war. The obituary of Stalin written by Palme Dutt, a leading CP intellectual, sums up this feeling:

> 'There are moments in history when an instant sums up an age. Such a moment was when the news of the death of Stalin struck a chill in the hearts of the overwhelming majority of human beings throughout the entire world. The days of grief that followed revealed that the whole world—with the exception of a tiny handful of evil maniacs—mourned the loss of Stalin.'

And Monty Johnstone wrote in *Challenge*:

> 'In the passing of J V Stalin the working people of the world have suffered an irreparable loss... His life is an example to every young socialist of courage, tenacity, faith in the people, the combination of study and action, constant devotion to principle.'

ALL THAT changed in 1956. The monolith cracked. And the initial crack came, not as a result of Western propaganda, but from the heart of the Eastern bloc itself.

It came in February, at the 20th Congress of the CPSU. Stalin's successor, Khruschev, made a 'secret speech' in closed session which was not only a massive attack on Stalin but which also admitted many of the horrific events previously dismissed as Western fabrications.

The substance of the speech filtered out very slowly (the British delegation made the unlikely claim that they knew nothing of it while at the Congress, since foreign delegates were excluded from the session). But its effect, even though delayed, was shattering.

The first hint of problems came in the report of the Congress by George Matthews (a delegate along with Pollitt and Dutt) in the CP's weekly, *World News*. After spending pages on topics such as agriculture and creative Marxism, he referred to an 'over-emphasis on the role of Stalin, and weaknesses in respect of collective leadership... The cult of the individual did great harm.' Matthews reassuringly continued that 'the mistakes have been recognised and put right'.

In future weeks other snippets of information came out. It was not until fully two months after the Congress that an article entitled 'The 20th Congress of the CPSU—and the role of Stalin' by Harry Pollitt—supposedly a full explanation—appeared. Pollitt, while stating that 'the new estimation of Stalin has come as a profound shock to the members of every

Khruschev

Communist Party in the world' reiterated the by now standard line that 'at each stage in the last 20 years of Stalin's life the carrying through of the correct general line by the Party and the people was accompanied by mistakes, abuses and injustices arising from Stalin's increasing dependence on the security forces instead of on the Party and the people.'

In other words, Stalin was too powerful and dictatorial, but this was just because of his behaviour as an individual. It didn't apparently cast any doubts in the CP leadership's minds as to the nature of the regime itself. But if the leadership could satisfy itself with talks of mistakes and the need for self-criticism the membership wasn't so easily fobbed off. Everywhere people were asking, how could it happen? Didn't anyone else know about Stalin's atrocities? What guarantees were there for the future? And the more people asked questions, the more the question of the nature of the USSR became entangled with another one—that of democracy inside the CP.

Dissatisfaction on both these counts led to the publication of a dissident magazine by two CP intellectuals, both lecturers in Yorkshire, John Saville and E P Thompson. *The Reasoner* was only published three times—in July, September and November 1956—and it was duplicated by hand. But it received an instant response. Copies were eagerly snapped up. Hundreds of letters were written to it. Many CP members were desperately thirsty for this sort of analysis. The editors put their fingers on a real problem when they pointed out the practice of the CP and showed that there were:

> 'deep disagreements on the very meaning of "Marxism": the presence of grossly irrational and authoritarian attitudes intermingled with claims to a "scientific analysis"; the hardening of theory into dogma, of socialist education into indoctrination.'

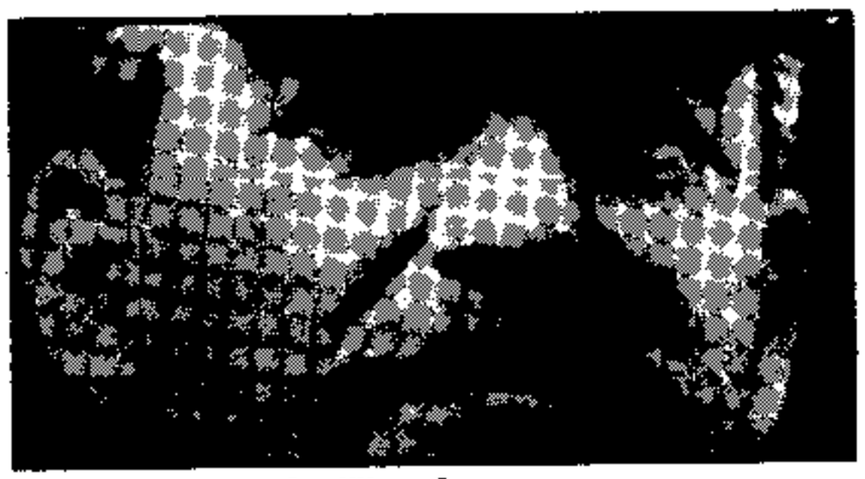
These sorts of ideas had a big impact, especially among party intellectuals. These same intellectuals had, after all, been called upon to justify many of the excesses of the Stalin period. They had done so in good faith, and now suffered terrible moral dilemmas which led them to rethink their ideas quite thoroughly. Thompson and Saville summed this up in *The Reasoner*:

> 'History has provided a chance for this reexamination to take place; and for the scientific methods of Marxism to be integrated with the finest traditions of the human reason and spirit which we may best describe as Humanism.'

The CP leadership responded in a manner which was to prove disastrous to them in terms of holding their party together. They dragged their feet. Revelations in the capitalist press brought grudging admissions. They invoked disciplinary measures as a means of stifling debate. Thompson and Saville were denounced for behaving in an unconstitutional manner and eventually suspended from the party. The leadership reluctantly established a commission on inner party democracy, but caused a scandal by initially appointing nearly all its members from the ranks of party full timers. Above all, no attempt was made by the party leadership to provide any theoretical analysis of what had happened and why.

MAYBE, despite all this, they could have ridden the storm. But on 23 October the second bombshell exploded. In supposedly Communist Hungary a student demonstration led to a sequence of events which saw in the space of several weeks the murder of the hated secret police, street fighting with Russian tanks, the establishment of workers' councils, and a second intervention by the Russians which left thousands dead, many more forced into exile.

This was incredible—a revolution involving hundreds of thousands of workers in what was supposedly a workers' state. To the dissidents, to those who had agonised about the nature of Russia all year, it was a confirmation of everything that they argued. The excesses of Stalin weren't just mistakes, and Hungary proved it.



Beloved leader of millions?

There was something much more deeply wrong. So Thompson, in a seven page supplement to *The Reasoner*, 'Through the smoke of Budapest', wrote not only that 'the intervention of Soviet troops in Hungary must be condemned by all Communists' but also argued:

> 'Stalinism is socialist theory and practice which has lost the ingredient of humanity. The Stalinist mode of thought is not that of dialectical materialism, but that of mechanical idealism.'

The party leadership, far from welcoming the Hungarian revolution, condemned it out of hand. They claimed, following official Russian policy, that the uprising was a counter-revolution, and that there was a danger of fascism in Hungary. They said that the events were the work of Hungarian officers and the Catholic Cardinal Mindszenty. They put out a statement backing the Russian imposed Kadar government. They referred to the events as 'the White Terror in Hungary'.

To many thousands of CP members these arguments had no connection with reality. The revolution was about change for the better, not about re-establishing the old order. It clearly involved hundreds of thousands of workers. The *Daily Worker*'s own correspondent in Budapest, Peter Fryer, wrote articles which confirmed this (and which were eventually suppressed). The doubts and worries over Stalin were now inflamed, fanned by press reports of fighting and suppression of the revolution which could not all

be western fabrications. The voices of protest grew. Letters flooded in to CP publications. The historian Christopher Hill was among 30 CP intellectuals who wrote a dissident letter to the *New Statesman* and *Tribune*.

But the protests went far beyond a small group of intellectuals. A breakdown of reported votes in various CP branches, area and district committees and membership meetings in the month or so after the Hungarian uprising gives a probably representative—if incomplete—picture. A total of 3,582 voted to back the line of their executive. But 1,080 voted against and 414 abstained. So a substantial minority—probably a quarter of the membership—either opposed the suppression of the revolution, or were at least sufficiently worried not to back their leadership.

THE GUILT and the moral dilemma of the intellectuals continued, and led them increasingly to question a whole range of politics, especially the whole idea of democratic centralism. Industrial workers too had spent years defending Stalin's Russia, dismissing anti-Stalinist notions as Western propaganda. They had always pointed to the Eastern bloc as a superior society. Now they could not. They faced a grave crisis of confidence.

The leadership was totally incapable of providing any of the answers that its members needed. To do so would have meant challenging the whole basis of their politics—unswerving support for Russia and the Eastern bloc. That was unthinkable. Instead they remained apologists for the Kadar and Khruschev regimes, relied increasingly on calls for unity and party loyalty, and when that failed, on party discipline.

Thousands left the party in the ensuing months.

The figure quoted by Christopher Hill at the CP special congress at Easter 1957 was 7,000. Today it is estimated that 10,000 left the party following Hungary. The leadership dismissed this exodus in a number of ways. They declared that these people were all intellectuals and denounced them as such. This often received widespread support from the party rank and file, who were happy to believe that this challenging of so many fundamentals was indeed confined to, as one correspondent wrote, 'intellectuals, of whom many lack a firm class outlook, easily panic, and see in mistakes and setbacks the end of everything'.

The argument was largely nonsense. The intellectuals were certainly in the forefront of the arguments in 1956 and were the most prominent. But many industrial workers were also worried about Hungary and some left as a result. 'The myth of the rock-like working class and the wobbly intellectuals should be thrown out once and for all,' wrote Brian Behan, a leading building worker, in February 1957. Johnny McLoughlin, the convenor of Briggs Motor Bodies (now Ford Dagenham), bitterly attacked the leadership at the special congress. A considerable number of leading CP trade unionists broke away in 1957, including prominent leaders of the CP fraction in the NUM, ETU and FBU.

And of course many of the intellectuals backed the party line to the hilt. Palme Dutt was notoriously pro-Stalinist. And the literary historian Arnold Kettle at the special congress attacked the 'immodest parading of conscience, of moral superiority, which some of our middle class intellectuals have gone for. It was this which above all was disgusting about *The Reasoner*.'

FURTHERMORE the leadership argued that those leaving were moving to the right. Now undoubtedly this was true of some, who used the events of 1956 as an excuse to drop embarassing ties. People like former electricians' leader Frank Chapple—then a fairly prominent CPer—left at the time. But the bulk of people were not succumbing to cold war pressure—they simply wanted answers to the problems they faced. A writer to *World News* from west London put it like this:

> 'I read one issue of *The Reasoner*. With some of it I agreed, with some I did not, a great deal was frankly above my head, but I have long wanted to hear a reasoned reply to it. All the executive committee have done, however, is to condemn, correctly, their unconstitutional way of presenting their arguments. The number of comrades who have called for unity must see that this type of unity just exasperates the critics who feel that their arguments are receiving no proper consideration.'

It was the party's inability to deal with such cries from the heart which lost them so many members—people who were not moving to the right at all.

Indeed many who parted company with the CP moved—at least initially—to the left. No one seemed to have any time for the right wing dominated Labour Party. A substantial number identified with what became known as the 'New Left' around Thompson and Saville and the magazine *New Reasoner*. The attempt was to find a new form of humanist Marxism, not to abandon the ideas of Marx. Writing in 1957, Thompson dismissed the idea that the previous year's events were just a revolt against 'soulless Communism'. There was instead 'a profound conflict within the Communist movement, a revolt of socialist humanism against soulless bureaucratism—a struggle, if you like, for Communism to regain its soul'.

This theme was one which ran through many of the writings of the time, along with others which stressed ideas of truth, democracy and humanism. The reaction against Stalinism was so strong, it forced debate and discussion on a range of issues. It also led to a theoretical questioning of what had passed for Marxism for so long: 'Man is capable not only of changing his conditions, but also of transforming himself; there is a real sense in which it is true that men can master their own history.'

SUCH IDEAS were a real and refreshing break from the ideas of the inevitable progress of history which dominated the CP. But there were confusions in the ideas as well. A vague notion of 'all the people' as

Idol with feet of clay

opposed to the working class was present, as were a number of formulations which made concessions to nationalistic ideas. And there was not a serious attempt to theorise the class nature of the East European states which had given rise to such unsocialist excesses. Neither did the New Left make any serious attempt to organise, especially among workers. Although in the late fifties there were between 30 and 40 Left Clubs, they were essentially discussion groups and little more. In addition, the stability of Western capitalism at the time meant that there were not the mass workers' struggles which could have led some of the CP dissidents towards activity.

The contradiction was that there may have been a revolution in Hungary, but in Britain class struggle remained at a low level. The new thinking therefore became increasingly channelled towards stressing the humanist and populist side of socialism, and towards activity in broad 'popular' campaigns like CND. This fitted with Thompson's view that:

> 'We must break with the closed constitutional party concepts of agitation and try to re-establish the open tradition of the Nineteenth Century (at its best) where not one party but the whole people were taken as the arena; pressure groups and platforms were formed around urgent particular issues.'

Having been in a party and found it wanting Thompson drew the conclusion that the party itself was at least a substantial part of the problem, and recoiled from the idea of forming a new organisation.

NOT EVERYONE who left the CP rejected organisation however. A much smaller group of people, including some significant worker militants, joined Gerry Healy's group, which later became the Trotskyist Socialist Labour League (forerunner of the Workers Revolutionary Party). They were attracted by a more serious commitment to industrial struggle. In addition the SLL's theory that Russia was a degenerated workers' state was very attractive. It provided an explanation of Stalinist excesses, but didn't require a serious rethinking of the basic CP theory. It seemed that these people had found a revolutionary alternative.

But in reality its cataclysmic predictions of the capitalist system's impending collapse proved as unrealistic as the CP perspectives. By the late fifties nearly all of those who had joined after 1956 also left the SLL. Some remained politically active as individuals. Others dropped out completely.

So the CP's split didn't result in any long term establishment of a socialist grouping which could challenge the rottenness of the CP's politics. But at the same time, the split was massively significant. It led to an unfreezing of Marxism, a blossoming of new ideas. The logjam of Stalinist orthodoxy was broken. In that process those questioning the CP's theory were forced to undertake a thoroughgoing examination of at least some of the ideas. This was particularly true in the arena of philosophy, where they were forced to look back 50 or 60 years in order to understand some of the defects of Stalinist 'dialectical materialism'.

In the process, some of the original communist tradition of Lenin, Trotsky and the Third International was re-established.

Again, this didn't always have immediate or lasting results. Often, given the lack of struggle, individuals would move to the right, sometimes even abandoning any idea of Marxism. It was not until the sixties and early seventies that any revolutionary alternative began to benefit from this unfreezing of ideas.

Nonetheless, in the history of post-war Britain the events were fantastically important. Nineteen sixty-eight was the year when the mass struggles eventually broke out. Nineteen seventy-two was the year when workers finally moved to the centre of the stage. But without the radical rethinking and substantial weakening of the CP in 1956, the nature of those subsequent events—and of the impact of revolutionaries within them—would have been very different.

Thirty years on: the new opposition

Andy Zebrowski interviewed Miklos Haraszti and Laszlo Rajk, two Hungarian dissidents living in Budapest. Haraszti was arrested in 1973 and tried for subversion after nine typewritten copies of his book (published in Britain as* A Worker in a Worker's State*) were confiscated by the police. Rajk is the son of Laszlo Rajk, Hungary's Foreign Minister, executed in 1949 in the Stalinist purges. Three years ago he was forcibly evicted from his apartment for running an underground literature shop.

The same Janos Kadar who was the butcher chosen by the Russians to crush the revolution of 1956 is still in power. To understand the present state of the opposition to his government we need to go back thirty years.

Rajk describes the repression after 56:

'It lasted until the amnesty, which was in 1963. Some theories suggest that there were also executions even after the amnesty. The real tyranny lasted for two years. Daily, people were arrested and sentenced or executed. After thirty years there are still no official statistics about how many people were executed, there are only theories. It was worst in the workers' movement.'

Miklos Haraszti explains the amnesty:

'It was false because people still remained in the prisons. But at least publicly compromise was offered to the intelligentsia—at the price of their loyalty of course. That was the moment when some of them were let back into the machinery of culture and when some cautious criticism "from inside", as they call it, was allowed in the press.

'My trial in 1973 was the last of a public person. Since then the law on subversive activities has been applied only against unknown workers.'

This repression is in marked contrast to the level in Poland after martial law was imposed in December 1981. Why is this so? In both cases the regime had the support of only a tiny proportion of the population. The main task was to get production going again as quickly and efficiently as possible. But in Hungary the workers had taken up arms.

The underground was virtually wiped out. The revolution is for most people remembered as a scar not an inspiration. Haraszti explains:

'The people who take part in the opposition are younger. Even so, a big fear as a collective memory goes from generation to generation. This is a politically withdrawn nation. That's the basic reason for the small amount of opposition...'

Some measure of the impact of the defeated revolution can be gained from the reaction to events in Poland in 1980-81. Laszlo Rajk describes them like this:

'Among workers the immediate propaganda was quite successful. It suggested that the Polish workers are so poor because they don't work. Instead of striking they should work and then they will be as well off as we are. It was quite successful for a while.

'Among intellectuals it was completely different. The majority of intellectuals were sceptical. They didn't believe that anything could be changed. It's still the result of 1956. The reaction to Czechoslovakia in 1968 is more complicated because there is this tradition of nationalist disagreement. Secondly, the whole reform in the Prague Spring was run by the Communist Party. And people in Hungary had lost confidence in the CP. People didn't trust that anything would come out of it.'

Hungary today has the least evidence of icons of its leader in public places—or of

Janos Kadar: butcher of the revolution

productivity slogans which greet people on the way to work in other Eastern Bloc countries.

Haraszti explains the economic reforms:

'I think the government is ready to make any reform that would not harm their political base. You can call it a Russian brake. You can call it a brake that works from inside. More radical reforms have political limits. Those reforms that would push the party out of production for example.'

Parliamentary reforms were introduced for last year's elections. There were restrictions and difficulties placed in the way of anyone who wanted to stand. The parliament only meets eight days a year anyway.

I asked Laszlo Rajk who tried unsuccessfully to become a candidate what he thought of the parliamentary reforms:

'I can't think of a more polite word—it's just bullshit. The fear of the authorities wasn't that I would be a member of parliament and would make some scandals. I guess their fear was that once you are a candidate then you have one month to campaign. Beforehand, when you are going to these pre-electoral meetings, it's absolutely forbidden to have a programme.'

The party dominates the proceedings throughout. In order to qualify, the prospective candidate for parliamentary candidacy had to go through two meetings organised by the local district parties. The meetings were attended by plain clothes police. Who were the people who were prevented from standing? Haraszti says:

'Independent people—people who were not nominated by the party. It doesn't mean a political problem necessarily. So they were environmentalists or reform economists or people like this. They were able to show up but they got booed down.'

Rajk describes how he was fixed:

'Pure cheating. There is open voting in these pre-election meetings — that means with hands. They just counted it so that I didn't get through.'

In March this year parliament narrowly threw out a bill that would exempt weekend cottages from tax. It was the first parliamentary defeat in an Eastern Bloc country. At first sight this seems like a public relations exercise, but Laszlo Rajk interprets it differently.

'I think it was an accident. An official member didn't behave as he was supposed to. Two days after, they had a closed parliamentary meeting and they

passed a new regulation for parliament. You have to hand in your opposition to a bill to a parliamentary committee. If they accept it you can stand up in the parliamentary session and speak up. But practically it's impossible because you have to hand it in to the same committee which prepares the bill.'

Haraszti explains the polities of the opposition in Hungary today:

'This new opposition has existed since the late seventies. Basically in Hungary it is a free press movement. There is no independent political organisation in Hungary but there are independent papers. The basic aim is restoring freedom of speech. I guess that looking at it from a democracy like yours it must look like a very non-ideology. Many of these people like myself who are involved in this movement began as very orthodox Marxists because we were raised in this culture. It took a certain time until we understood that having or not having free speech is a more important question than a very right position on questions of social utopia.'

Last summer a conference of opposition met on a camp site. About 40 or 50 people attended, mainly intellectuals—writers, economists, sociologists, architects. They discussed the kinds of issues Haraszti raised above.

Green politics are also becoming more popular. The movement calls itself Duna Kor (Danube Circle). In February this year some 400 people were attacked by the police for protesting against the construction of a joint Hungarian-Czech dam in northern Hungary.

This year has seen an increase in police brutality. Haraszti tells of one example:

'There were two marches on 15 March. One at noon about 7,000 strong. Another one in the evening of about 1,000. It was the anniversary of the 1848 Revolution which, by the way, declared a free press. On the Chain Bridge in Budapest they prepared a trap for 500 people. They pressed them together from the front and the back, beat them up, and took their identity cards. The march is confrontational every year. Normally they pick a few people off. This year it was worse than normal. The marches started in 1973. Before that nobody would dare.'

The stricter regime was also in evidence last November when the Rak Part debating club was shut down. Mainly young people would meet and discuss after hearing a short talk. It was closed down because, as Rajk puts it, 'It was getting tougher, more straightforward and more popular.'

There were no demonstrations after Chernobyl although some Greens produced leaflets and wrote articles for Samizdat papers. Haraszti says,

'The general effect on the public was devastating. The radio and official media hadn't said for at least 15 days that eating vegetables could be dangerous. It had the effect that half a forint bought a head of lettuce where usually it was 12 to 15 forints.'

Hungary is a modern industrial society. The industrial working class numbers some two and a half million, of a workforce of five million. This is out of a population of some 11 million people. There are massive concentrations of workers. Places such as Csepel and Ujpest (where the workers council issued the call for the Central Workers Council of Greater Budepest in 1956) still exist.

Laszlo Rajk summarises the kind of strikes that occur today:

'They are very local and generally very spontaneous. Also the authorities are very much afraid of such things. Immediately they try to fulfil the demands.'

On 6 August, in the most concerted strike action seen in recent years, 400 miners 'resigned' in Borsod colliery 40 miles west of Budapest. At the same time 300 miners walked out at Tatabanya in north-east Hungary. They were protesting against the government's announcement in July to shut 14 of Hungary's 36 pits. The government had announced in July that it wanted to close uneconomic pits, have more opencast mining and less deep mined coal. There are clearly possibilities for further fightbacks from miners.

The number of non-official Marxists is small in Hungary as it is in every other country at the moment. Haraszti provides some hope for the future:

'Recently in one of the Samizdat journals I read some neo-Marxist statements. That very notion of making a difference between bourgeois democracy and socialist democracy in the opposition is quite new talk. That kind of talk was over ten years ago.'

Neither Haraszti nor Rajk are Marxists. But when I asked Haraszti if a 1917 type revolution is possible in Hungary he said:

'It's very difficult but certainly it's not impossible. Our societies are the most working class society of the world ever. Eastern European societies are the only ones in history where the physical working classes are more than 50 percent of the adult population. This was not true in 1917 in Russia. It is not true of western Europe or in advanced capitalism or anywhere. But the ideological situation, the devastating effect of state communism, is a very thorough one you know, very thorough. Therefore workers' democratic tendencies would find other ideological expressions for themselves. At least at the moment they are tending to find other ones.'■

In debt to the dollar

WHEN Hungary's leader Janos Kadar visited Britain last November Thatcher claimed it was her favourite Communist country. Journalists write articles about Hungary's full supermarket shelves and describe shop window displays like those in Western Europe. Car ownership in Hungary numbers one million.

What the pundits don't stress is that workers' living standards have fallen in recent years and that there is growing unemployment. The boom in consumer spending is restricted to middle class Hungarians. A worker needs to have a second and sometimes a third job in the black economy to make ends meet.

Hungary borrowed from the West in the seventies but unlike Poland never needed to have this debt rescheduled. But the fact that it had borrowed at all meant that it was integrated into the world finance market. Today the debt runs at $11 billion.

Of all the Comecon countries, Hungary has gone furthest in opening itself up to the influence of the world economy. About half of Hungary's foreign trade is with the West, although it is now declining. Until Poland joined the IMF this year Hungary was the only Comecon country to be a member.

The level of debt is the most important problem facing Hungary's leaders. It has a far greater effect on living standards and working conditions than the internal economic reforms.

Since the 1956 revolution was crushed one important factor helping the bureaucrats was the possibility of both economic expansion and an improvement in living standards. Hungary received aid from Russia, other East European countries and China. The loans were due to be repaid in the mid-sixties.

The first reforms were in agriculture. In the late fifties farmers were encouraged voluntarily to join agricultural co-operatives. This was in marked contrast to the forced collectivisation of a decade earlier, which gave the state control over food production and forced many peasants into the giant factories of the cities. The aim now was to improve the efficiency of food production. Today there are 1½ million private small scale farmers who account for 30 percent of agricultural production. Six hundred thousand of these belong to the co-ops which provide a pool of machinery and an outlet for distribution. The rest is accounted for by workers who own one or two animals.

In the spring of 1968 Kadar introduced the New Economic Mechanism. But the invasion of Czechoslovakia served as a warning and strengthened the anti-reform camp in the bureaucracy. By 1972 the reforms began to be dismantled.

Len Murray and Co swap stories of rank and file struggle with their Hungarian counterparts...and nearly make it to the shopfloor

There has always been an inbuilt pressure against the reforms. Market forces were to play a more detailed role in the economy by opening up more to the West. Decisions to invest were to be based on the profitability of individual enterprises.

On the other hand there was the political need to protect the party, to maintain control of the economy. So during the gap in reform between 1972 and 1978 company profits increased by 14.3 percent but state subsidies increased by 17 percent. One estimate reckons that 60 percent of business profits were state subsidies. No doubt the back-tracking on the reform was strongly urged from Moscow.

In nine of the ten years after 1968 the growth rate beat the target planned through export led growth. Hungary's exports rose twice as fast as, and reached a level that was half of the national income.

In the late seventies the growth rate fell as did those of the other East European countries. The reforms were warmed up again in 1979 because of this. But since then Hungary's economy has continued to decline. Gross domestic product grew by only 3 percent in 1981, 1 percent in 1983 and -1 percent in 1985.

Part of the black economy was legalised in 1981 when workers were allowed to work on their machines at work in their own time. The firm would allow use of machinery, and provide materials and transport—all for a cut in the profits. It is estimated that almost three-quarters of Hungarian families earn some money from the black economy.

Since the early eighties there has been a drop in working class living standards.

The level of unemployment is still not officially admitted. In 1984 a state enterprise producing office equipment was shut down without a legal successor, the first time this has happened. Seven hundred people were redeployed.

A large number of people change their jobs—about 700,000. If they are not redeployed, the government is supposed to pay people while they are retraining but the money is very low. Not every one is covered by this so that some people are left with nothing. The figures for this unemployment are impossible to obtain.

With that attitude towards unemployment, no wonder Hungary is Thatcher's favourite Communist country.■

The sad fate of British Trotskyism

War and the International: A History of the Trotskyist Movement in Britain 1937-1949.
Sam Bornstein and Al Richardson.
Socialist Platform, £5.95.

A PREVIOUS work by these authors, *Against the Stream* (reviewed in our March 1986 issue), took the story of Trotskyism in Britain up to late 1937. It was in a parlous state at that point. Split into three rival groups whose combined total membership (under 200) was stagnant, if not actually declining, and riven by conflicts both political (about perspectives and tactics) and personal, it was increasingly isolated by the growing influence of Stalinism on the left.

In these unpromising circumstances the international leadership of the Trotskyists exerted itself to unify the groups. In the event unification was achieved in two stages (April and August 1938), a small breakaway from the remnant of the old SLP also joining the fusion. The claimed membership of this RSL (the name adopted) was 170.

A mini-group, the Workers International League, refused to join in on the basis that there was no real basis of agreement on the perspective and orientation of the united organisation.

It may be doubted that this was the real stumbling block. The American Trotskyist leader Cannon once said, 'Everyone has at least two reasons for his position, a good reason and the real reason.' In this case, at least, the aphorism fits. The WIL arose out of a split in the *Militant* group (the biggest of the three that ultimately fused) towards the end of 1937 around an apparently trivial issue (the alleged misdemeanours of some recruits from South Africa during a laundry workers' strike). Jock Haston, Ted Grant and Gerry Healy and a few others walked out.

Obviously, the laundry workers strike issue was the occasion rather than the cause of the split. The real difference was that Haston and the rest were groping towards an aggressive, interventionist political stance as opposed to the increasingly passive (and formalistic) approach of the others. Hence their refusal to join in the fusion of August 1938.

It proved to be entirely justified. To this little group (perhaps 20 members in early 1938) were recruited almost all of the Trotskyists of the next generation—the war generation. The war from September 1939 put the groups to a severe test. Both remained internationalist but their fates were very different. The WIL proved viable and grew (to more than ten fold by 1943). The RSL, the official 'British section of the Fourth International', failed miserably.

The difference lay in the WIL's eagerness to intervene in any actual working class *struggle*, as opposed to the RSL's near-exclusive concern with *institutions* (in practice largely Labour Party wards and constituency meetings).

These quickly atrophied from 1940 on. Bornstein and Richardson, who believe in 'entry' in nearly all circumstances, nevertheless concede:

> 'The RSL's failure to relate to the day-to-day experiences of the working class stemmed from its retreat into the Labour Party... Labour Party inner life was at a minimum due to the electoral truce. Wards hardly met... As the Labour Party is essentially an electoral machine, the fact that elections were not being fought had a paralysing effect. Theorising totally divorced from action led to abstentionism, reflecting itself in inactivity at crisis points, concessions to pacifism, a retreat into clandestinity, and a regime of permanent factional conflict, resulting first in splits, and then in complete disintegration'

The WIL, on the other hand, responded to the changed circumstances of war, although without formally abandoning entrism at first.

The WIL's real break came from June 1941 onwards. The Labour Party had supported the war from the outset and entered the government in the summer of 1940, but the Communist Party had an anti-war position until 22 June 1941 when Hitler's forces invaded the USSR. It then sommersaulted into the most extravagant chauvinism. This opened up real possibilities for the WIL.

Although the CP's anti-war line was far from revolutionary, so long as it was maintained the CP supported strikes and promoted shop floor organisation (which was extremely weak before the war). Its paper, the *Daily Worker* had been suppressed by the government and as a fairly big organisation, it was the natural focus for discontent—and there was plenty of that. But from June 1941 the party not only opposed all strikes, but took the lead in urging sacrifices of working conditions in the name of higher output at all costs. Thus the still tiny WIL (with around 80 members by then) had an open field on the left in terms of industrial intervention. Of course it was not easy. It was very tough going. But, for the first time, there were real openings.

The WIL's paper (the *Socialist Appeal* from June 1941) reported and supported workers in struggles and was used to reach militants. By no means only a strike-sheet—it put revolutionary ideas in clear and popular language—it did focus on the disputes and made some impact, although it was only a four page monthly and then (from 1943) fortnightly. The WIL grew to something over 250 by late '43. This period of real achievement is very well covered in the third chapter of this book which conveys something of the atmosphere and excitement of the time. The quality of some of this layer of recruits was impressive, militants of some standing and experience (of course there were 'raw youth' too—I was one of them). In March 1944 the remnants of the RSL fused (reluctantly in many cases) with the WIL and the fused organisation proclaimed itself the Revolutionary Communist Party—in contrast to 'His Majesty's Communist Party' as the *Appeal* called the Stalinist organisation.

A very grand title for a group of 300 or so (the CP had about 50,000 at the time). It points to a grave problem. The WIL/RCP had an absurdly over-optimistic and apocalyptic perspective. The 1942 perspective document (later published as a pamphlet) was called *Preparing for Power!* (It may be as well to point out that the present sect using the title has no connection with the real RCP.)

Now, the 'revolution at the end of the war' prognosis was in no way peculiar to the RCP. It was the line of the Fourth International and derived directly from Trotsky's writings of 1938-9.

But, of course, it was disastrously disorientating when, in 1945, the wartime radicalisation (which was real and substantial) was found to have produced a massive revival of social democracy and Stalinism in Europe (and Stalinism in Asia) and the revolutionaries found themselves marginalised.

The WIL/RCP's success and apparent influence were due to a peculiar combination of circumstances which faded fast after 1945. The RCP leadership (or rather its majority—there was a minority led by Gerry Healy which supported the 'catastrophic' perspective of Mandel and the SWP (US) for years longer) tried hard to reorient themselves to come to grips with the new situation—including the totally unexpected development of new Stalinist states. Ultimately they failed.

The RCP shrank and, in 1947, gave up the ghost. Our own tendency was formed during these debates and emerged as the *Socialist Review* group in 1950-51. It was necessary, in the process, to reject much of the RCP's theoretical baggage. One thing the *Socialist Review* group did inherit was the model (even if only as an aspiration at times) of an active, flexible, interventionist (where possible) organisation whose fixed point of reference was working class struggle. And that was vital.■

Duncan Hallas

Briefing on
The Big Bang

A TRANSFORMATION in the way the London Stock Exchange operates, known as the 'Big Bang', will take place on 27 October. But if the next few weeks see another collapse in the value of the shares quoted on the exchange, the 'Big Bang' could turn into a whimper. This briefing looks at the what the changes will mean, and how they will increase the financial instability of the system.

What happens on the stock market?
The stock market is best known for the 'second-hand' dealing in stocks and shares. This is more important than the issue of new shares by companies. The *Financial Times* share index, which gets quoted on the TV, summarises the rise and fall in the value of a selection of existing shares. But in recent years the biggest slice of the market has been dealing in 'gilt-edged' stock (bonds issued by the government when it needs to borrow money).

What difference will the Big Bang make?
Since 1908 the Stock Exchange has been run like a private club. Outsiders couldn't buy or sell shares directly but had to go through a stockbroker, who in turn dealt with the 'jobbers' on the floor of the exchange.

The stockbrokers operated as as cosy cartel—they all charged the same 'price', a fixed commission, and competed only in terms of the 'advice' they offered.

The 'Big Bang' will put an end to that. The distinction between jobbers and stockbrokers will disappear, and the market opened up to 'outsiders'.

Is that all there is to it?
No. The run-up to the 'Big Bang' (which was decided in 1983 with a deal between Cecil Parkinson, then still in charge of the Department of Trade, the Bank of England, and the Stock Exchange itself) has been accompanied by other changes.

Previously the Bank of England prevented banks owning stockbroking firms, and imposed various other restrictions which have now gone ('deregulation'). As a result almost all the firms on the stockmarket have been taken over by large international banks such as Barclays, Citicorp and the Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation. Others, such as Nomura, the big Japanese dealer, have joined the exchange.

The exchange has also merged with ISRO, the body representing the dealers in international bonds and securities, based in London.

So the divisions between different financial markets, and between the 'domestic' side of the City (relating to British industry and trade) and the international side, are being dissolved. Some see this as a change with momentous implications (see, for example, Nigel Harris in *SWR*, April 1986).

Why has it happened?
Apart from government pressure, there are two basic reasons.

One is the impact of new technology linking computers and telecommunications, which have made 24 hour global financial markets possible. Firms like Reuters are making big profits simply from providing the financial information and programmes for this technology.

Secondly, the Stock Exchange was in danger of being by-passed as a result. In 1984, for example, most dealing in ICI shares took place outside of the exchange (60 percent in New York). A global market has emerged in the shares of the top 200 or so multinational companies. London wants to maintain its chunk of the market, in the face of intense competition from New York and Frankfurt.

New York's Wall Street had its Big Bang in 1975. As a result it has seen a concentration of financial muscle in the hands of a few big players, such as Merrill Lynch, who are now moving in on the London market.

Who will benefit?
In the short run the biggest beneficiaries are proving to be a few millionaire stockbrokers who have sold their firms at inflated prices. Salaries in the City have also soared with the competition for staff.

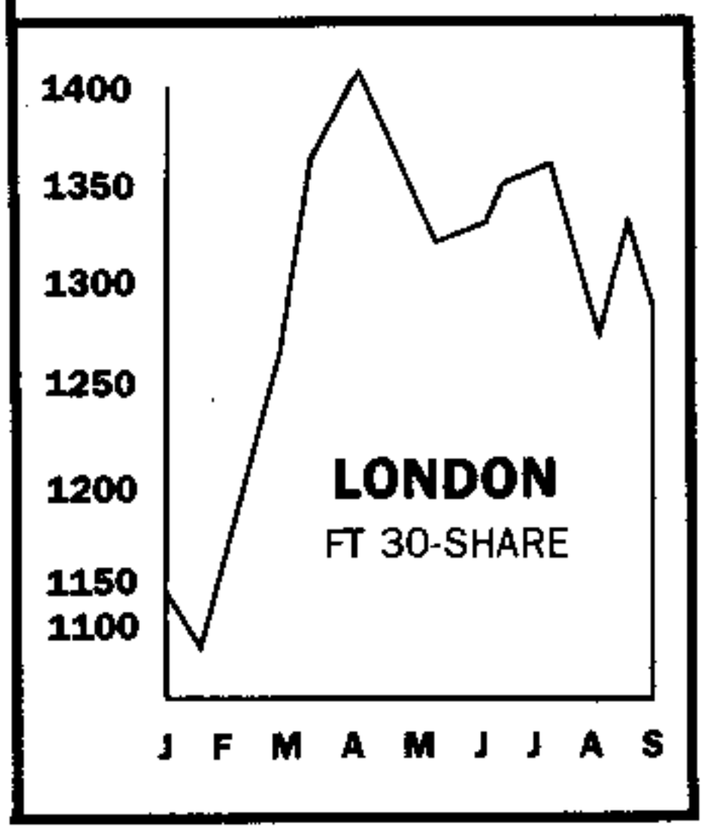
In the longer run there will be a shakeout in which only the fittest will survive, as in New York. The big institutional investors such as the pension funds and insurance companies will also gain from cheaper commissions.

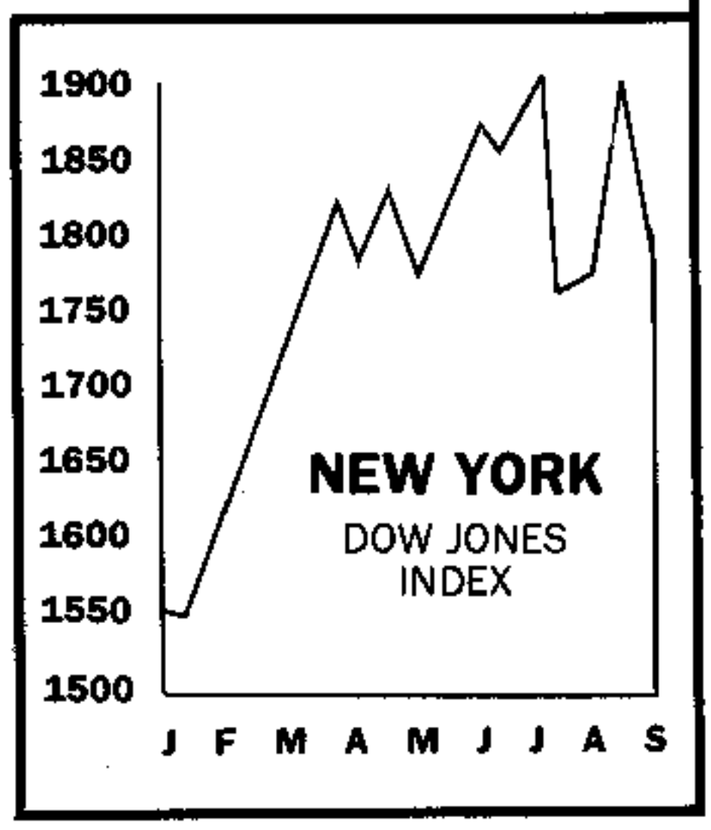
What about the individual shareholder?
Only the very rich, who deal in large numbers of shares, will gain from cheaper commissions. The small shareholders may well end up paying more. Despite privatisation, individual shareowners are still only a small minority of the population (less than 10 percent) and own less than a quarter of all shares (see chart 1).

Has the government withdrawn from all intervention in the market?
No. For one thing the Bank of England retains enormous power. As its governor said in 1984:

Chart 2/3: **THE UPS AND DOWNS OF THE MARKETS IN 1986**

Source: The Observer





> 'Recognition of the benefits that foreign participation can bring does not of course imply indifference to where control of major participants in our markets lies, and we would not contemplate with equanimity a Stock Exchange in which British-owned member firms played a clearly subordinate role, any more than we would like to see Lloyd's or any other City market dominated by overseas interests.'

The government has been closely involved in setting up the new Securities and Investment Board to protect the interests of investors. In the wake of the massive corruption in the Lloyds Insurance market, the Tories are apparently very worried about the risk of another scandal before the election.

The new system creates enormous opportunities for fraud and 'insider dealing' (using advance information about takeovers and the like to speculate on the exchange—investment banker Dennis Levine has just been charged with making over 12 million dollars on Wall Street that way).

But the problem for any government is that if it makes the rules too tight it risks driving the business offshore to the Cayman Islands, Luxembourg or even to New York where the rules are much laxer.

What effect will it have on share values?
One argument is that the new 'liberalised' market will be able to draw in more funds, and push up share prices. But the history of Wall Street since 1975 also shows increased volatility—wild swings in the value of shares, even from day to day.

Deregulation of the financial system generally is accompanied by increased stability. Greater integration of world markets in turn means that shocks in one part of the system are transmitted almost immediately to the rest. As one American banker quoted in the *Financial Times* on 8 May put it: 'The danger in all this is a crash in the system and then re-regulation.'

Ultimately the health of the financial system always depends upon the health of the productive industry which is the source of its dividends and interest. But in the last few years the financial markets have become increasingly disconnected from that underlying reality. While industry has stagnated, they have boomed. Some sort of adjustment is inevitable. (See Notes of the Month, September *SWR* for a comparison with 1929.)

As this was being prepared, world stock markets took another turn downward (see chart). By the time it is published it could be out of date.

Chart 1: **THE DECLINE IN INDIVIDUAL SHARE OWNERSHIP**

	% Share of Ownership in all shares		
	1963	**1975**	**1984**
Individuals	58.7	37.5	22.0
Institutions (Pension Funds, Insurance Co's Unit Trusts, etc)	27.8	46.9	60.00
Other (Charities, government, overseas, other companies)	13.5	15.6	18.0

Source: Financial Times

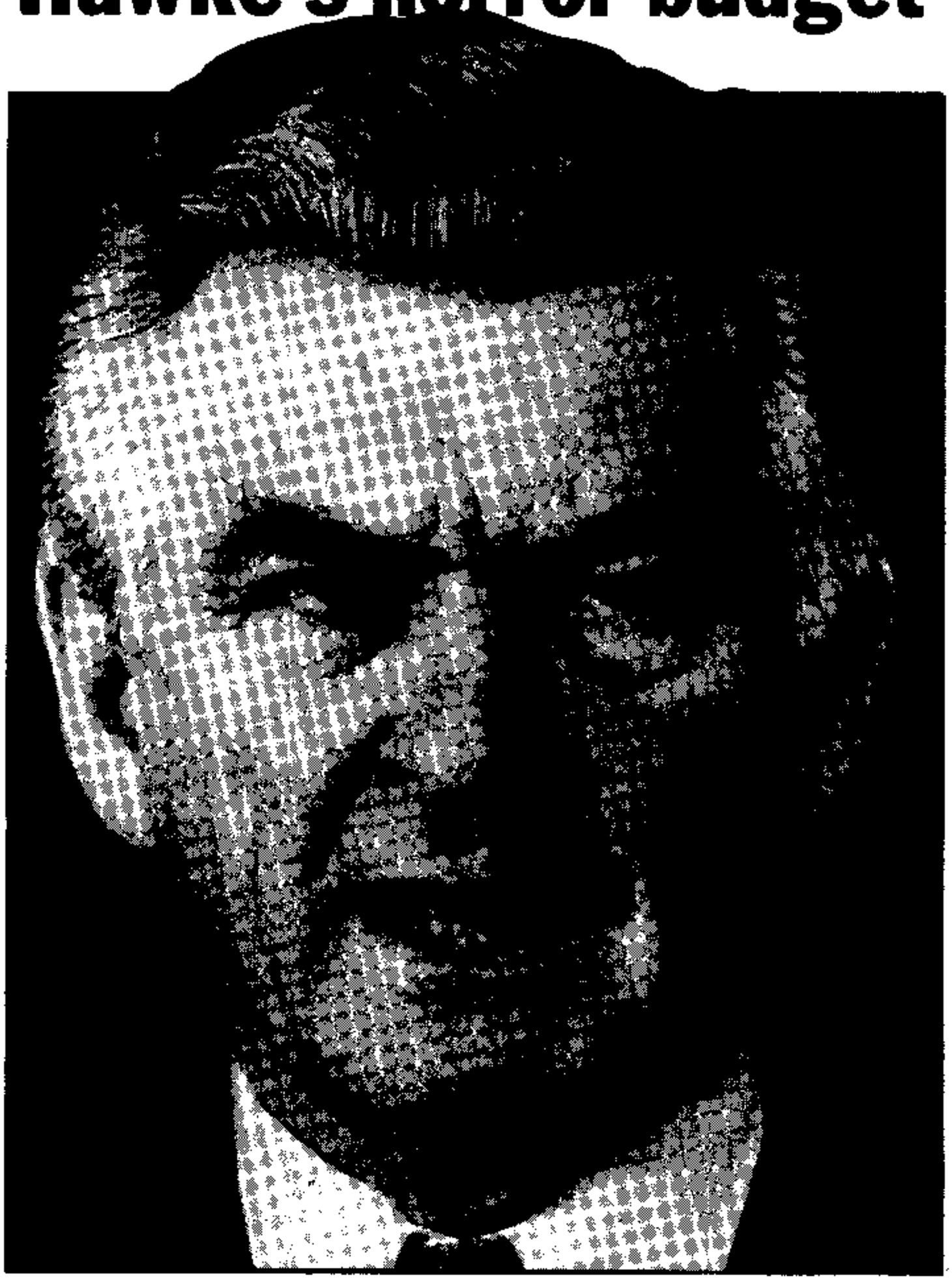
(Note: Earlier this year the Treasury claimed that after privatisation 14 percent of adult Britons owned shares, up from 7 percent in 1979. But an opinion poll commissioned by the *Economist* found that the figure was only just over 8 percent.)

Further reading on the City
The best available 'Marxist' account is *The City of Capital* by J Coakley and L Harris, although its conclusions on 'Nationalising the City' are reformist. *The Square Mile* by J Plender and P Wallace (Plender writes regularly in the *Financial Times*) is not in the least Marxist but has a good feel for how the markets work.

Finally, though focused on the United States, *Paper Money* by Adam Smith (pseudonym of a Wall Street financier) is cheap, very entertaining, and brilliantly conveys the sheer madness of the system we live in.■

Pete Green

Hawke's horror budget



Bob Hawke

A COUPLE of years ago, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) gave Australia's Paul Keating an award for being the world's most successful finance minister.

It was an award the Labor government was enormously proud of: proof that they could run the capitalist economy better than the right wing Liberals.

Today, Labor's dream is falling apart.

In the past two years the Australian dollar has halved in value under the impact of a massive balance of payments crisis.

With the economy now in recession, the ruling class has moved sharply to the right, demanding not only pay cuts, but an offensive against the unions.

Paul Keating's recent 'horror budget' was an attempt to stem the tide, an attempt to restore the balance of payments and win back ruling class confidence.

The explicit aim of the budget was a massive attack on working class living standards. The government announced yet another 2 percent cut in wages on top of the 7 percent cut Labor already boasts of. The budget also forecast a sharp rise in unemployment.

To kick that off, they announced 2,000 jobs would be scrapped in the public service.

There are a host of new taxes that will hit workers especially hard. The health insurance levy is up 25 percent, petrol taxes are up and will cost workers £2-3 a week, and there are increased taxes on a wide range of commodities from soft drinks to the kitchen sink.

One estimate put the cost of the budget at £8 a week for the average worker.

At the same time, Labor handed out a massive tax cut for the very rich. The top tax rate was cut from 60p in the pound to just 49p. For someone on Bob Hawke's income, £50,000 a year, the tax cut is £80 a week!

Fees are to be re-introduced for university students, starting next year at £100. But this is just the thin edge of the wedge. Hawke and several other ministers have made no secret of their ambition to make students pay most of the cost of running the universities.

Uranium exports to France will be resumed. They had been banned because of French nuclear testing in the Pacific. This will bring the government just £25 million. At the same time, foreign aid is severely cut, a step that is already causing new economic problems in the former Australian colony of New Guinea.

And as a final sop to the ruling class, Labor has cut £200 million from the welfare budget, delaying cost-of-living rises to unemployed people and pensioners, and launching a new offensive against 'dole bludgers' and single mothers.

The end result was a budget deficit £1 billion lower than last year, lower than virtually any other western country, and lower than either the Liberals or even the right wing bosses had demanded.

Yet none of this satisfied the ruling class. Whilst early reaction to the budget in London was favourable, the bosses here and in America were less impressed. They wanted a much more savage attack on wages and they forced the Australian dollar down even further just to underline the point.

The Labor government is now in serious trouble. Its whole strategy has been based on winning the confidence of the ruling class and creating the conditions for new investment to take the economy forward.

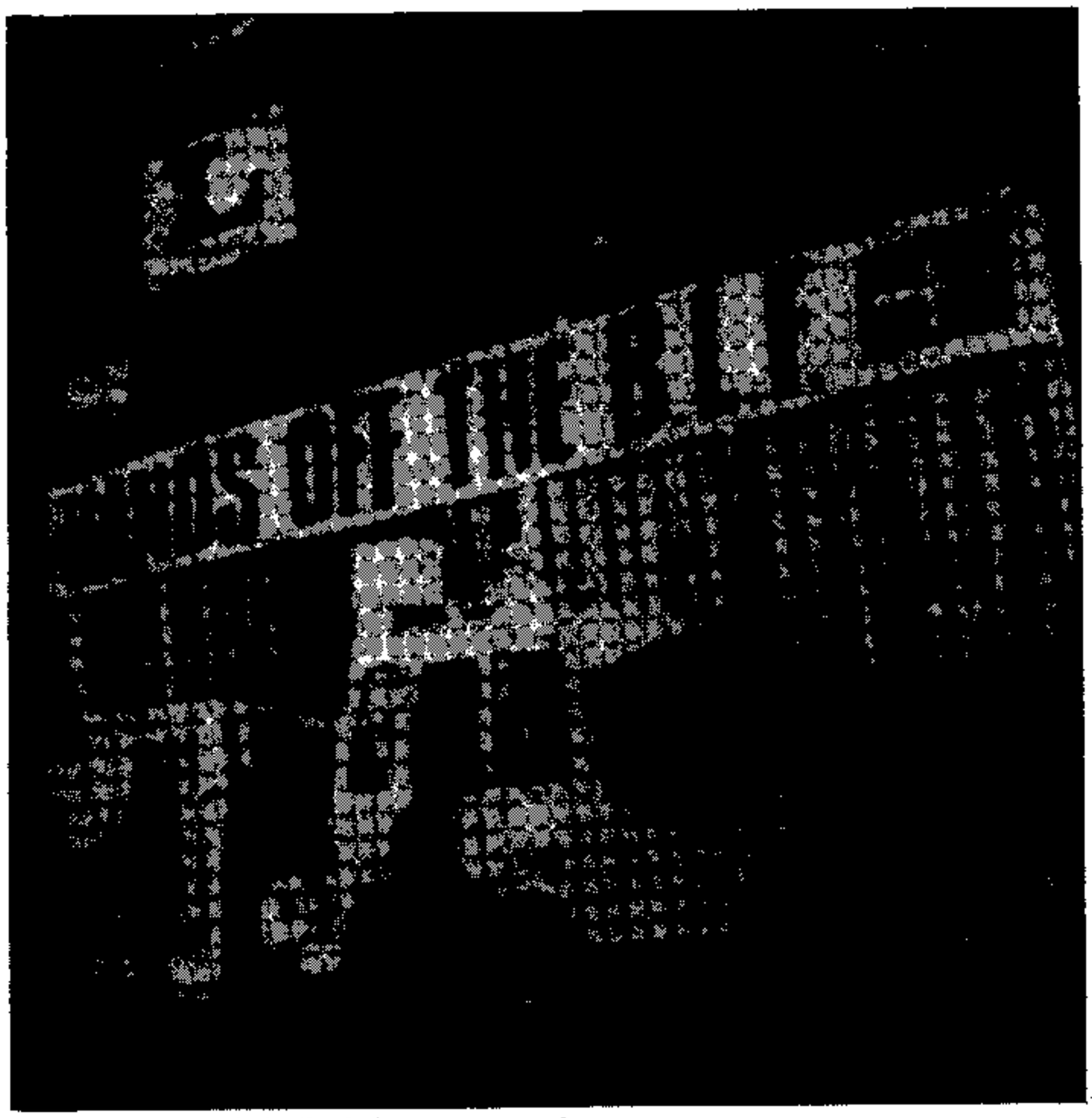
But the ruling class has very little confidence any more in Labor because it's not hitting the working class hard enough.

And there is widespread and growing disillusionment with Labor amongst its traditional supporters. In two recent by-elections for the New South Wales state parliament, Labor suffered swings of 15-20% against it in solidly working class electorates. There has been a wave of resignations from the party, with membership down by more than 25 percent in Victoria alone.

What went wrong?

Labor tried to find a way to lead Australian capitalism out of the crisis. For three years it has cut wages and forced profit rates up so that they are now higher than at any period during the previous Liberal government. Labor hoped to create the conditions for an orderly recovery, for a renewed period of investment.

But things didn't work out that way. The massively increased profits of the ruling class were used for speculation—the share market has boomed in the past two years—and for investment overseas where the prospects seem better. Luxury consumption also shot up, but not investment, which continued to languish.



Building workers fight the Labor government

Profits were higher, but not high enough. Labor imposed a rigid wages policy on the working class—the only rises were to come from the Arbitration Commission—and the trade union officials zealously policed it. Even with wage cuts this wasn't enough for the bosses.

The Australian version of the Social Contract, the 'Accord', led to a massive decline in industrial struggle, with strikes at a 20-year low. This only served to boost the influence of the right wing of the ruling class who saw the opportunity for even greater gains for their class.

Labor's strategy did lead to a mild recovery for the first couple of years, whilst the world economy was still recovering.

But when world commodity prices began falling, this spelt trouble for Australia. In the past two years, oil prices have collapsed and wiped out £1 billion in exports. Wheat and aluminium prices are down 20 percent, coal by 14 percent (Australia is the world's largest exporter of coal) and wool and iron ore are also down substantially.

At the same time, the recovery in Australia led to increasing imports and increased borrowing overseas to finance the government's deficits.

This couldn't go on. The currency collapsed, and the economy has been pushed into recession. The logic and demands of the world economy finally asserted themselves, forcing Labor onto the defensive.

Now, the only answer Hawke and Keating have is to attack the working class even more forcefully. Not only are wages to be cut, but there is increasing pressure to attack 'work practices', such things as staffing levels, working conditions, methods of work and so on.

The crisis is a disaster for the reformist left and the left union officials. They staked everything on the Accord. It was Communist Party union officials who led the way in campaigning for the Accord, even before Labor took office.

They argued that workers couldn't defend themselves and their wages with industrial action; the government could just take it all away with higher taxes.

The Accord talked about controlling prices, improving welfare and social services, reducing taxes on workers, revitalising industry, consulting the unions and a million and one other fantasies.

But at the heart of the Accord were the wage controls, and they are the only part that has ever been taken seriously.

To promote the Accord, the officials hammered any section of workers that tried to win pay rises outside the official system. Leading Communist Party official, Laurie Carmichael, led the attack on the tiny Food Preservers Union when they won modest pay rises through strike action.

And it was some of the left unions in the building industry who campaigned for the smashing of the militant Builders Laborers Federation (BLF) who used 'guerrilla tactics' to win substantial site allowances.

The Federal Labor government and the state Labor governments of New South Wales and Victoria were only too eager to agree, despite the hesitations and even opposition of some of the biggest building employers.

The result was the most draconian anti-union legislation in Australian history, the large-scale mobilisation of police to force labourers to sign up with other unions and the jailing of the BLF secretary on 'corruption' charges.

But for all their subservience, Hawke has shown nothing but contempt for the left. He happily threw Labor Party policy out the window and kept uranium shipments going.

He ignored party policy on the Indonesian invasion of East Timor, and threw the party's policy of Land Rights for Aboriginal Australians out the window in the face of a racist campaign in Western Australia.

Not content with cutting wages, Hawke and Keating have deregulated the financial system and floated the currency in a deliberate attempt to open up the economy to outside competitive pressures. Even the Liberals didn't have the guts to take this step when they were in office.

The only time the left has ever won anything against Hawke was when it was leaked that he had agreed to co-operate with the Americans in testing MX missiles.

Hawke was forced to call off his plans and the ruling class responded violently. The dollar was forced down and a media campaign unleashed portraying Hawke as weak for giving in.

The lesson the left drew from that was to never humiliate Hawke again. It could cost Labor its cosy position in government!

The budget finally showed the bankruptcy of the left's strategy. We saw the left's Brian Howe, the minister for social security, introducing plans to harass the unemployed, increase the number of snoopers and try and cut single mothers off the pension.

The reformist left as a whole faces a terrible choice: either fight the government and probably destroy it, or accept the wage cuts, the new taxes and the new attacks from the right. Most of the left officials have accepted the cuts and are keeping their heads low.

But much of the damage has been done. The last three years have seen a succession of important defeats: the smashing of the BLF in at least two states, the smashing of the union in the Brisbane electricity supply, the suing of the meatworkers union for £700,000 over a defeated picket line.

Most workers feel powerless in the face of the crisis and accept the rhetoric of sacrifice. Only a small minority are becoming angry and bitter about Hawke and Keating.

But the lack of fight doesn't mean either the crisis or the class struggle will go away. The bosses are determined to force as much as possible out of the working class and they have the Labor government as an ally.

Their very militancy may force sections of the working class to resist. Hopefully, the increasing hostility to Labor can be tapped, so that we can build a revolutionary alternative to Hawke.■

Phil Griffiths

When Wales ran riot

Rebecca's 'children' riot

BETWEEN 1839 and 1843 the countryside of west Wales witnessed a remarkable series of uprisings. Under the cover of night, fantastically disguised horsemen led armed crowds in the destruction of the tollgates that had become a symbol of their oppression. Troops and police seemed powerless as the rioting spread into semi-industrialised Carmarthenshire.

The authorities' worst fears, of a fusion with the radical Chartist-influenced industrial workers, and a generalised insurrection, seemed within reach. Then, as suddenly as they had started, the disturbances came to an end. What had caused them, and why did they end so abruptly?

Most of the population of south west Wales at this time eked out a living from the land. The peasant farmers lived by selling the produce from their miserable plots, and lived in a state of extreme poverty. The tollgates, owned by the Turnpike Trusts, at which the farmers had to pay in order to pass en route to market, ground them even further down into destitution. It was not surprising, then, that when the explosion came, it found the gates as its target.

On the night of 13 May 1839, the gate at Efail-wen on the Narberth road was completely destroyed and the toll-house set ablaze. The Trust rebuilt it, and sent special constables to protect it, but on the night of 6 June a crowd of 400, including many men disguised in women's clothes or with their faces blackened or painted, chased off the constables and again destroyed the house and gate. A nearby gate at Maes-gwyn was also demolished a few nights later.

The magistrates strung a chain across the road at Efail-wen to act as a temporary gate, asked the Home Office for troops, and called out the Castlemartin yeomanry cavalry. Nevertheless, ten days later, in broad daylight this time, a large crowd again chased off the constables and smashed the Efail-wen chain.

The Turnpike Trust held an emergency meeting, and, anxious to prevent further disturbances, decided that the destroyed gates should not be rebuilt, and that two other gates should be removed.

However, far from placating the peasant farmers, this merely proved that direct action of this kind could achieve its aims. Indeed, what was to come made the events at Efail-wen look like a preliminary skirmish.

The origin of the name 'Rebecca' is unclear. The local story goes that the leader of the rioters at Efail-wen, a fist-fighter called Tom Rees, could not find a disguise to fit, and so borrowed clothes from a neighbour, Big Rebecca. As the rioting progressed, a biblical quotation, that 'Rebecca' should 'possess the gates of them that hate thee', was also widely used.

What is clearer is that a pantomime began to be enacted each time a gate was destroyed. A man, dressed in women's clothing, and seated on a horse, would approach the gate, feign surprise that his way was barred, and urge his followers, similarly disguised, but on foot, to remove the obstruction. For obvious reasons of secrecy, the mounted man was always referred to as 'Rebecca' or 'Becca' and those on foot as 'Becca's children'. Later, threatening letters were also signed in this manner.

Like 'Ned Ludd' or 'Captain Swing', the name seems to have been used for secrecy and to confuse the authorities.

After the Efail-wen riots there was a lull, but the summer of 1842 was one of unrest thoughout England and Wales. Troops were in constant use in the industrial areas of the Midlands and the North, and in the aftermath of a Chartist general strike in the industrial heartlands of South Wales, the children of Rebecca once more moved against the hated tollgates.

A new gate near St Clear's was the first to go on the night of 18 November, together with one at nearby Pwll-trap. Both were rebuilt, but within three weeks a crowd of 'Rebecca-ites' entered St Clears at midnight, armed with guns and scythes, and destroyed all the gates in the town.

The rioting spread through Pembrokeshire, and threats were made that Narberth workhouse would be destroyed unless the paupers were given better food. During the spring of 1843 tollgates throughout north Carmarthenshire were destroyed, and in May a crowd of 300 entered Carmarthen itself, and, firing at the town constables, took the roof off a tollhouse and levelled the gate.

The exasperated magistrates' attempts to swear in more special constables failed when 'Becca and Children' pushed death threats under the prospective constables' doors. Death threats were also sent to magistrates who were suspected of being active against Rebecca, and their property was set ablaze. It was impossible to gain information about participants, despite free pardons being guaranteed, and rewards of up to £500 being offered.

Anyone who oppressed the poor was seen as a legimitate target—workhouse masters, vicars who confiscated property in lieu of tithes, even the High Sheriff of Carmarthenshire. He was sent a letter warning him that unless he lowered his rents by the next rent day, Rebecca would visit him and feed his flesh to his hounds.

Workhouses were also becoming a focus for Rebecca—in particular the notorious Carmarthen workhouse. In June of 1843 a huge demonstration converged on Carmarthen as a show of strength by Rebecca's supporters. Over 3,000 people poured into the town, led by a band and carrying banners. They were followed up by horsemen, one of whom was dressed as Rebecca, in women's clothes and with long ringlets of horsehair. As the march wound its way through the streets the townspeople, many of whom had had first-hand experience of the workhouse, flooded to join them.

The crowd laid siege to the workhouse, calling on the terrified master to hand over his keys. Then, pouring into the courtyard, they broke into the building, led by a persecuted pauper girl, an unmarried mother, who 'did a wild dance on the tables' as she led them to their targets. The place was ransacked, the furniture smashed and hurled through the windows, and the paupers released.

In the midst of the commotion, a troop

of cavalry swept into the courtyard. Ordered by the War Office to move from Cardiff to Carmarthen on the day of the demonstration, they had been deliberately misdirected at Pontarddulais. Fourteen miles from Carmarthen a despatch reached them telling them what was happening, and they covered the remaining distance at speed. So hard did they drive the horses that one dropped dead in the workhouse courtyard. The crowd scattered, and 60 people were taken prisoner.

However, out of these 60 only 12 actually went for trial. Half of these were acquitted, and of the remaining six, five were sentenced to eight months hard labour, and one to a year's. Given the serious nature of the disturbances, these were remarkably lenient sentences. The whole episode suggests that the local magistrates had succumbed to intimidation from 'Becca and Children' and, more importantly, that the authorities feared that harsh sentences would provoke further disorder, and possible direct retaliation.

Nonetheless, the events of Carmarthen convinced the government that the situation was serious. The military were poured into the area from Castlemartin, Pembroke Dock, Cardiff, and as far afield as Clifton and Taunton. Field guns were sent by the War Office, plain clothes police who could understand and speak Welsh were brought in from London. The real fear of the authorities was that the 'Rebecca-ites' would link up with the Chartists and radical industrial workers of Glamorgan and Monmouthshire, where bloody uprisings had already taken place. An attempt was now made to physically seal off South West Wales from the rest of the country.

Yet within the area itself even this massive military presence appeared to make no impact upon the activities of Rebecca, such was the support for her among the country people. During the summer of 1843 tollgates were destroyed throughout Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire, in an area taking in Haverfordwest, Cardigan and Llandovery. In vain did the Tollgate Trusts reduce tolls and agree not to rebuild destroyed gates.

Renewed threats were made to destroy workhouses unless conditions were improved. Rebecca continued to exert her own discipline on backsliders and informants in such a way that the whole judicial system was rendered impotent. Special constables refused to serve, court cases backfired, with witnesses changing their stories, juries unable to reach verdicts, and charged rioters walking free.

By this time the rioters were moving about in a semi-military fashion. There would be an advance guard of 20, armed with guns, then a main body of two or three hundred with axes and hammers, then a rearguard, also with guns. The troops found themselves being quite deliberately lured around the countryside by false rumours of impending attacks, surrounded by a population that watched their every move.

By the late summer of 1843 the authorities' worst fears seemed about to be realised, as rioting spread into the fringes of the industrialised areas. A crowd, mainly of colliers, destroyed the gate at Tumble. In the autumn the Swansea copper workers went on strike, and nocturnal rioting began in that area almost immediately. Also, an industrial depression had gripped the valleys, and unemployed miners and ironworkers, drifting back into rural Wales in search of work, enthusiastically joined in the night time disturbances.

Hugh Williams, a Chartist who had launched the first Working Men's Association in Wales at Carmarthen, helped organise meetings between the Chartists and representatives of Rebecca. These meetings took place in the Three Horseshoes in Merthyr (and were immediately reported to the Home Office by a spy who had infiltrated the Chartist lodge). Although there was considerable interest among the Chartists about events in West Wales, and although representatives of Rebecca had invited Chartist speakers to address the Rebecca-ites, there was no fusion. The meetings at Merthyr did not secure an alliance.

Rebecca

The reason why this should have been so pinpoints the weakness at the heart of the Rebecca movement. Its breaking-point was not repression by the authorities, despite the eventual transportation of a handful of convicted rioters, but the class nature of the movement. Rebecca was essentially a revolt of small farmers—once they had won the ear of Thomas Foster, correspondent of the London *Times*, who gave them sympathetic coverage, and once a government commission had travelled to West Wales to set about removing their worst grievances, they felt they had achieved their aims.

More importantly, as industrial workers, and even farm labourers began taking independent intitiatives in the rioting, the peasant farmers felt the whole movement slipping out of their control. They quickly replaced the destruction of the tollgates with mass meetings, duly reported by Mr Foster, and although there was sporadic rioting right through to the summer of 1844, the Rebecca movement petered out.

The peasant farmers' immediate class interests did not include a general insurrection. The movement was limited by the fact that its control never moved into the hands of the class whose interests *did* include this—the emergent industrial working class. However, the Rebecca riots had thoroughly humiliated the authorities and had released energies that no one could have foreseen.

A letter (probably from Hugh Williams) to the *Welshman* newspaper, demonstrates the emerging class consciousness that the movement had helped to generate:

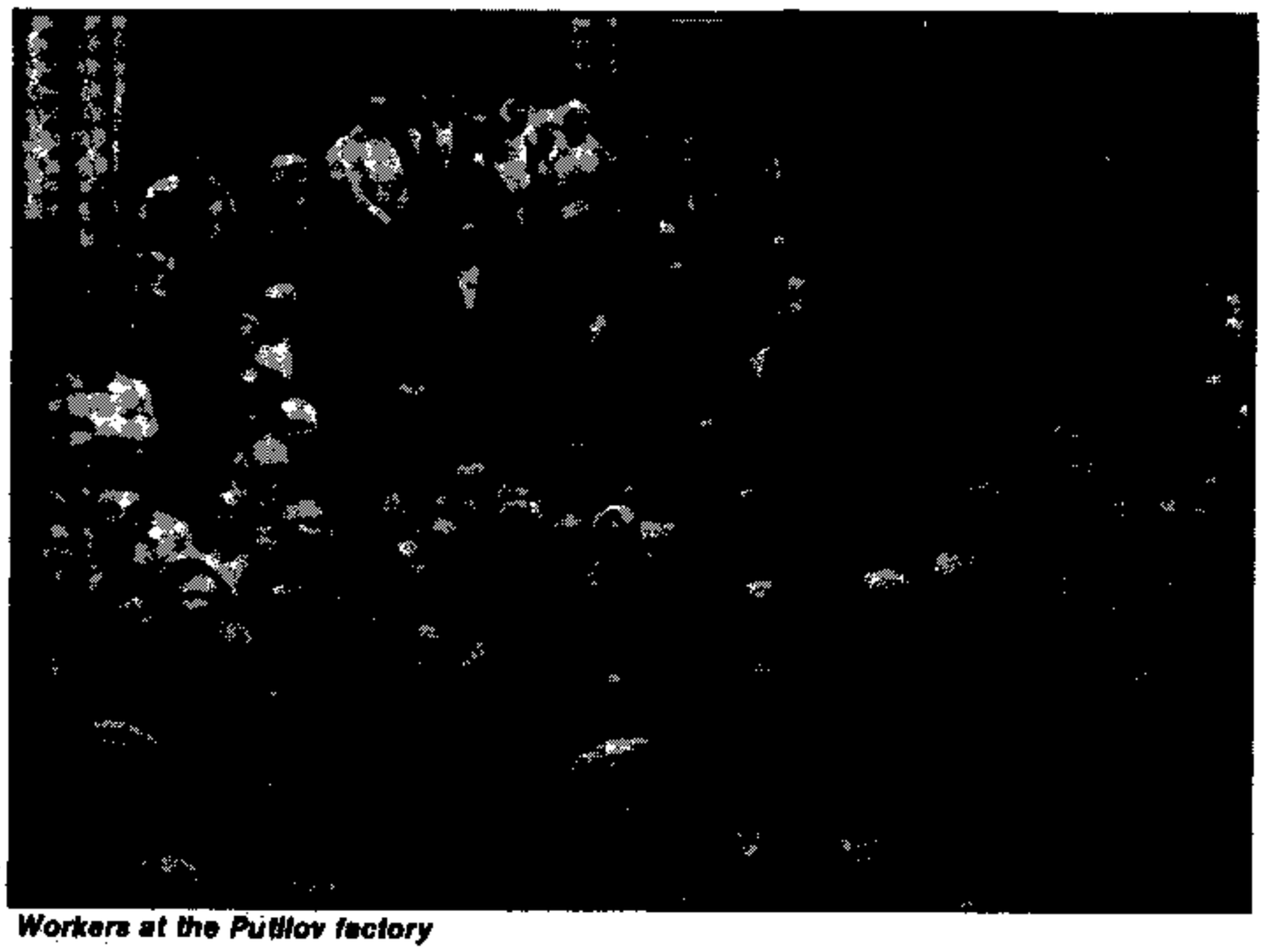
> 'Oh yes, they are all my children. When I meet the lime-men on the road covered with sweat and dust, I know they are Rebecca-ites. When I see the coalmen coming to town clothed in rags, hard worked and hard fed, I know these are Rebecca's children. When I see the farmers' wives carrying loaded baskets to market, bending under the weight, I know well that these are my daughters...these are members of my family, these are the oppressed sons and daughters of Rebecca...'■

Tim Evans

Off the shelf

Alienation and freedom

History and Class Consciousness
Georg Lukacs
Merlin £5.95



Workers at the Putilov factory

LUKACS' *History and Class Consciousness* was forged during the highest point revolutionary struggle has yet reached, the Russian Revolution and the revolutionary wave that swept Europe following the First World War.

The war confirmed Lukacs' deep loathing of capitalist society and the Russian Revolution showed him that there was an alternative to elegant despair.

'It opened the window to the future', he wrote in the 1967 Preface to *History and Class Consciousness*.

Within the space of a few months Lukacs travelled the road from romantic, anti-capitalist philosopher to People's Commissar in the short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919.

Along that road he left a number of essays as markers of his intellectual development. Some of them are collected in *History and Class Consciousness*.

Lukacs' conversion to Marxism was no shallow affair. He was steeped in the bourgeois philosophical tradition, he had studied with the most influential sociologist of his time, Max Weber, and he had already published books of art criticism.

When Georg Lukacs came to Marxism he did so through a ruthless criticism of the best that bourgeois thought could offer. In doing so he developed the philosophical basis of Marxism in a way that no one since Marx had even attempted.

History and Class Consciousness is the impressive, but not perfect, result.

The book's language is not easy and, being a series of essays written between 1919 and 1922, it jumps between different levels of analysis.

Only two essays were written especially for the book, 'Reification (or alienation, as it is more commonly called) and the Consciousness of the Proletariat' and 'Towards a Methodology of the Problem of Organisation'.

It is these two essays on which I shall concentrate.

Lukacs sets out to explain some issues that are vital for Marxists. Why is it only the working class that can change the world? Why is it that the working class can move from acceptance of bourgeois society to overthrowing it? Why is it that only Marxism can give an accurate picture of reality? What is the relationship between theory and practice?

Central to his answers is the concept of alienation.

In capitalist society, where one class owns the means of production and the other has to sell its labour power, the things that workers produce confront them as hostile, alien forces.

Even a worker's labour is alien to him. It is not under his command, it is at the beck-and-call of a hostile capitalist class. The work of his very own hand, his very own brain, appears as a burden and an imposition.

And so it is with the commodities that this *alienated* labour produces. The goods are not the natural result of the worker's efforts which fulfil his or her needs. They appear as unobtainable. Worse, their price on the market will determine whether the worker has a job, for how long and how much he will be paid.

As Marx says, 'To them, *their own social action* takes the form of the action of objects which rule the producers instead of being ruled by them.'

Their own creation has become an alien force which dominates their life.

When the newspapers talk of the 'pressure of competition' or 'the law of the market' they talk as if these were impersonal forces like the weather or gravity, not the product of social relations.

This is one of the key insights in Lukacs' book. Behind the unbendable 'laws' stand class relations and these change as the struggle develops.

Society is not composed of hard and fast institutions governed by rigid laws, it is a dynamic, ever-changing set of social relations. Society is history, it is a continuous process of change.

For Lukacs, even the Communist Party is 'a process by nature' since it can only be forged over time, through struggle and experience.

Lukacs argues that it is a special characteristic of capitalist society that it makes its class structure appear natural and inevitable. In feudal or slave societies the rule of the oppressing class was a more obvious affair.

It is this analysis which provides the foundation for understanding why workers accept bourgeois ideology.

It is not good enough simply to say that it is the fault of the TV, the press etc. *Of course* they propagate ruling class ideas. The key question is: why do workers accept them? Lukacs provides a materialist answer: because those ideas correspond to the real, alienated experience of workers under capitalism.

But Lukacs also sees that workers are in a unique position to break the hold of this alienated consciousness. After all, it is their labour on which the system stands and it is they who feel the weight of society on their shoulders.

The capitalist class is also alienated, it believes itself helpless in the face of the unalterable laws of the market. But, as Marx says, 'they are happy in their alienation'.

Lukacs says:

'The reef on which bourgeois economics foundered was its failure to discover even a theoretical solution to the problem of crises. The fact that a scientifically acceptable solution does exist is of no avail. To accept that solution would be to observe society from a class standpoint other than that of the bourgeoisie. And no class can do that—unless it is willing to abdicate power freely. Thus the barrier which

converts the class consciousness of the bourgeoisie into 'false' consciousness is objective; it is the class situation itself.'

So all that even the most enlightened bourgeois philosophers and social scientists can do is stand back and observe the world in an attitude of passive contemplation.

This is the root of Lukacs criticism of the western philosophical tradition: within it there is an unbridgeable gap between the observer (the subject), and the real world (the object).

This is the cause of the rift which runs through all bourgeois social science. A rift between thought and reality, theory and practice and between the society that *is*, and the better one that *ought* to be.

Worse still, this view had infected the reformist Second International. Bernstein, on its right wing, simply accepted society as it is. But Kautsky, on its left, was little better. He just expected socialism to come automatically as a result of economic crises.

Neither saw the whole truth, that the tendency to crisis must be consciously acted on by revolutionary workers.

This led Lukacs to place great stress on the idea of 'totality'. He followed Hegel's view that 'the truth is the whole'. Bourgeois science might be able to see partial truths, but it could never assess their relative importance because its class position prevented it from seeing society as a whole.

The working class has no such barrier to seeing society as a whole. It is both the engine which produces the whole society, and once aware of the fact, the class that has the motivation and the means to do something about it. There is, potentially at least, no division between thought and reality, theory and practice.

Workers are, when alienated consciousness has them in its grip, the passive object of history, but through political action they can become the active subject which is capable of transforming society. So the possibilty of seeing society as a whole exists for workers in a way that it doesn't for the ruling class.

Totality is a vital concept for Marxists and Lukacs was absolutely correct to insist on this, but it is an exaggeration on his part to make it the sole defining characteristic of the Marxist method.

Likewise, Lukacs exaggerated when he claimed that Marxism could be defined by its method of analysis. The reasons for this are outlined by John Molyneux in *The Real Marxist Tradition*.

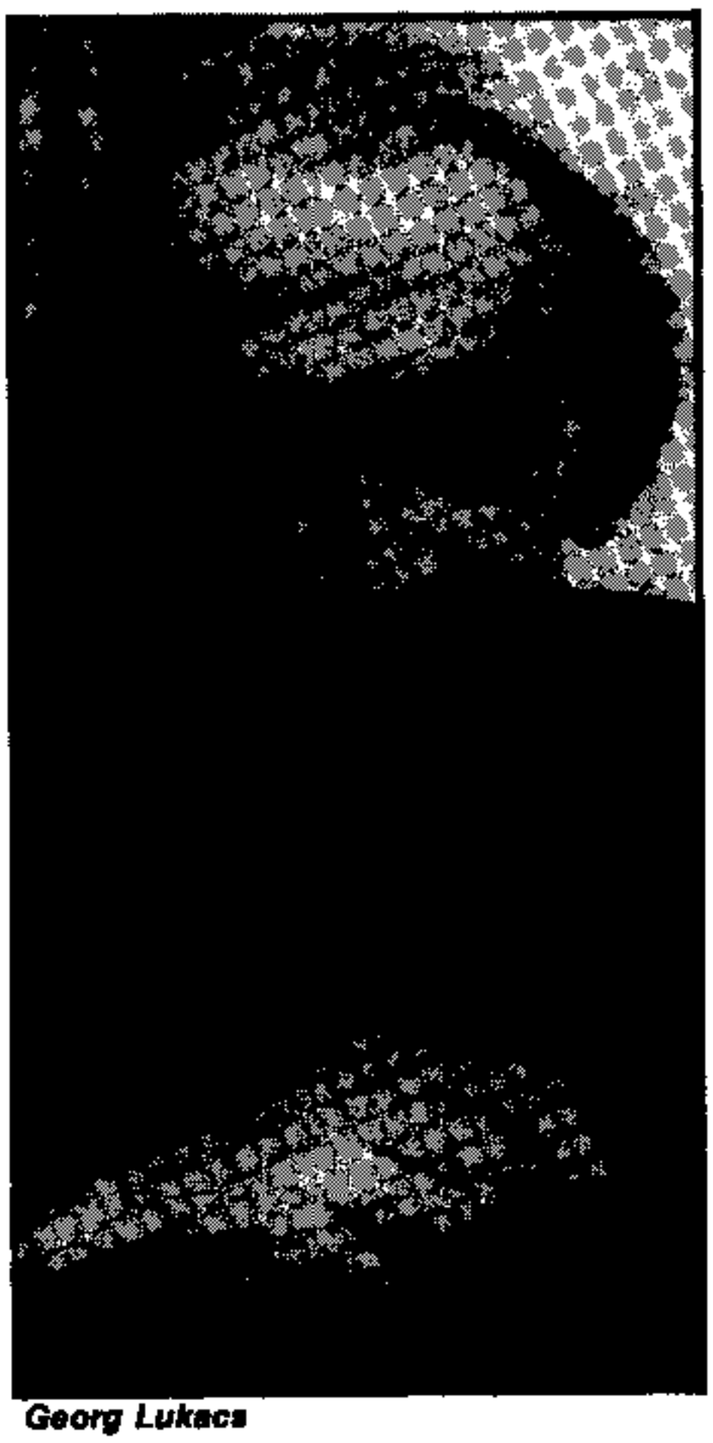
But Lukacs' concept of alienation did supply other, more valid, insights. Alienation is not just something that affects workers in the factory: it conditions the whole structure of capitalist society, including the theoretical and artistic theories of the bourgeoisie.

It follows that the struggles in which workers break the hold of alienated consciousness are not purely economic.

Lukacs praises Marx's account of the Silesian weavers' revolt, which noted 'their battle cry does not even mention the hearth, factory or district... Whereas other movements turned initially only against the industrialist, the visible enemy, this one also attacked the invisible enemy, namely the banker.'

Looking back, Lukacs said that his standpoint was that 'of Lenin in *What is to be Done?* when he maintained that "socialist class consciousness would differ from spontaneously emerging trade union consciousness".'

Some critics, usually Stalinists or some other variety of crude materialist, have misinterpreted Lukacs' statement that the working class is both the objective foundation of society and the subjective, active force that can overthrow it.



Georg Lukacs

They claim that this means that all the working class has to do is 'change its mind' and the revolution will be accomplished. Lukacs is charged with idealism.

Even a cursory glance at *History and Class Consciousness* shows this to be absurd.

Lukacs intended alienated consciousness and full class consciousness to stand as two poles. He knew that at any particular point in history there will be all sorts of gradations and amalgams of both sets of ideas inside workers' heads.

He says, 'The class consciousness of the proletariat does not develop uniformly...large sections of the the proletariat remain intellectually under the tutelage of the bourgeoisie; even the severest economic crisis fails to shake them.'

Lukacs continues:

'This ideological transformation does indeed owe its existence to the economic crisis which created the objective opportunity to seize power. The course it takes does not run parallel in any automatic way with the crisis itself. *This crisis can only be resolved by the free action of the proletariat.*'

This is not idealism. It is simply stating that economic crises, while essential, are not enough, conscious action is necessary.

This is precisely why a revolutionary party based on the most advanced sections of the class is needed.

Lukacs was well aware that the theoretical skeleton he had provided would look very different with the flesh of real life on it.

In fact he makes a special effort to show how the underlying but invisible structure of society is connected to the very different surface appearance.

He talks about how alienated consciousness is transmitted and reinforced (or mediated) by the state bureaucracy, the factory system and the reformist parties. All in different ways, of course.

One of the huge benefits of Lukacs' work is that it gives this process of mediation a special and essential place in Marxism, where previously many crude Marxists have just dragged it in, on an ad hoc basis, to cover up a gap between theory and reality.

A related accusation is that Lukacs' *History and Class Consciousness* leads to ultra-leftism. While it is true that Lukacs was part of an ultra-left current for a period, it is not true that ultra-left positions flow automatically from the ideas in *History and Class Consciousness*.

In fact, Lukacs had accepted Lenin's criticism of ultra-leftism by the time he wrote the final essay in the book. He condemns sects 'who argue that the "conscious" minority has to take action on behalf of the "unconscious" masses', because 'they regard the real process of history as something separate from the growth in consciousness of the "masses".'

Lukacs considered 'the question of organisation the most profound intellectual question facing the revolution' precisely because the main enemy he faced was the fatalism of the Second International. That is why his work stresses the importance of workers' consciousness.

This work and his 1924 book *Lenin* make Lukacs the first Marxist to *explicitly* integrate Lenin's theory of the party into the overall theoretical framework of Marxism. As such, it gave the definitive answer to those who saw Leninism as a cunning, pragmatic opportunism.

Lukacs could not have achieved this without first developing a systematic theory of class consciousness. *History and Class Consciousness* is formidable in its scope and relentless in its conclusion that a revolutionary party is necessary.

There are few books that are as difficult, there are also few that, properly understood, are as valuable for Marxists.■

John Rees

MARXISM & CULTURE

Turning a blind eye

Over the top in the Somme offensive, 1916, 60,000 were killed on the first day alone

IN 1917, the year of the Russian Revolution, a mutiny erupted amongst British and colonial troops at Etaples training camp in Northern France. Over 100,000 men were involved in that mutiny. Its adaptation for TV, by leading dramatist Alan Bleasdale, is now at the centre of a right wing backlash.

There has been an almost unanimous Fleet Street and House of Commons reaction to the showing of *The Monocled Mutineer*: they hate it. A stream of abuse has been heaped upon it and it has been used by the right wing in the controversy surrounding who will become the next chairman of the BBC.

Home Secretary Douglas Hurd is being faced with an array of Conservative back benchers arguing that Alan Bleasdale's serial proves the need for a tough chairman who will not allow such subversive programming. Their favoured candidate is Lord King, at present presiding over the privatisation of British Airways.

Even the programme's supporters on Fleet Street, like the *Guardian* and *Daily Mirror*, deny the historical accuracy of the serial. The *Mirror* commented: 'The serial is only slightly related to the truth.' And most of the press is accusing Bleasdale of rewriting history with a left wing bias.

The objections concentrate on the supposed left wing bias of the BBC and the historical accuracy of the serial. Neil Hamilton, Tory MP for Tatton, is quoted as saying, 'Once again the BBC is rewriting history and selling Britain's history short.' Nicholas Soames, Winston Churchill's grandson and Conservative MP for Crawley, went as far as to assert, 'It suits the BBC, with its left wing bias and determination to mock every form of authority, to rewrite history in this way.'

Where do they get the ammunition to fire at the programmers? Historians, supposedly 'expert' on the Etaples mutiny, have been dug up by the *Daily Mail*. These 'experts' get their 'facts' from the war diary of the camp commandant, Brigadier-General Andrew Graham Thomson. There are many good reasons why his official account would not admit the extent of the mutiny, not least of these being the threat to his career prospects.

William Allison and John Fairley, the authors of *The Monocled Mutineer* (on which Bleasdale's dramatisation is based) spend a great deal of time and effort demolishing this war diary. They are also concerned to detail the cover-up of the mutiny which began the day it started. This is something the serial does not portray, but the reaction to it by politicians and press alike shows the cover-up continues.

The research undertaken by Allison and Fairley was extensive. Scores of witnesses were interviewed, and their evidence was backed up by a book written in 1933 by an ex-Secret Service agent who recounted how he was involved in the search for Toplis after the Etaples mutiny. Fairley states, 'I have detailed records of dozens of letters and interviews showing that this and every other incident in the book are absolutely true.' The supposed experts want to deny that this oral history—which recounts the experience of ordinary people, not just official documents—has any validity.

One 'expert', Judge Babington, commented: 'I read the book and they don't quote any authorities.' So referring to books by First World War experts who have only the war diary to refer to is presented as being more valid and accurate than interviewing dozens of soldiers who actually took part in the mutiny.

The television serial follows the original book quite closely, particularly on the events during the mutiny. Bleasdale states the obvious: 'The historical complaints indicate that the powers-that-be are rattled. This is a crude attempt by the right wing establishment to discredit me.' He is part of the way there.

There are many aspects of the book and serial which the right wing would not be expected to like. They show how the class division within society is reproduced in the army. They illustrate how working class youth are the cannon fodder in war, beaten and bullied into obedience by their 'superiors', who manage to maintain a very comfortable lifestyle.

At the time of the Etaples mutiny, Britain's rulers were scared, and had very good reason to be. They were in the third year of the war which was to have been 'over by Christmas' of 1914. The experience of the brutality of war had by then killed off the patriotism of 1914 in many troops.

By the end of the war more than 60 million men had been mobilised worldwide, eight and a half million killed and 21 million wounded. Most of the casualties were on the Western Front where the Etaples men were heading. Just keeping them fighting was a major problem for the ruling class.

In that year mutiny was to strike at virtually every army involved in the war. In April 1917 French armies began to mutiny. In the spring of that year the British and French armies were due to try and revive the offensive on the Western Front but the French troops were simply refusing to return to the trenches and risk probable death.

On top of this there was the spectre of revolution spreading from Russia. Revolutionary slogans were heard and the 'Internationale' sung.

Given the clarity with which the BBC production portrays the Etaples mutiny, it is hardly surprisng that it is under attack from the ruling class. Marx wrote, 'the prevailing ideas are the ideas of the ruling class'. The BBC has to play its part in ensuring this remains the case. Usually this does not prove a problem for them, as a nightly viewing of the BBC news will show.

However, very occasionally something manages to slip through that actually challenges those ideas. It is then greeted with a howl of abuse. The documentary series on Channel 4 which exposed the British role in the Greek Civil War produced a similar reaction to the one being witnessed at present.

The Monocled Mutineer challenges some of our rulers' most cherished ideas—especially the idea that they have a 'natural' right to rule over less able members of the population. They are shown as brutal incompetents unable to motivate men to fight for 'King and country'.

The book and the series have challenged the right of those people to rewrite history and get away with it. The press and some MPs are trying to reassert that right, to such an extent that William Allison commented, 'I am beginning to wonder if there was a First World War, let alone a mutiny.' The cover-up the authors detail in the book continues.

The book is in the best traditions of investigative journalism, exhaustively researched and well written. Unfortunately, this is something the *Daily Mail* and the majority of Fleet Street journalists know very little about.■

Lesley Hoggart

Hope of change

Where Sixpence Lives
Norma Kitson
Chatto and Windus £9.95

Working Women in South Africa
Lesley Lawson, for the Sached Trust
Pluto Press £5.95

NORMA KITSON identifies completely with the African National Congress. Its Freedom Charter 'was the programme I dedicated my life to', and she did so with great heroism.

Her husband, David Kitson, was put on the four-man National High Command of Umkhonto we Sizwe (Spear of the Nation), the armed wing of the ANC, after the arrest of Nelson Mandela and other ANC leaders in Rivonia in 1963. In June 1964 he was arrested and sentenced to 20 years in jail, all of which he served, bar a few months. A month later Norma, his wife, was detained, interrogated and tortured. She was only released after a month.

She had to leave South Africa with her two children some years later, and her son returned to visit his jailed father. He too was arrested, tortured and held for some days. Then her sister, who had helped her and visited David in prison, was murdered. She and her children continued the fight for the release of David Kitson and the other detainees relentlessly.

Her book is the story of her life from early childhood, her long fight for David's release and their continuing fight against apartheid until the present. The early part is a fascinating, very authentic description of her life as a member of a well-to-do Jewish family in Durban. Her mother played rummy most afternoons and poker most nights. On one occasion she lost £1,000. The numerous African servants cooked, fed, dressed, and did everything else for her and and her family.

'Living in South Africa', says Norma, 'had poisoned her, had made her unable to take care of herself or of her children—had made her as dependent as a baby... She was part of a poisoned generation that could never envisage change of any kind.' When Norma had to cope with living in England she says, 'I had never operated in a kitchen. I didn't even realise that water steamed when it boiled though I had read about it when I studied dialectical materialism.' Yet the servants who did everything had to wear white gloves when waiting at table, so that their black hands would appear never to have touched the food or any vessel that contained it.

One of the servants had seen her husband and five children die, another saw her child, called Sixpence, perhaps once a year. Another feigned dumbness, Norma discovered, because he got the sack from every previous job when he proved too smart. 'They feel too threatened,' he remarked.

The first part of this book is well worth reading for its intimate observations of the dehumanising character of white life. This is well symbolised in a normal white housewife's order from a butcher: '4 lbs chops, 4 lbs prime steak, 2 chickens, 2 lbs dogs' meat, 2 lbs boys' meat'!

Norma perceived all this and rebelled.

Working Women in South Africa tells of life in the country from the opposite end of the social spectrum, from the lowest of the low, the African woman, in a series of interviews recorded in the last two years, interspersed with facts and photos.

African women in South Africa carry perhaps a greater burden than women anywhere in the world, because of the grinding poverty and inhumanly long hours most work. These are common phenomena in many third world countries, but there, mutual aid in keeping alive is undertaken in large families living together.

Women workers

Crushing constraints destroy this lifeline for most black women in South Africa. Influx control keeps millions of women and children cooped up in the Bantustans, while the men work in the white towns; or makes vast numbers illegal in the towns. Hence they are in and out of prison (16,532 women were arrested in 1982 for pass offences).

The Group Areas Act forces black workers to spend about four hours a day travelling to and from work in the white areas. A nursing assistant describes how she leaves home at 3.30pm to get to work at 5.30, works till 6.30am, and gets home at 8.30am—17 hours. She then begins her own household chores, so sleep—if any—is two to three hours—none over the weekends because of the daytime noise of family and neighbours.

Many, who have their children in the 'homelands' looked after by a grandmother, see them a fortnight a year.

Influx control was abolished on 23 April 1986. Like all Botha's 'reforms', the abolition is meaningless, as legal sojourn in the towns is now subject to residence in approved housing—and there is very little of this for blacks.

Even if there is a man in the family, the tradition of women carrying the burdens of children and household despite their long hours has not been overcome, and drinking is heavy. The result is that a number of the women interviewed talk of throwing out the institution of marriage. One says: 'In Soweto marriage is no more.' She wants her daughters to have their children and stay with her where they can all help one another. Another is frightened to take a runaway husband to court because it probably means jail, and then, 'as soon as he comes back he might try and kill the children so that he doesn't have to pay'.

Maternity is a nightmare. Women have in recent years been taken on in men's heavy labouring jobs at much lower pay. Not covered by any regulations or benefits, subject to the sack if they have a child, they first have to hide their pregnancy—one woman strapped herself down so tightly that her baby was born dead at 8½ months. Then they have to carry on working till the last opportunity at often heavy work: the heavy steam pressing machine in a Johannesburg dry cleaners was known as 'the abortion machine'.

To get or retain a job at all in these days of economic recession in South Africa many black women are forced to sleep with the man in charge.

With all the most unbelievably harsh conditions and constant harassment and bullying, black women's pay is much below the pitifully low wages of African men, ranging from under £10 per month in rural work or about £15 per month for domestic workers (and rural and service work employed 81 per cent of African women in 1970) to £100 per month for most African women workers and £40 per week for a lucky few factory workers. By comparison the average, mainly male, metal workers earned about £47 per week. (Whites earn on average 11 times more than blacks.)

Through the horror stories the book gives hope of change. Trade union organisation has been getting stronger through the sheer determination of some women, sometimes at the cost of the sack, mostly at the cost of desperately needed sleep, to go to union meetings and build at the workplace. And victories have been won. Strong and carefully planned organisation in one factory got rid of a manager who forced women to have sex at lunchtime. Some firms have introduced maternity agreements. One is even progressing towards equal pay.

The book gives a graphic description of the frightful hardships of black women in South Africa and also shows the beginnings of the way out. However, it deals purely with the trade union struggle, and does not touch on the politics of the fight.

By contrast, *Where Sixpence Lives* deals extensively with the politics of the struggle, and completely misses out on workers' organisation in trade unions and the work-

place as an integral and potentially leading factor. The class struggle is not mentioned, even though Norma Kitson considers herself a Marxist. This says volumes about the policy of the South African Communist Party, to which both Norma and David belonged, and which is a major political influence in the ANC.

The ANC's Freedom Charter omits any mention of the leading role South Africa's powerful black working class must play if its toiling masses are to be liberated and move towards socialism, which alone can end their oppression and exploitation.■

Chanie Rosenberg

Black papers

The Press and Political Dissent
Mark Hollingsworth
Pluto £6.95

'Mr Benn—Is He Mad or a Killer?' The Sun, *22 May 1981. 'The IRA-loving, poof-loving, Marxist leader of the GLC, Mr Ken Livingstone.'* Sunday Express, *27 September 1981.*

A FEW years ago this sort of disgusting hysteria was splashed across many daily papers.

This book attempts to look at the way in which those who don't fit into society's 'norms' have been portrayed in the popular press, and the motivation that lies behind these torrents of abuse.

It is a timely study, since this month sees the production of at least five new papers.

This has been heralded as a turning point in the history of the press. Now there will be a real chance to open up the press, enabling all sections of society to have a say. Here is the chance to obtain a freer, less biased press.

But is this really the case?

The main assertion of the book is that the press has changed significantly since 1979. While it has become increasingly centralised, there has been a rise in the level of militancy amongst the oppressed over the last seven years.

> 'The reality is that as the labour, trade union and peace movements have become increasingly radical and militant, so the press attacks have intensified and increased.'

The picture that Mark Hollingsworth portrays is that of a once liberal, 'democratic' society being hijacked by Thatcherism. For Hollingsworth, it is since the election of Thatcher that the press has been undermined. What was once a pluralist society is being replaced by a monolith. The attacks on political dissenters by the media and the increasing monopolisation of the press itself are all a consequence of this Thatcherism.

This is the great defect in Hollingsworth's book.

In an attempt to prove his assertion, the 'political dissenters' he illustrates all reached notoriety in the 80s, with the exception of Benn (but even then the campaigns against Benn are shown as increasing in ferocity).

To justify his claim that increasing militancy sparked the press campaigns, Hollingsworth draws attention to the media coverage that the miners' strike received.

Anyone active in the strike will remember the barrage of lies that confronted the miners. Scabs were portrayed as heroes, while Scargill was compared to Hitler. *The Sun* shrieked 'Scum of the Earth', whilst *The Mirror* continued its campaign to wreck the strike, using issues from violence to the ballot.

Hollingsworth claims that the miners' strike had the worst press coverage of any since the war, then proceeds to add an astonishing assertion that this could never happen again!

The *Financial Times* summed up the press attitude to strikes in 1970 during a work to rule by power workers:

> '...what has to be weighed at this point is the force of public opinion... The greater the inconvenience suffered by the public, the greater the pressure will be... There comes a point when nobody likes to be unpopular, and this point may well come for the electricity workers too.'

It is simply not true that the miners' strike was a unique case of the press attacking workers in struggle. It's happened before and certainly will again!

Secondly, it is not true that the level of militancy and radicalisation has increased and that a form of consensus politics was predominant in the early seventies.

The early seventies saw periods of far sharper, far more generalised class struggle than anything we have seen today. And with the number of strikes at their lowest since the war, Hollingsworth's notion that the press is being goaded by militancy is clearly nonsense.

So is it the case that it is the papers themselves that have changed? Again, a main part of Hollingsworth's argument is that since the late seventies the proprietorship has become increasingly centralised, with the result that not one paper exists that will put forward the ideas of the 'rainbow coalition', ie Benn, Livingstone, Greenham Common women.

It is certainly true that the press is increasingly centralised and that huge corporations such as Lonhro have taken over ownership.

But he is totally wrong in assuming that there has been a golden age of the press, when papers existed that covered all points of view.

For the press to be owned by millionaires and tycoons is certainly not new. In 1960-1, mergers took place in Fleet Street that resulted in Cecil King, chairman of the International Publishing Corporation, owning the *Daily Mirror*, the *Sun*, the *Sunday Mirror* and the *People*—a total of 40 percent of the national circulation.

Every national paper in Britain today reflects the views of at least sections of the ruling class. Even so-called opposition papers, such as the *Mirror*, often as not side with the ruling class (as does the Labour Party itself).

There are important exceptions, such as the 1972 miners' strike, when the *Mirror* sympathised with the strike. But again it was in its interests to do so. The strike had large public support, the miners held vast sympathy and the *Mirror* could tap into this support and maintain its readership and hence its profits.

Hollingsworth's solution to the biased nature of the press is a common one, and one keenly advocated by Kinnock and his supporters.

Firstly, they believe that with the advent of new technology, the markets will open up. A Labour movement paper can become feasible.

But if we look at the demise of Eddie Shah's *Today* it is clear that whilst there may be bursts of new papers, the probability of their being able to compete with giants like the *Sun* or *Mirror* is exceedingly small. Instead, as has been the case with *Today*, they are bought out by the big fish such as Lonhro.

The pressure of competition, and the advertisers, will mean that any national left wing paper's politics will be severely constrained.

The second part of Hollingsworth's solution lies in a parliamentary bill. The bill's aim would be to stop ownership of the press by foreigners and would make papers more accountable to a Press Council with members of the public on it presided over by a judge.

The first part is nationalistic nonsense—as if the country of origin decides whether the press barons support strikes or not! A reporter from the *Sun* quoted in Hollingsworth's book answered

the point about the press council. When threatened with legal action the reporter replied, 'Sue us. So what? What do we care? This is a great story and we're going to use it.'

By far the most successful way of ensuring a right of reply and an end to some of the worst press outrages was given by the printworkers themselves during the miners' strike. When workers at both the *Express* and *Sun* voted to take action if certain articles and photographs attacking the miners weren't either removed or replied to by the miners, they successfully stopped the offensive articles.

In periods such as the present one when strikes and industrial action is sectionalised and isolated, workers' struggles are often unpopular.

The left is also often marginalised. The ability of the press to portray figures on the left as cranks and freaks is heightened.

> 'I have lost faith in the newspapers I once read, the *Sun* and the *Daily Mirror* are banned from this house now. They are banned from most homes in this village. They have told lies, half truths and peddled propaganda.'

Only when this miner's wife was involved in struggle could she and hundreds of other miners make this vital break.

As Marx said, the prevailing ideas in society are those of the ruling class. But when workers engage in struggle against the rulers, they come into conflict with these ideas.

Mark Hollingsworth's account of the media's role is extremely shallow. He portrays the problems of the press but fails to give a satisfactory solution. It leaves an overriding sense of pessimism and, although he claims otherwise, it portrays people as passive and brainwashed, never breaking from the mould. For us, it is the times when workers have broken that are important.■

Frieda Smith

Chinese cracker

Breakfast with Mao: Memoirs of a Foreign Correspondent
Alan Winnington
Lawrence and Wishart, £12.50

THIS BOOK comprises the memoirs of Alan Winnington, who was a life-long member of the British Communist Party, foreign correspondent for the *Daily Worker* and a Stalinist through to his bones.

The memoirs are written in an interesting journalistic style which, coupled with the events he is covering, make compelling reading.

He was with the People's Liberation Army in 1949 when it entered Peking. Before this he describes working for the British Communist Party during the 1930s when, under Stalin's direction, the party lurched from one turn to another.

During this time he was a close friend of Harry Pollitt, the CP leader who was forced out for supporting the war against Germany before Russia was attacked. Later of course, after that invasion, he was reinstated.

During the 1950s Winnington reported the Korean war from the northern side. In return for atrocity stories concerning the South Koreans and Americans he was deprived of his British passport and therefore had to return to China for work. All these periods of his life are described in stylish detail.

Throughout this eventful career he was an attentive observer and his memoirs supply interesting first hand information on the development of China from the revolution through the Great Leap Forward to the Cultural Revolution.

His information on the Korean War is also revealing, particularly when it comes to exposing how the media operated. At one point he intercepted a message, marked 'Urgent' from United Press New York to United Press Tokyo. The message read: 'Need only limited coverage on returning PoWs except for tales of atrocities and sensations.'

By far the most fascinating period he recounts concerned his time living and working in China. Following the revolution China had no capital and no industry. The idea of the Great Leap Forward was to 'overtake and outstrip Britain in 15 years'.

The leaders declared their determination to 'build socialism by exerting our utmost efforts and pressing ahead consistently to achieve bigger, faster, better and more economical results'. In 1958 the Second Five Year Plan was changed—industrial output was multiplied by six and a half times.

The intention behind the Cultural Revolution was the promotion of production by mobilising the largest resource China had—its enormous population. The object was forced development, regardless of the backwardness of China. The result was disastrous. Attempting to impose development, by encouraging effort and dedication and ignoring objective circumstances, made it necessary to create a virtually hysterical atmosphere.

Winnington describes some of the more ridiculous aspects of this. On one occasion the population was mobilised for the task of wiping out the Four Evils: rats, flies, mosquitoes and sparrows.

> 'Incalculable man-days were wasted collecting, counting and book-keeping dead flies. Beijing ran out of flies. Desperate to fulfil quotas, people, including my wife, solved their personal problems by breeding flies in boxes in order to have something to wipe out.'

What he unfortunately misses out is any details of the wage freezes that were imposed on the working class at this time and the wave of strikes that shook many Chinese cities in the late 1960s.

He also lacks analysis of the forces and motives behind the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. There was a split in the Communist Party leadership over how to industrialise China but Winnington sees this split and the consequent political developments very much in terms of a clash of personalities.

This lack of analysis is a feature of the book as a whole. But it is an extremely well-written account of some of the most interesting and important events of the 20th century.■

Lesley Hoggart

Two cheers

The Retreat from Class: A New 'True' Socialism
Ellen Meiksins Wood
Verso, London 1986, £6.95 pbk

IN THESE days of mass unemployment it seems that one of the few ways of being guaranteed a living is by setting up in business as an academic Marxist to attack 'reductionist', 'economist', 'vulgar' Marxism.

According to these critics, most of them associated with Eurocommunism and the Labour right wing, the problem with the 'vulgar' Marxists is their pig-headed insistence that there is some kind of fundamental connection between the working class and the struggle for socialism.

The forerunners of this school of thought include people like Althusser and Poulantzas, and its best known supporters today are Ernesto Laclau, Barry Hindess, Gavin Kitching and others. Ellen Wood's book sets out to provide a critique of their politics from the point of view of a more orthodox Marxist position.

Wood, herself a professor of political science and one of the editorial committee of the *New Left Review*, calls them the 'new "true" socialists' (NTS) after the 'true' socialists of the 1830s, attacked by Marx in *The German Ideology* for their belief that socialism would be achieved by the spread of progressive ideas rather than through the class struggle.

The shared point of departure is their theory that, against the claims of the founders of Marxism, there is no necessary connection between the mode of production and the ideologies that dominate in any society. In Althusser-speak, politics and ideology are autonomous, or at least 'relatively' autonomous of the economy.

The conclusion they have drawn is that a mass socialist movement can be built irrespective of its social content. Workers' immediate demands and interests are more or less irrelevant to socialists—we don't need to develop any special relationship with or orientation toward the working class. Like the utopians before us we should appeal to anyone and everyone on the basis not of their material interests but in terms of universal, supposedly classless values like 'freedom' and 'democracy'.

Many of the NTS have gone even further to argue that economic struggles—the defence of wages, working conditions and so on—actually *distract* from the struggle for socialism. Because workers are usually fighting to get a better deal out of the existing system, they are the least likely to lead any struggle to revolutionise society.

As Wood points out, although this pseudo-Marxist rubbish is presented as being the basis for a socialist strategy, the real objective isn't socialism at all but something quite different—parliamentary power. The bottom line of the NTS argument is that if people didn't keep dragging class issues into politics it would be a lot easier to win voters to Labour at the next elections.

The real strength of Wood's analysis lies in her grasp of the ideas that make up the essence of Marxism, ideas that the NTS have abandoned—that it is the system of exploitation that is at the heart of capitalist society, and therefore that the fight against exploitation is central for socialists because it is *only* there that it is possible for the great mass of society, the exploited, to rid themselves of 'all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew'. It is that kind of understanding that Wood contrasts to the arguments put forward by Laclau *et al*.

Despite this, there are still two major flaws in the book. The first is that she never takes on board the question of *organisation*.

Socialists need to relate to workers' struggles, yes—but how? As individuals? From inside the Labour Party? For all of her insight she still remains trapped by a tradition that puts logic-chopping analysis above actual involvement in the class struggle. She argues that only workers can lead the struggle for socialism, criticises the consensus politics of Labour, accepts the need for political organisation, and yet still fails to draw the necessary conclusions from her own critique about the need to build a revolutionary workers' party.

The second problem is Wood's support for the popular front. It is no coincidence that almost every Stalinist revision of Marxism away from class politics has been directed precisely towards providing a justification for the popular front.

Given that, it really is nothing less than amazing that after rubbishing the class-collaborationism of the NTS, Wood should go on to accept a tactic whose first premise is that sections of *all* classes can share a common political interest that overrides the social issues that divide them.

Nevertheless, despite the shortcomings she has gone a long way towards her aim of using class politics to dismantle the arguments of Kinnock's more intellectual fans. And at a time when reactionaries of all sorts are mounting a new attack on Marxist theory that is something we can applaud.■

Andy Wilson

Bookbrief

A PAPERBACK edition of **The Good War: An Oral History of World War Two** by Studs Terkel has been issued by *Penguin (£5.95)* and has some fascinating stuff in it.

They have also issued a rather odd collection of writings by South Africans from P W Botha (!) to Nelson Mandela. It is called **Apartheid in Crisis** *(£3.95)* and is edited by Mark Uhlig. In spite of some of its contributors the tone of the book is liberal.

Still on the subject of South Africa comes *Pluto*'s **Big Red Diary** for 1987, entitled 'Southern Africa/Victory is Certain' (£3.95). It's been written by the Anti-Apartheid Movement and Namibia Support Committee. The text is slanted towards the ANC interpretation of events with any information of black trade unions extremely sparse. The title is a pointer to its soggy politics.

For those who need to study riots or were involved and would like to see how they got it wrong comes **The Scarman Report** of 1981 in *Penguin (£3.95)*—the liberal that the establishment ignored.

One of the more boring books to have arrived at the review office is **Local Government in Britain** by Tony Byrne, subtitled 'Everyone's Guide to How it All Works' (Fourth Edition, *Pelican £5.95*). A more honest title would be, 'How it doesn't work'. If nothing else this should put people off parish socialism.

The Women's Press have published **Lesbian Mothers' Legal Handbook** by Rights of Women Lesbian Custody Group *(£3.95)*. The history of the courts' attacks on the right for lesbians to even win custody of their children is awful.

Also from the The Women's Press comes a novel that our reviewer thought quite highly of—**Mud** by Nicky Edwards *(£3.95)*. The mud of the title is both that of Greenham Common and of the First World War.

The best book out this month is Rosa Luxemburg's **The Mass Strike** with an introduction by Tony Cliff *(Bookmarks, £1.95)*. At a time when most of the left have moved behind Kinnock because they see no alternative, it's good to be reminded, as Cliff puts it, that 'Rosa Luxemburg's enduring strength lay in her complete confidence in workers' historical initiative.'

Get your facts right

IN YOUR Notes of the Month (September *SWR*), it is stated that Tony Benn and I agreed to the TUC/Labour Party documents 'People at Work: New rights, new responsibilities' and 'Low Pay: Problems and priorities' without dissent.

That is completely untrue. Both Tony and I and others tried to get the trade union document amended. We were outvoted, and then *we voted against it*. These facts were reported in the Labour MPs' *Campaign Group News*, and I also had an article in *Labour Weekly* and in other left papers which gave the facts and the votes against.

With regard to the low pay document, again efforts were made to seriously amend it. Again we failed, but did not vote against it (although we did not vote for it), as there is a case for a genuine minimum wage.

What we are against is any attempt to bring in a statutory wages and incomes policy. If efforts are made to do that, we shall fight it tooth and nail. We do in fact anticipate that efforts will be made to introduce such a policy.

Perhaps your political position is such that you feel you must castigate the genuine left of the Labour Party. Even so, facts are facts, the truth is the truth, and that was unfortunately missing from your Notes. We are against state interference in trade union affairs and any wage restraint policy. That is the truth whatever you might say.

It is regrettable that your journal was not fully truthful, because most of what was in the *Review* was excellent.■

Eric S Heffer
House of Commons

We're very sorry this error occurred. We are happy to be able to correct it.—Editor

Glad to be gay

TED CRAWFORD'S letter (September *SWR*) was little more than gay-bashing with a left face.

His position seemed to be that unless you are a working class prostitute then your so-called oppression as a gay or lesbian should be of no concern to socialists. Crawford sees 'toleration for gays...as a progressive, non-class issue akin to admitting women to the stock exchange'.

At the root of the oppression of women and gays is the family, and the family is very definitely a class issue. The working class family is capitalism's method of reproducing the working class—it not only maintains the present generation of workers, but raises and trains the next generation as well. The family isn't just a cheap way of feeding and clothing the workforce, it is also a powerful ideological tool as well.

The sexism that is part and parcel of life under capitalism derives from the family, just as surely as does the economic position of women and the burden of unpaid household labour.

Homosexuality is a threat to that ideology, and it is for that reason that gays are attacked, discriminated against at work and used as a scapegoat.

Comrade Crawford went on to make some criticisms of those left Labour councils that failed to fight against ratecapping, trying to pass off equal opportunities employment policies as a substitute. Well, I would agree that employment policies which might just benefit a few gay job applicants (or blacks or women) is not a substitute for a real fight against government cuts, but that is not why equal opportunities are under attack.

Nor are they being attacked because they are ineffective—without extra funding, they will remain token gestures. They are being attacked by the right wing, by racists and by gay-bashers, and that is why we have to defend equal opportunities policies at work.

Equally, we will have to fight over the inclusion of material on homosexuality, abortion and so on in sex education lessons in schools.

With the left very much on the defensive, we will rarely be able to choose the terrain of struggle, but socialists cannot desert oppressed groups because they are unpopular, or on the spurious grounds that their struggle is peripheral to the struggle of the working class as a whole.

The logic of comrade Crawford's position is that AIDS is only a problem for hospital workers, rather than a general political issue that is immensely important for every member of the working class. When a worker is fired for being gay, or compulsory blood tests are introduced, then that is a warning to *all* workers to keep their heads down.

Finally, it is clear that comrade Crawford does not actually know very much about the Trotskyist tradition that he mentions at the end of his letter.

Sexual politics has been important in the revolutionary socialist tradition, as he would know if he had read his Kollontai, Zetkin, Trotsky and so on. We don't talk about sexuality to counter those jackals of the new right wing morality, but because sexual freedom is part of the socialist society that we are all fighting for.■

Gordon Jamieson
East London

On the skids

A LABOUR victory in the next election would undoubtedly herald some type of incomes policy.

But how practical would such an incomes policy be for the ruling class? And can an incomes policy fundamentally alter the crisis of British capitalism?

The idea that the relatively uncompetitive character of British industry is the *direct* result of high wages is probably one of the most common explanations. But it doesn't stand up to any serious analysis. In *absolute* terms, Britain is competitive in it wage levels.

Wage levels are of vital importance. But they must be considered in relation to the levels of output achieved.

More specifically, the crucially important measure of relative competitiveness is productivity, the costs of production per unit of output. In Britain productivity levels are catastrophically low.

To understand this phenomenon, it is necessary to look at the formation and development of these productivity levels over a number of years. The problems of British industry cannot simply be solved by introducing new technology or changing working practices.

The massive expenditure upon armaments from the end of the Second World War benefitted the system as a whole, but it did so in an uneven manner.

The post war period had begun with the dominance of two powers in the western world. The major power, America, accounted for almost 70 percent of the combined gross national product of the advanced capitalist nations. The minor power, Britain, had a share which was modest by comparison but was still higher than West Germany and amounted to 2½ times that of Japan.

By the mid 1970s the picture had changed dramatically, America was only producing under half of the combined GNP. West Germany had clearly outstripped Britain and Japan and was producing over 2½ times as much.

The colonial heritage of the British economy had included guaranteed markets in the old colonial world. Exclusive access to such markets reduced the competitive pressures to which Britain was subject. This is clearly seen in Britain's initial refusal to enter the Common Market.

Delusions of grandeur, the rhetoric of Empire was certainly a contributory factor, but the material heritage of imperialism was decisive. It allowed Britain to sustain levels of arms spending which were completely disproportionate to the country's economic muscle. This diverted resources away from more productive investment.

The basic problems of British capitalism would remain largely untouched by a future incomes policy.

These problems are the product of the previous 40 years of capitalist development. To increase productivity levels sufficiently would take at least a decade of massive investment in manufacturing.

Without a return to something like the boom conditions of the 1950s this is not a realistic option.

Investments in manufacturing would be useless except on a relatively long term basis — even then the rewards are likely to be meagre. Considerable sums of money can be made quickly on the stock exchange, so there is no real choice to be made between the two.

Rhetoric about 'making Britain great again' may be fine for the conference hall, but it bears little relation to the harsh reality of what is fundamentally a low pay, low productivity economy. Under these circumstances a new social contract, even though it is probably the only 'viable' option for the ruling class, would be rather like taking an aspirin to cure the infirmity and decline which comes with old age and senility.■

Tony Milligan
Alloa

We welcome letters and contributions on all issues raised in *Socialist Worker Review*. Please keep your contributions as short as possible, typed, double spaced if you can, and one side of paper only. Send to: SWR, PO Box 82, London E3 3LH.

Biffing the BUF

THE THREAT of fascism in this country reached its high point in the early thirties with Oswald Mosley's blackshirts. Crucial to the defeat of Mosley was the way in which the left confronted him and his supporters.

This opposition, combined with a dismal performance in the general election of 1935, compelled the fascists to change their tactics.

They embarked on a vicious and sustained campaign of anti-semitism, focussing on what they regarded as a major fascist stronghold—the East End of London. The East End contained many Jewish immigrants.

The streets of Bethnal Green and Stepney echoed with the strident bark of fascist loud-speakers. Shouts of 'Heil Mosley' and 'perish Judah' generally announced some outrage, as Jewish premises were attacked and individuals assaulted in the streets.

The level of attacks was such that the right-wing Labour leader Herbert Morrison was moved to issue a mild reproof to the Home Secretary in the House of Commons: the Home Secretary's reply was uncompromising—'I say, and I am sure the whole house will agree that in this country we are not prepared to tolerate any form of Jew-baiting.'

But the attacks went on unchecked—only the numbers of anti-fascists arrested rose.

The magistrates were prepared to levy heavy fines and periods of confinement for the most trivial of offences. Contrasted with this was the leniency displayed towards the fascists. Only days before Cable Street an official of the British Union of Fascists was congratulated by a magistrate and a charge of insulting behaviour dismissed.

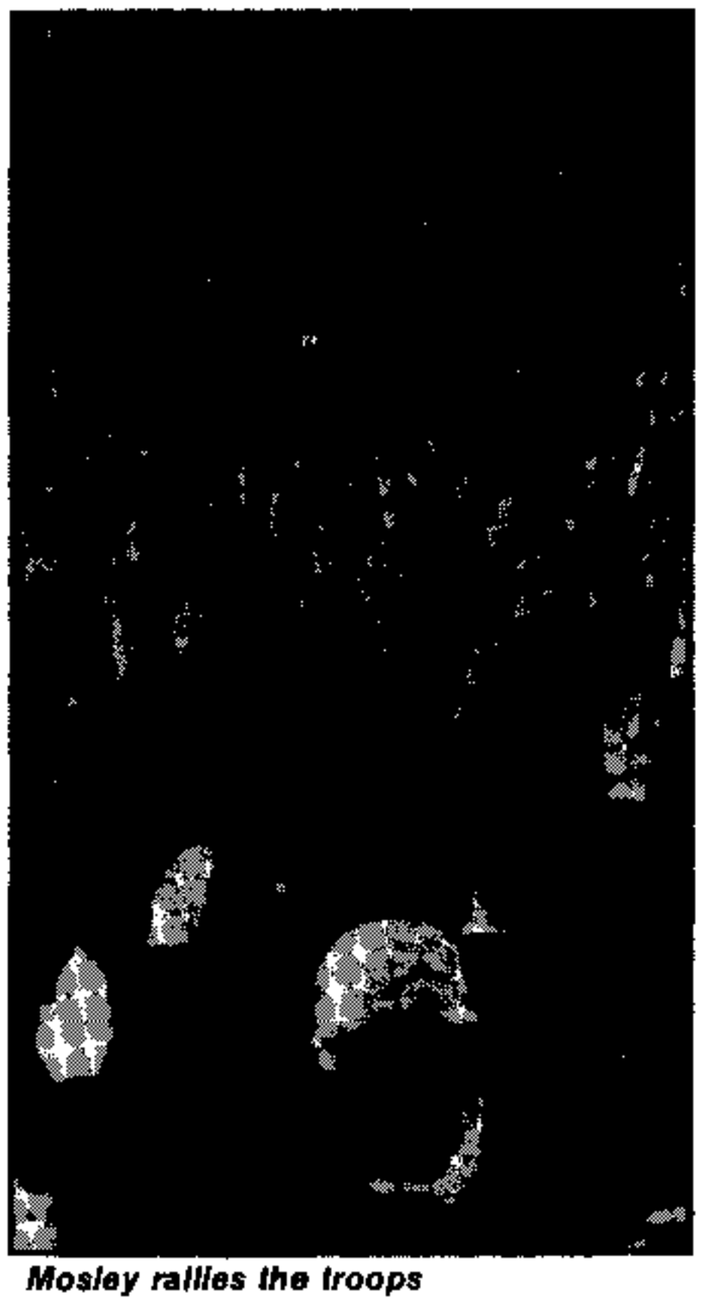
Some weeks previously a fascist speaker's remark that Jews were 'venereal ridden vagrants who spread disease to every corner of the earth' led to an anti-fascist protest in Hampstead. The protestors were threatened with arrest for insulting behaviour!

In spite of all this activity, fascist penetration into other areas such as the docklands around Shadwell and Wapping had been successfuly resisted. On 26 September the *Blackshirt* announced a march through East London calculated to provide a springboard to overcome this resistance.

The Jewish Peoples Council submitted a petition of 100,000 signatures protesting against the march, while a deputation of the mayors of East London Boroughs visited the Home Secretary in an attempt to get it banned or diverted.

The Home Secretary's outright refusal did not prevent these worthies from issuing calls to all anti-fascists to stay away. In company with them were the Labour *Daily Herald* and well known Labour leader George Lansbury.

For the small Independent Labour Party and, after some vacillation, the Communist Party, the course of action was clear. Teams of flyposters and gangs armed with pots of whitewash covered the East End with slogans and posters calling on the workers to prevent the march.



Mosley rallies the troops

Preparations for the day included setting up first aid posts attended by anti-fascist medical personnel. Lines of communication ensured that whatever route Mosley took, his movement could be intercepted.

Loudspeaker vans toured the areas calling people onto the street while the National Unemployed Workers Movement boasted of a human barricade. From numerous windows red flags were draped.

The central rally point was Gardiners' Corner in Aldgate. Although the counter demo was for 2.00pm, by mid-morning the streets were teeming.

A march organised by the Jewish Ex-servicemen's Association making its way up Whitechapel Road was halted a half mile from Aldgate. Mounted police swept onto the road and captured the British Legion banner which was then torn to shreds.

By midday the police in Aldgate had begun their efforts to disperse the demonstration. Baton charges with mounted police in support left countless injured. With each surge the windows of neighbouring shops yielded to the crush of bodies but the police could make no impression on the human barricade, now over 50,000 strong.

Turning their attention to Cable Street, the police met with even less success. Preparations by CP militants included provision of a lorry as a barricade, accompanied by banks of timber, iron tanks, bricks and carts, while from windows overhead rained a hail of missiles.

Mass sorties from numerous sidestreets led to the capture of the occasional policeman who generally forfeited his baton or helmet in the process, to say nothing of his dignity.

Eventually the Commissioner of Police overrode both the Home Secretary and Mosley's objections and forbade the march, thus conceding the day to the workers.

They in turn, led by the walking wounded and a band, marched to attend a victory rally in Victoria Park Square while countless street corner meetings went on throughout East London until the early hours of the morning.

It was estimated that some 250,000 people in total had participated in the counter-demonstration that day.

Although the BUF continued to organise afterwards, Cable Street dealt a body blow to British fascism in the thirties from which it never fully recovered.

The Battle of Cable Street demonstrated two things.

The attitude of the authorities was shown up repeatedly as one of indifference to the persecution of an oppressed minority combined with a determination to crush any mass opposition that this persecution generated.

From the Home Secretary right down to the lowest level of the judiciary, the hand of the state bore down heavily on those struggling against fascists.

In turn the role of the Labour Party and TUC leaderships was abject. They rejected calls for a united front in opposition to fascism and issued a manifesto, 'Democracy versus Dictatorship', which denounced fascism and equated it with Communism. Not content to spectate, they spared no effort to sabotage the struggle.

It was then logical that they should combine with the government to produce the Public Order Act, ostensibly for use against the fascists.

Instead it furnished the police with even greater powers then they enjoyed before and has been used, almost without exception, against the left up to the present day.

It provided a clear warning against investing any faith in legislation to combat the fascists. What Cable Street showed was that mass confrontation was the only way to win!■

Steve Guy