

# socialist worker Review

February 1987

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## The call to arms



### Labour & Defence

**Plus:** Iran Iraq war  
Fifty years of *Tribune*  
The roots of anti-semitism



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# Caught on the hops

IS ERNEST SAUNDERS, disgraced former chairman and chief executive of Guinness, the one rotten apple in the City of London's barrel?

If we are to believe the City apologists the Guinness affair is an isolated case, the chance discovery of ambition running ahead of City ethics. However, a closer look at the circumstances which brought the case to light, and the still ongoing effects of it, reveals that sharp practice is becoming vital to world capitalism's survival.

The Guinness saga came to light when Ivan Boesky, a highly successful Wall Street financier, was arrested for insider trading.

He illegally used privileged information to buy shares in companies about to be taken over. When a take-over bid was made and the share price of the target company rose, he made a massive killing.

Boesky got into these privileged positions by supplying what are known as "junk-bonds". These are high risk, high yield, short term claims to money increasingly being used to finance take-over bids in America.

Boesky swapped these bonds for investors' money which he then lent to



Saunders: one of many

companies about to buy off other companies.

As capitalism desperately tries to climb out of crisis, strong companies attempt to buy up weaker ones. They then sell off or close down the less profitable parts and "rationalise" those parts they keep.

In the process thousands of workers are sacked and, in some cases, whole communities decimated. Large amounts of quickly available money are required for this activity hence the emergence of junk-bonds.

Some more established corporations, jealous of the millions being made by Boesky and the new breed of company like Morgan Grenfell in GB and Drexel in the US, claim that junk-bonds threaten the

## NOTES of the month

stability of world markets.

But as John Kissick, head of Drexels West Coast finance department has said, "the outstanding amount in the junk-bond market is \$120 billion. Junk-bond companies are America."

When Boesky was arrested he agreed to spill the beans on his contacts in return for a light sentence. The police also agreed to delay the disclosure of his arrest until after he had sold off vast quantities of his shares in order to get the best price! Among the companies that Boesky fingered were Guinness.

He gave the authorities enough information to establish that Guinness had persuaded, bribed and bullied all sorts of institutions and investors to help them in their take-over of Distillers. As the *Financial Times* said:

"It is all too clear that the market was thoroughly manipulated during the Guinness bid for Distillers through secret support operations for the Guinness share price."

This manipulation inflated their share price giving them greater bargaining power



Filthy brewed



# NOTES of the month

in a Guinness for Distillers share swap—the method by which most take-overs operate.

Since these discoveries various people have gone from the corporations and institutions involved. Saunders, the bad apple, went, along with the other members of the Guinness “war cabinet” which handled the take over bid.

Oliver Roux, Guinness’ whizz kid finance director and Roger Seelig from Morgan Grenfell, their merchant bankers (and one of the cities leading financial houses) were both sacked.

Later, as Lawson and the government realised that they had to be seen to be doing something, Christopher Reeves and Graham Walsh both from Morgan Grenfell were also pressured into resigning.

Now the spotlight has turned onto the stockbrokers Cazenove, a very highly respected and well established firm who advised Guinness throughout.

One of their partners, David Mayhew, was also on the Guinness “war cabinet” which held daily strategy meetings during the Distillers bid. The rest of the cabinet have been forced to resign but Mayhew clings on whilst his firm comes increasingly under pressure.

Back in October, during another take over bid, they were rebuked by the Take Over Panel, a city watchdog committee originally set up in response to another Cazenove dirty deal; again for buying shares on the quiet to inflate their price.

The panel said that Cazenove were guilty of “a breach of obligation to disclose” and went on “the frequent involvement of Cazenove as professional advisers in bid situations makes their lapse more surprising.”

Cazenove are still in one piece. Robin Leigh-Pemberton governor of the bank of England just happens to be the brother-in-law of Anthony Forbes, one of Cazenove’s senior partners.

From junk-bonds on Wall Street to the Bank of England’s brother-in-law in the City, the song remains the same. Corruption goes to the very heart of world capitalism and, in the post Big Bang era of 24 hour trading and greater centralisation, it is corruption which is becoming increasingly more difficult to detect even if governments wanted to. ■

## BRITISH TELECOM

# Stringing them along

JUST when the Tories were telling everyone that their people’s capitalism had put a stop to all the old-fashioned nonsense about class war, a strike broke out in British Telecom, the jewel in the crown of modern privatised classlessness.

Into the new vast private monopoly had come a nasty bunch of Thatcherite hatchet men, each vying with one another for the title of “BT’s MacGregor”.

Their contempt for their unionised workforce had deeper roots than their own right wing politics and training.

Despite its fantastic profits—more than £200m in 1985-86—the company was hopelessly underinvested; weighed down with old exchanges and pricked by “competition” from new and even greedier cowboys on the profitable business lines.

It was obliged to move against the unions, the biggest of which, the NCU, has not been weakened by the recession as other unions have been. Despite the union’s heavy and expensive defeat over privatisation three years ago, the union is still resilient and most members get some pride and pleasure from their work.



The union's Duke of York...

British Telecom’s new bosses—in particular Ian Vallance and Michael Bett—misread the recent right-wing swing in the union elections as a sign of surrender.

They demanded first a nil pay rise, then a grudging five per cent with productivity “strings”. The strings shocked the engineers even more than the nil pay offer. They included not only an end to the precious nine day fortnight, but proposals on flexibility and grading which threatened as many as 70,000 jobs, or a third of the total.



...wanting to lead them down the hill

The union, led by former right wing Labour MP John Golding, moved cautiously. They started with a consultative ballot on industrial action, which went two to one in favour.

When Vallance and Bett pushed on regardless, another, clearer ballot produced an astonishing 4-1 vote for industrial action. Democratic as ever BT started to suspend engineers who banned overtime or forsook “goodwill.”

What happened next is instructive. The executive cautiously urged branches to strike if members were suspended—but only for 24 hours.

Most branches, including many led by the Broad Left, were happy to go along with this instruction. But in Dudley, in the West Midlands, where the suspensions were specially harsh, and Manchester, the call came from the rank and file for more drastic, all-out action.

The call spread like wildfire through the union. When the City branch, with its 2000 members at a mass meeting, voted with only three votes against for an all-out strike until all the suspended men were reinstated without conditions, the die was cast.

Poor John Golding had to rush to the front of the strike in order to keep control of it.

There he immediately prepared himself for the time-honoured road created by the Grand Old Duke of York. Even before the union had got to the top of the hill, Golding was urging them down again. British Telecom bosses are ready for a long lockout, but the damage done by the strike to exchanges is probably much worse than they admit.

As we go to press, the outcome is not certain. Either side (and, more probably neither) can still win.

Many NCU members recall the privatisation defeat, which they ascribe, rightly, to the refusal of the (then left-wing) leadership to call an all-out strike.

Now they have their all-out strike, they will not be a push-over, certainly not for the extreme demands of an extreme management—and maybe not even for the softer soap which the union executive has in mind. ■

## CIVIL LIBERTIES

# Early warnings

THE SCANDAL of the Zircon spy satellite is a shocking indictment of the undemocratic nature of the British state. It is also an indictment of the feebleness of the Labour Party.

First, the "independent" BBC bowed to pressure from the government not to televise what was to have been one in a series about the secrecy of the state machine.

The joke is that if Duncan Campbell and the BBC had found out about a spy-satellite designed to eavesdrop on Soviet radio messages it can hardly be news to the Russian secret service.

Then the government added to the farce by attempting to prevent the newspapers repeating what had already been revealed in the *New Statesman*. What followed was more sinister.

The *New Statesman* offices and Duncan Campbell's home were raided by Special Branch. This moved the *Economist*, not given to left wing rhetoric, to declare that the police acted "more courteously, but just as thoroughly, as if it had been the KGB".

A few days later Special Branch also raided BBC Glasgow Scotland's offices in a trawl of all six films in the *Secret Society* series. The only note of comic relief was the bungling of the police in obtaining the wrong search warrant, not once, but twice!

What has also become clear is that the government knew as far back as last July what was going to be shown in the TV programme. As in the Wright affair, it has consistently lied through its teeth about its complicity in the affair.

Thatcher's high minded concern to save the British people from foreign subversion (and unpatriotic left wing enemies at home) is the purest hypocrisy.

Ludicrous though much of this is, the outrage against civil liberties is real enough. Better than any quotation from Lenin, it demonstrates how unaccountable the state machine is to anyone, including to the supposed protectors of our freedoms in parliament. It also shows how willing the state is to resort to police methods to protect its secrets—even if those secrets have long since been blown.

The outrage also reveals something else. We are told that there is no money in the kitty for extra hospitals or extra jobs, yet some £500 million was secretly spent on a spy satellite. It is easy to see what the priorities of capitalism are.

What was the response of the Labour Party to this heaven-sent opportunity to embarrass the Tories? Initial instincts were



Duncan Campbell

healthy. Even Robin Cook MP, a fervent Kinnockite, declared: "I personally believe the security argument is humbug".

However, wiser councils prevailed. After being briefed by the foreign secretary, Kinnock changed the line.

As far as the Labour leader was concerned, the government was perfectly correct on the security argument. Where he thought the government had blundered was over its ineffectiveness at protecting state security.

Kinnock's position was to the right of the government! He sought to prove what a champion of the British state he will make when he becomes prime minister. He made it crystal clear that the Labour government will be more secretive and more compliant to the demands of the military establishment.

How safe, then, is Labour's commitment to go unilateral and not do what the last Labour government did, which was to secretly modernise rather than phase out Polaris?

Undoubtedly, the effect of Kinnock's reaction was to give the green light to the Special Branch. In raiding the *New Statesman*, Duncan Campbell and the BBC, they were out to prove that they were not soft on security. Had Kinnock denounced the security argument as humbug, the government might have thought twice before authorising the raids.

What is so stupid about Kinnock's search for respectability is that it doesn't allow him to take full advantage of the Tories' embarrassment. He therefore misses out on any electoral mileage that might have been made.

But if Kinnock is stupid, what of the Labour left? Tony Benn clearly believes that he has scored a massive victory by forcing the government to set up a select committee. This body will decide what programmes the House can and cannot see. Making a fuss about the toothless rights of parliament is evidently much more important than making a fuss about the rights of the rest of us.

The silence from the Labour left has been deafening, the unprincipled ambition of Kinnock has been unbridled.

The lure of office produces some strange results. But we can't say we haven't been warned about the real attitude of the next Labour government towards the British state. ■

# NOTES of the month

## WORLD ECONOMY

# Caught in a trap

"DOLLAR plunges", "Transatlantic trade wars", "US demands on Europe", "EEC squares up to America", "New lows ahead for the diving dollar", "Tokyo gloom", "Slow growth dashes US hopes", "Clouds gather over trade"—those were some of the headlines in the *Financial Times* and the business pages of other newspapers.

For the last four years growth in the world economy has been sustained by the American state. When that growth slowed almost to a halt in the wake of the oil price collapse last year, arms spending in the United States continued to prop up the system.

The American government has been able to keep borrowing the surplus savings of the rest of the world to cover its massive budget deficit. The Federal Reserve bank is still able to prevent any crash in the American banking system, or indeed the global financial markets, partly by keeping interest rates down.

The significance of the events of the last month is that they confirm the now widespread fear that this situation cannot last much longer.

In theory the fall in the dollar should have eased the pressures on American capital facing intense competition at home and abroad. It has made US exports cheaper for the rest of the world and should have squeezed out more expensive (because their currencies have risen) imports from the likes of West Germany and Japan.

The dollar has fallen by over 40 percent against both the yen and the mark since its peak in early 1985. Yet the United States deficit on its "current account" of the balance of payments is still running at around \$140 billion a year.

There are three main reasons for this. One is that Japanese exporters have preferred to cut prices, and accept a big



# NOTES

## of the month

squeeze on their profit margins, in order to maintain their share of the American market in the long term.

The second is that some of the newly industrialised economies such as South Korea, Taiwan and Brazil are continuing to step up their still very competitive exports. Taiwan, for example, had a surplus of about \$15 billion with the United States in 1986 (the third biggest after Japan and Canada).

Thirdly, and most fundamentally, a fall in the dollar cannot by itself cure the weakness of large chunks of American manufacturing industry after years of low profits, little investment and savage reductions in capacity.

nightmare of trade deficits inflamed by capital flight. An attempt by Japanese and European investors to withdraw private capital from the US would threaten a collapse of both the New York bond market and the dollar."

Such disaster scenarios cannot be entirely discounted so long as the trade imbalance persists. Coupled with the spectre of US protectionism on the scale of the 1930s they underline the urgency with which a solution must be sought.

Since the prematurely acclaimed Plaza Hotel agreement of September 1985, Baker has been desperately trying to win support from the Europeans and Japan for joint policies. But what the Americans want is for the West German and Japanese governments in particular to take measures to expand demand in their economies and import more American goods. The Japanese have agreed on paper but that's made little difference in practice. The West Germans regard any such moves as too risky.

All this is reminiscent of the late 1970s. Then, as now, the Americans followed a policy of letting the dollar fall. Then as now, they tried to persuade their rivals to share the costs of propping up the world economy.

But in the end as the dollar collapsed and the whole international monetary system threatened to unravel, the American state had to call a halt. Interest rates in the

words of a *Financial Times* editorial on 24 January, "would be a major international disaster".

But such warnings have not stopped the Americans escalating their dispute with the EEC because their farmers were being cut out of the Spanish grain market. The Americans were set to impose 200 percent tariffs on British gin, French brandy, and Dutch cheese. The French trade minister demanded "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" in response. For the moment, the dispute has been staved off.

The other "remedy" is for the Americans to take the sort of medicine prescribed by the bankers for Latin America debtor economies—cut back government spending, raise interest rates and push the economy once again into slump. But that would also be an international disaster. ■

## IRELAND

# Left out in the cold

SOUTHERN Ireland goes to the polls on Tuesday 17 February. Over 80 percent of the electorate will vote for the three main parties of the right.

The traditional right wing parties, Fianna Fail and Fine Gael, have been joined by yet another "right of centre" party, the Progressive Democrats. Quite naturally, all of them urge austerity and attacks on workers' living standards.

The leading political columnist with the *Irish Times* summarised the electoral contest neatly:

"The political leaders vie with each other as to which of them will create the biggest dole queues so as to assure the gougers of the international banking world that whatever else they can depend on Irish politicians to crucify their own people to maintain fiscal rectitude."

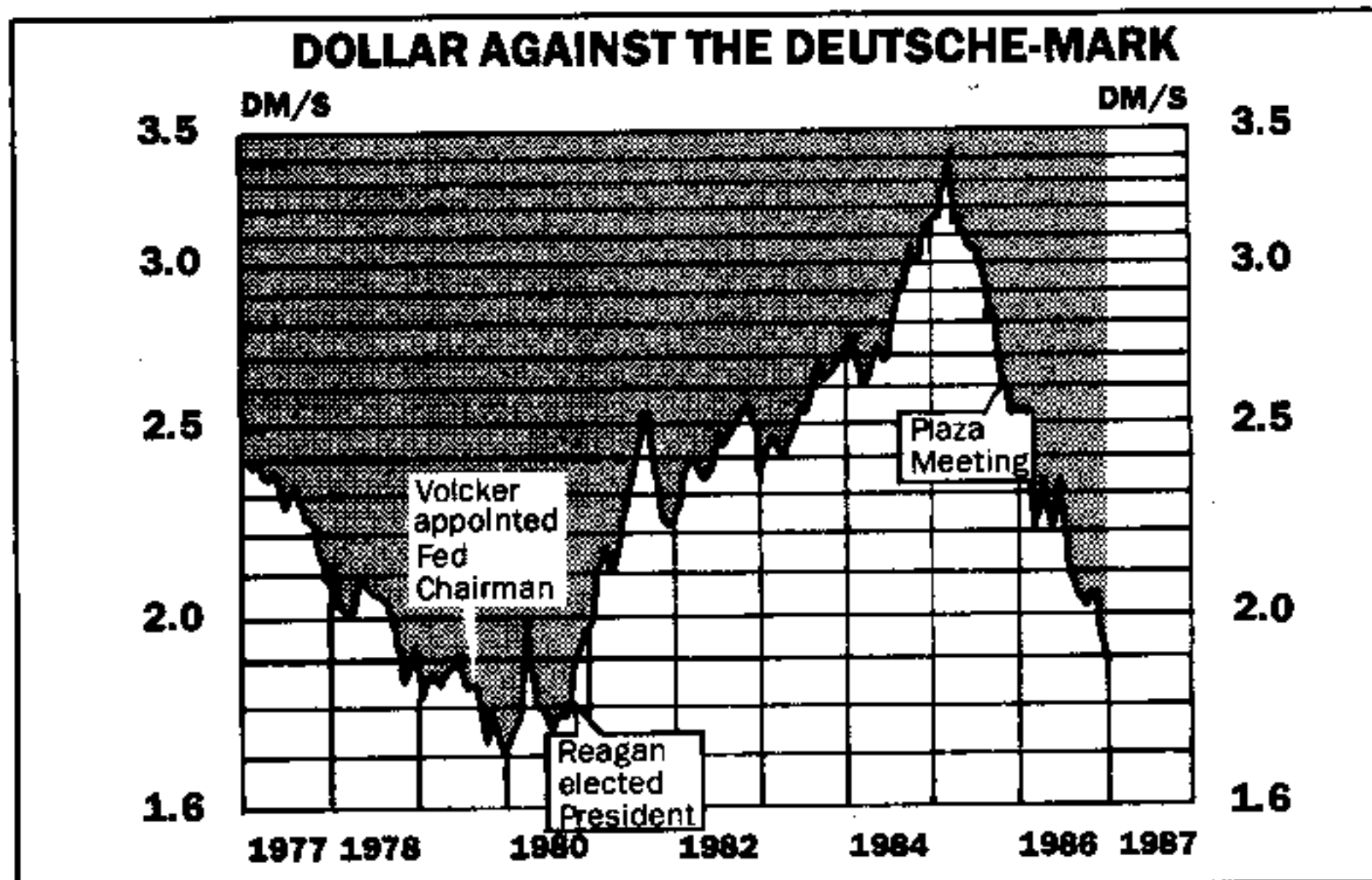
Emigration has always been the crudest measure of the health of the Southern economy. Today it is in a critical condition.

Since 1980, it is estimated that 150,000 people have left Ireland. When the United States ran a lottery system for legal visas for immigration, a quarter of a million Irish people applied. There are only 3½ million in the country!

The national debt stands at 150 percent of GNP making Southern Ireland the country with the fourth largest debt per head of population in the world.

Since 1979/80, the Southern economy simply stopped growing. Unemployment grew from 68,000 in 1981 to 250,000 in 1986. The industrialisation programme had come to a dead end.

The general election kicked off when the



On top of all that the United States is now a net debtor to the rest of the world. Five years of massive government borrowing to pay for the arms spending have led to a situation in which they are now having to pay out more in interest to the rest of the world than is coming back in the profits of American banks and multinationals.

That's why the dollar is now falling so rapidly. That's also why the more far sighted bourgeois commentators, and top American economic officials, are very worried. As Michael Prowse wrote in the *Financial Times* on 5 January:

"Mr Baker [the US Treasury Secretary] may yet have to face the Latin American

United States were pushed up to record levels in 1979. The dollar stopped falling. But the American economy, and with it the rest of the world, fell into even deeper slump.

Now the pressures on the American state are even greater. American farmers and other exporters want the dollar to fall even further. But that fall threatens to undermine the status of the dollar as the world's main currency, and the ability of the American government to borrow from the rest of the world.

Yet there are only two ways of stopping the dollar collapsing. One is to impose artificial controls on imports into the United States and unleash a trade war which, in the

former Fine Gael/Labour Party coalition broke up. Fine Gael decided to use its proposed budget plans as its electoral programme.

They include: an imposition of a £1 prescription cost for those entitled to free medical care (only one third of population); the elimination of Pay Related Benefit; the privatisation of the semi-state companies; and a pay freeze for public sector workers.

The main opposition party, Fianna Fail, argued that they could make greater cuts in government spending but refused to be specific. The Progressive Democrats, the more militant wing of the Yuppies, want even more privatisation and cuts in the public sector.

The same levels of agreement are to be found on Northern Ireland. Within days of the election, the major parties decided not to "make it an issue". This, despite the verbal opposition of Fianna Fail's leader, Haughey to the Anglo-Irish Agreement. In fact, Haughey has now committed himself to "work the machinery of the agreement".

Thus, whoever forms the next government—either a Fianna Fail majority government or less likely, a Fine Gael/Progressive Democrat coalition—there are major attacks ahead.

The Irish left overall will do badly in this election. There are three major parties contending for the left vote.

Despite its terrible record, the Labour Party is still the biggest with a mere 8 per cent of the vote. Its participation in coalition has decimated it in the working class areas. There is now only one Labour councillor on Dublin corporation. All indications are that it will shrink further into a rural rump built around trade union bureaucrats.

Sinn Fein and the Workers Party are contending for the vacuum left by Labour. But it does not look as if their combined votes can even make up the shortfall left behind from Labour's past high points.

The Workers Party, are expected to make some gains, but at most that will amount to an extra one or two TDs (Irish MPs).

Both parties argue that Ireland has not yet reached the stage where socialist politics can properly be put on the agenda.

For Sinn Fein, the border must first be removed before class politics cease to be the sport of an activist minority.

For the Workers Party, the country must first be industrialised. They also take an extremely reactionary view on the North. They support a return to "devolved government" and criticise the Anglo-Irish agreement for not involving the Unionist politicians.

Sinn Fein looks a far more dynamic party. Its candidates tend to be younger than the Workers Party who have a disproportionate number of union officials.

In inner city areas, where unemployment goes over 50 percent, Sinn Fein will do well.

But its message, despite left turns, is essentially nationalistic. It argues that the participation of Ireland is the source of the economic ills of the moment. Removing the



Charles Haughey

border and building "national sovereignty" is argued as an alternative.

In addition to that, its new found enthusiasm for entering the "mainstream" of Irish life has led it to jettison any "unrealistic" demands. Thus, like the Workers Party it speaks of negotiating to re-schedule the national debt rather than cancelling it.

The stranglehold of the right over Southern Irish politics will never be broken by such an approach.

# NOTES of the month

The dismal view that the left has first to travel through a number of distinct "stages" before it can openly fight for its politics makes no sense whatsoever.

The only occasion when the Irish left gained electorally was in 1969 when the Labour Party swung dramatically left and connected with an upsurge in workers' struggles. It is a lesson worth remembering, and one that seems to be lost. ■

*Additional notes: Lee Humber, Paul Foot, Gareth Jenkins, Pete Green and Kieran Allen.*

## IDEAS THAT CAN WIN

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NIGEL HARRIS

# FRAUD AND FAMINE

IN THE annals of great frauds perpetrated upon suffering humanity there will surely be honoured places for the agricultural protection rackets of Europe, North America and Japan.

By depriving their own citizens of cheap food, the governments of these regions destroy the markets of Third World food exporters and cause famine.

This year, the kindly inhabitants of these countries will pay an extra £50,000 million to deprive themselves of cheap food which will in turn pile up in rotting mountains.

Subsidising agriculture has produced a steady decline in the imports of food, to the severe loss of Third World exporters. The United States used to import six million tonnes of sugar. It now imports one million tonnes—after cutting imports from the Caribbean by forty per cent last year.

This is not the end of the problem. Europe's exploding food stocks are currently valued at £8,760 million (or £32-worth for every man, woman and child of Europe's 270 million inhabitants). It costs £2,400 million each year to keep the stocks. The grain stocks are now large enough to feed the whole of Africa's population five times over.

In Europe, butter and beef stocks require 10 million square metres of refrigerated space. And it is not enough—the search goes on for more space.

Even to control the stocks, the food must be destroyed, turned into something else or—worst of all—exported.

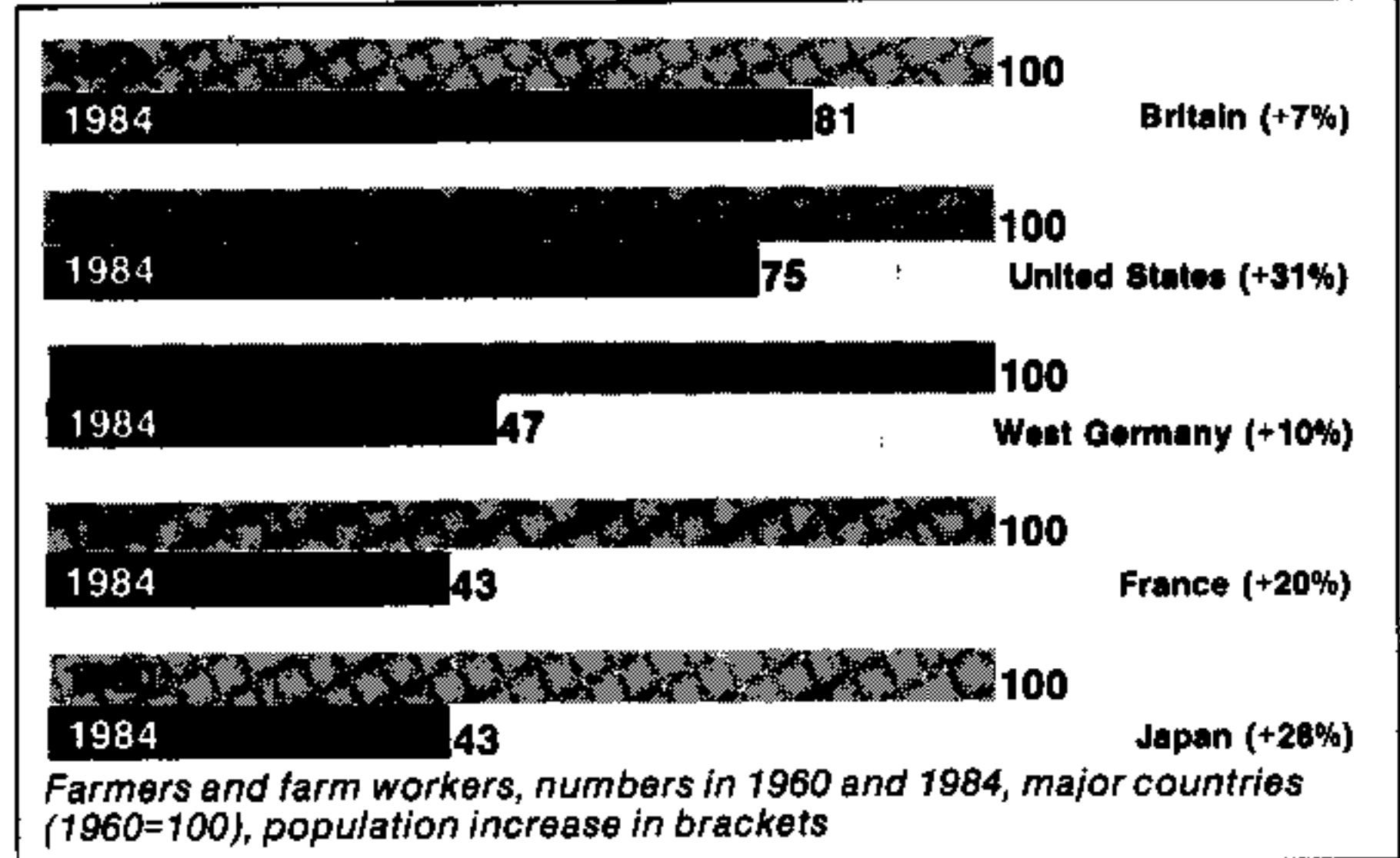
Europe's costs of food production are very high, so to export, requires even more massive subsidies—£3 to 4,000 million annually. And that destroys what is left of the markets for Third World exporters.

Not only do the Europeans and Americans import less and less sugar from the Caribbean, they then go on to capture all the other markets for Caribbean sugar in the world through dumping.

The Europeans dump wheat abroad at half what it costs to produce, and sugar at a quarter. The overflowing stocks of rice in the US have led Washington to subsidise exports by \$800 million, cutting the price from \$8 to \$4.20 per hundredweight, so breaking the export market of the world's largest exporter, Thailand.

Who gains from this monster? The defenders of the Common Agricultural Policy of Europe say it ensures stable prices—but at a level where the hungry of Europe cannot get the food, the stocks increase insanely, and price instability outside Europe is made much worse.

They say it ensures adequate supplies of food—but what use is that if you cannot afford to buy food?



They say it ensures self-sufficiency in the event of war when everyone knows that any future war will liquidate Europe, its agriculture and food stocks.

Finally, they say, it protects the five in every one hundred people who are engaged in farming. Does it?

If agriculture were booming, boosted by the massive subsidies pumped into foodstuff production, farmers and farm workers would stay on the land, a byword for wealth. They have not. The great drift off the land has continued, unaffected by subsidies.

The chart shows what has happened between 1960 and 1984. In the early sixties, there were sixteen and a half million people working the land in Europe; there were eight and a half million in the mid-seventies.

The subsidies have soared in the 1980s—just as the condition of agriculture has plunged into crisis, the worst slump since the 1930s. For the European farmer, what bit of the subsidies reached him or her, disappeared in inflated land prices and high rents for tenant farmers.

With the value of farm assets inflated, farmers borrowed heavily. In the eighties, land prices collapsed as farm incomes have been halved—and the burden of debt doubled. The total debt of British farmers could reach £8,000 million to £10,000 million this year.

In the US Mid-West, the picture is even bleaker. Whole towns and villages are being reduced to dereliction from the collapse of family farms.

But the subsidies did help some. In the US, two thirds of farm support cash went to a small minority of farmers and farming companies. Top farmers received on average \$1 million per farm in 1986. In

Europe, the quarter of the farmers with large farms in rich regions (the Paris basin, East Anglia) took three quarters of the farm spending that reached the farmers. They received on average £6,300 per farm, while the other seventy five per cent of farmers received £720.

But the tiny number of rich farmers do not explain this giant fraud. There are much bigger interests clustered round the farm sector than the farmers—the giant grain traders, the processors, the canners, the dairy companies, the storage companies, the transport and shipping companies, the exporters, the bankers, the suppliers of farm inputs, down to the retail outlets—and on and on and on, the full roll call of the big battalions of world capitalism. No wonder once the fraud was set up, it has proved impossible to end it.

In Europe, the cost of this fraud may break the Common Market budget this year. Everyone knows it is fraud, yet it continues with astonishing tenacity—and you can see why.

But now the cost is getting out of hand. Employers want cheap food, not wage demands to meet high food prices. Governments want to cut spending.

Bankers have nightmares because if the export of foodstuffs by Brazil and Mexico is blocked, those countries cannot service their debts—and could default.

While we are waiting for the system to come unstuck, the mass of the population of Europe and North America are obliged to pay through the nose to eat less, smash Third World export markets and contribute to famine.

The struggle against famine does not begin in Africa and with the begging bowl—but here, in the battle against the Common Market's agricultural system. ■



# A call to arms

LABOUR'S defence policy is either the Party's Achilles' heel or its golden opportunity, depending on your viewpoint. For the left it is proof that, whatever else might have been junked in the move to the right, Labour retains *some* commitment to radical ideas.

But for others, increasingly the perception is that Labour's plan to get rid of nuclear weapons is to hand the Tories a formidable electoral advantage.

What precisely is Labour promising, if elected?

As far as the British nuclear arsenal is concerned, it would decommission the ageing Polaris deterrent and cancel the order for its replacement, Trident.

It would also ban all American nuclear weapons from Britain. Cruise missiles and the submarine base at Holy Loch would go. So too would nuclear depth charges and nuclear arms connected with the F-111 aircraft based in Britain or stockpiled for deployment by American forces.

Something like twelve American bases would be affected. Their fate and that of the 32,000 American servicemen in Britain would be subject to a new treaty negotiated with Washington.

So far, so good. However, there are two problems. The first is that Labour is not committed to spending the money saved on socially useful items (such as hospitals or schools) but to spending it on more weaponry, albeit of a conventional type.

The second is that Labour is committed to retention of membership of NATO (Kinnock cites the example of non-nuclear Canada and Norway as evidence that a nuclear-free Britain could still play a role in NATO).

In part, the reasons for wanting to divert money from nuclear to conventional weapons and for remaining in NATO have to do with Labour's electoral strategy. More important, though, is Labour's loyalty to the British state and the international capitalist order of which the British state forms an indissoluble part.

Since its debacle in the 1983 general election, Labour is acutely conscious of its vulnerability to the charge that to be anti-nuclear is to be against defending Britain.

So in presenting its policy to the electorate for the next general election, Labour is at pains to stress that it wants *real* protection for Britain. Not for nothing has it called its new defence document *The Power to Defend our Country*.

Labour argues that the Tories' commitment to the rising costs of Trident in a declining defence budget means cutting conventional arms by as much as 30 per cent by 1990.

Mrs Thatcher's "nuclear fixation" means a rundown of the Royal Navy (fewer

frigates and submarines), the Royal Air Force (no funds for the European Fighter Aircraft), and the Army (cuts in such desirable items as anti-tank missiles and scatterable mines). Labour will aim to reverse this trend.

Labour thus poses as more patriotic than the Tories. The constant theme of Labour's pronouncements for some time (indeed as far back as the Westlands affair) has been to berate the Tories for spending not enough of the defence budget on building up the British armed forces and too much on American nuclear imports.

In this way Labour hopes to shield itself from Tory attacks that it is pacifist. Equally, it hopes to convince the British and American ruling classes that it has a viable alternative for the defence of capitalist interests in Europe. Hence its commitment to NATO.

However, whether Labour can convince the Americans is a moot point. The central question is could NATO survive if Britain went non-nuclear. The evidence suggests not. For historic and strategic reasons Britain cannot be a Canada or Norway.

But Labour's official plans go further and would mean dispensing with the entire *American* nuclear umbrella as well, including Cruise missiles and the nuclear bases. And that would entirely change the picture. To quote Hugo Young in the *Guardian* (27 November 1986):

"It is, however, with the air force bases, now housing nuclear-armed F-111s, that Labour's policy would, according to the Americans, be most profoundly destabilising..."

"For these are not merely nuclear bases. They are the sharp end of a huge American military presence in Britain, and the headquarters of the US presence

in Europe: the essential rear base of any European military operation, and proof of the historic fact that Britain is Washington's closest and most trusted ally.

"Located in Britain is much of the American material for a European war, as well as a body of 25,000 US personnel. Fuel supplies, alternative runways and vast arms dumps, all of them integral to NATO planning, are here. Half the US tactical air force capacity is here as well."

It does not seem likely that the US would be prepared easily to abandon such an important part of its global military strategy. Threats, subtle and not so subtle, have already been made about the kinds of economic difficulties a future Labour government might find itself in (a sterling crisis, for example, which it would need bailing out of by its friends).

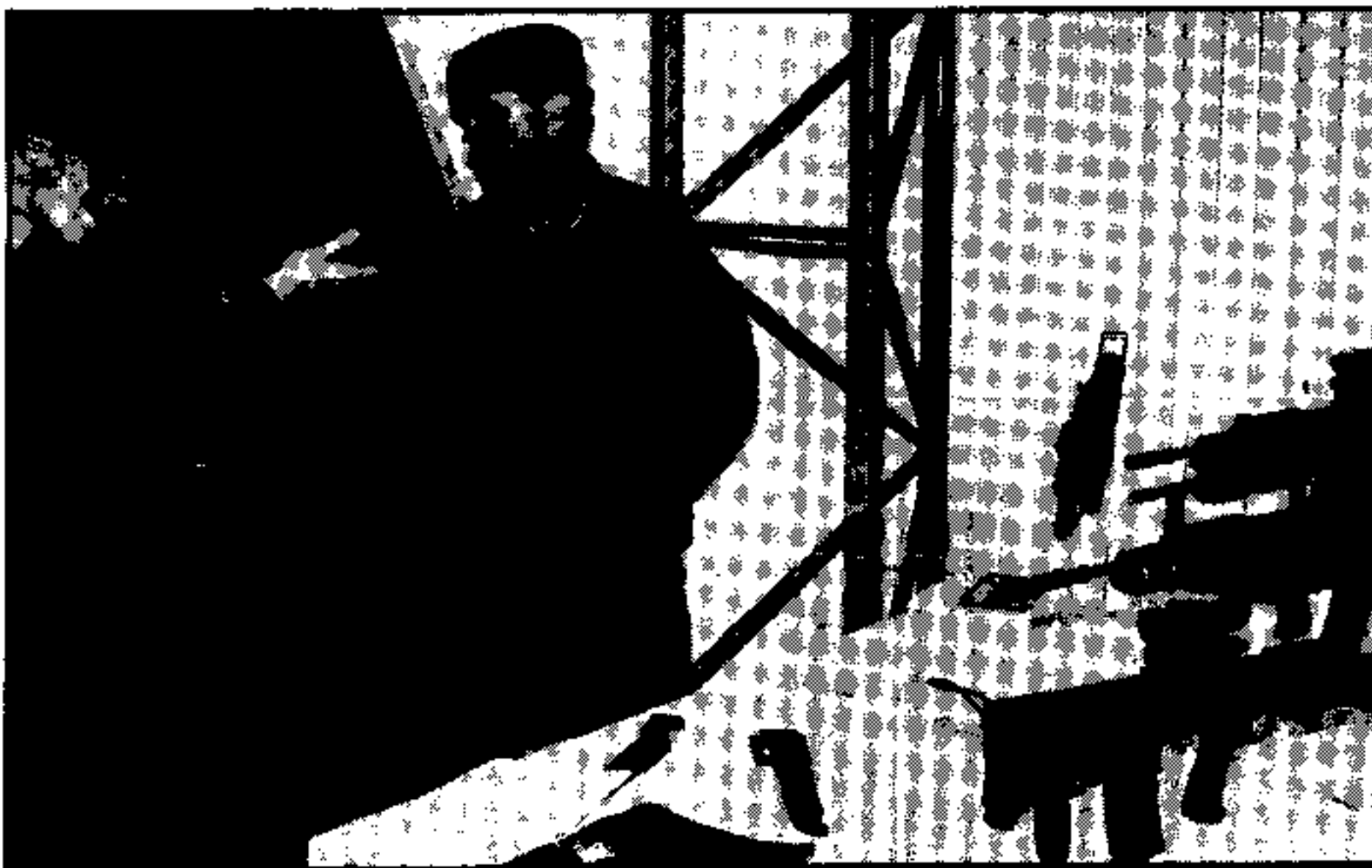
All in all, then, two things need to be said about Labour's defence strategy. The first is that, despite Labour's claim that it will eventually reduce defence spending, implementation would have some very nasty consequences, despite getting rid of nuclear weapons.

By diverting funds from nuclear to conventional weapons Labour would continue to spend an enormously wasteful proportion of GNP on defence.

The second point is that Labour's defence policy has no chance of ever being implemented. Past evidence shows that once in office Labour has never carried out a single one of its promises on nuclear weapons.

The present Labour leadership is no better than previous ones. In the face of pressure at home and from abroad they will retreat. Indeed, they are *bound* to retreat if they are serious about loyalty to NATO (which they are) since a Britain without an American nuclear presence undoubtedly spells the dissolution of the Alliance.

However, something more needs to be said about Labour's defence policy. It does, after all, mark a sea change in the evolution of the Party. It is not an exaggeration to say that Labour, in the post-war



Killing like this is OK

period, was the architect of NATO and its nuclear alliance.

For over thirty years, apart from the brief and almost accidental hiccup of unilateralism in the early 60s, it stuck to that policy.

It stuck to that policy because the right could always be guaranteed to fight, fight and fight again to keep a British nuclear deterrent and American nuclear presence as central to its defence programme. Now the unreconstructed right, like Denis Healey and James Callaghan, do not.

The truth is that Labour's right is probably shifting away from traditional Labour policy because the problems of defence, nationally and internationally, have entered a new and more difficult era.

These have to do with escalating costs in a period of economic crisis and the consequent effects on the mix between nuclear weapons (which might be more cost-effective, but riskier in escalating conflict to unacceptable levels) and conventional weapons (more expensive proportionally, more able to slow the rate of escalation, but less of a deterrent).

So even sections of the right (the Labour right as well as the Alliance parties) are prepared to consider measures like cancelling Trident. Because the Tories are the only party against cancellation, it makes the shift of the Labour right and the Alliance more radical than it really is.

This shift comes with the changed role that arms spending plays in the world economy compared with the 1950s.

From the time of the Korean war the USA spent something like 9 percent of its GNP on arms (the figure in 1939 had been 1.5 percent). This it did for political reasons; it felt obliged to defend its interests globally against the Soviet "threat", particularly in Europe.

In the early fifties, Britain spent 10 percent and was the key European component of the NATO alliance.

Far from damaging the economy this high level of spending on arms in fact stabilised it. The tendency of capitalism to go into crisis because there is eventually too much capital in relation to too little labour power (thus undermining the source of profit) was avoided.

By piling up capital in a sector of production (arms) which did not feed back into the system, the rate of accumulation was slowed down and the tendency of the rate of profit to decline could be staved off.

For the US as a major arms spender, the diversion of a large chunk of the surplus into arms spending would in the long term undermine its competitiveness. But because in the 1950s the US economy was

still far in advance of its competitors, US arms spending was able to help prop up world capitalism as a whole.

However, once the major non-arms spenders (like Japan and Germany) took advantage of the new world order and became major competitors in key areas, the picture changed.

They did not have to worry about arms spending having a depressing effect on their economic growth and so could begin to penetrate US markets.

US profitability was once again under threat and arms spending now became a factor in the crisis. An early example was the effect of increased military spending on arms caused by the Vietnam war. The inflationary pressures on the American economy led to the end of the international supremacy of the dollar.

From being a stabilising factor, spending on arms reverted to being a problem.

Not that state spending ceased to be important. The boom in the American economy in the early 80s was fuelled by

level of defence spending (the second highest in Europe in proportion to its GNP) and, on the other, its rapidly declining position in the international wealth league table.

So even the Tories are anxious to economise on arms spending. The question is how.

To much disquiet among the Chiefs of Staff, it is the conventional side that is being pruned.

But the problem doesn't end here. Competition in military hardware is intense. So, despite the fact that the number of frontline weapons systems have fallen, the unit cost of keeping up with the latest equipment has risen. This places extra strain on the military budget.

To minimise the strain the Thatcher government has therefore sought to fulfil its military obligations by buying in the cheapest markets. These have not always been British.

Hence it has been prepared to ditch Westlands in favour of Sikorski and the British Nimrod early warning system in favour of the American AWACS.

This has created tensions inside the Tory Party because of a clash of interests. Michael Heseltine's dramatic resignation over the Westlands affair was linked to an alternative strategy that was worried about over-reliance on America, preferring instead an Anglo-European solution.

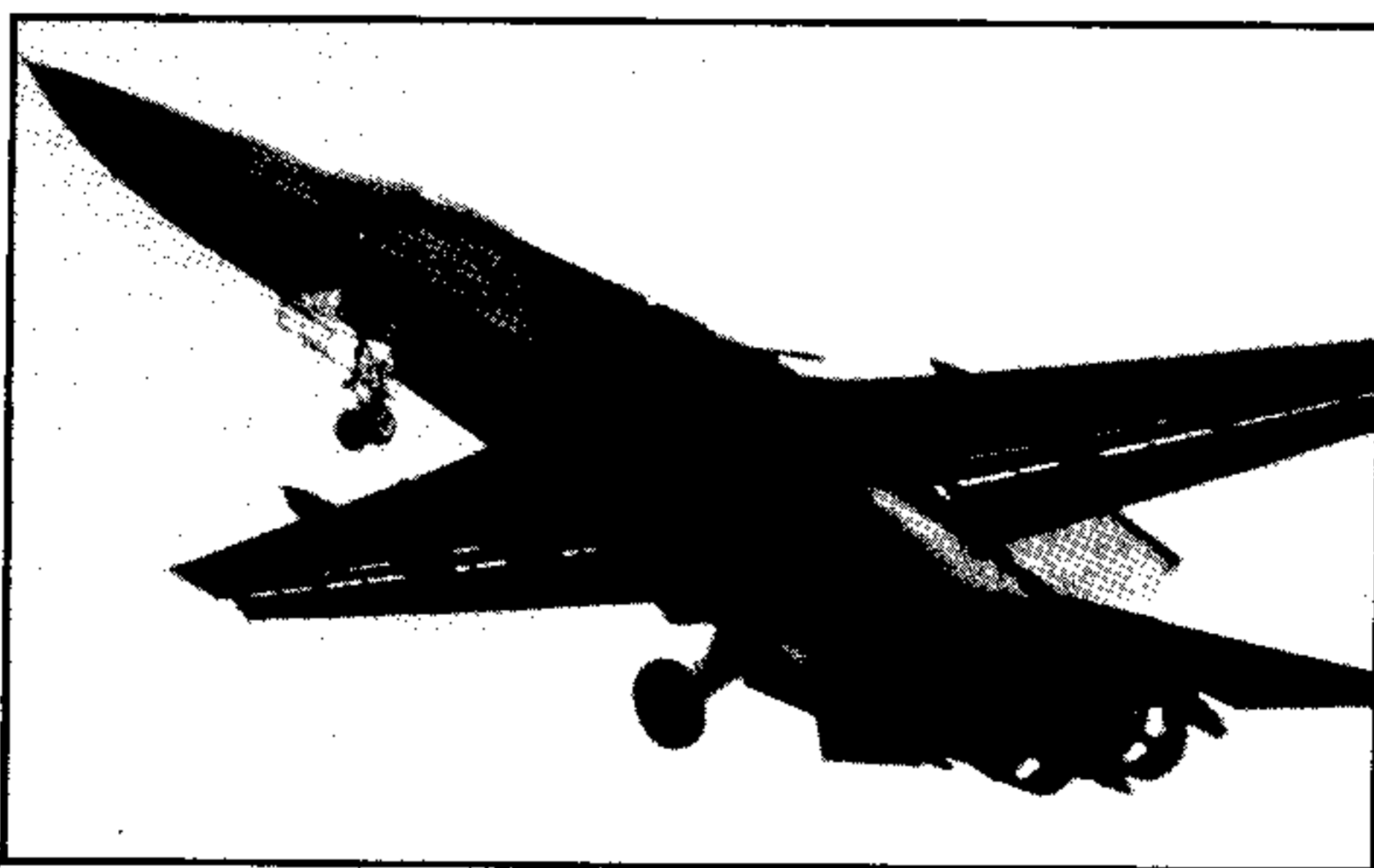
In the case of the cancellation of Nimrod the issue is even clearer.

The giant manufacturer GEC has lost billions of pounds worth of orders. But from the viewpoint of the British government, the purchase of the American AWACS is a gain: it is not only more reliable, it is cheaper and so less of a burden on the British economy as a whole.

What we see reflected in these political clashes is the economic interests of an important section of British capitalism that is worried about its future. That section is the electronics industry, firms like GEC, Racal, Ferranti, Plessey, British Aerospace. Even here there are complications: Plessey and Racal opposed the GEC bid because they are sub-contractors to Boeing.

But all these firms are increasingly dependent on Ministry of Defence contracts. Between 1974 and 1984 the share of manufacturing which went into defence sales rose from 6.3 percent to 12.3 percent, with 50 percent of all defence procurement being accounted for by aerospace and electronics.

Research and development is intimately linked with this militarisation. The electronics industry is the most R & D intensive



*Bird of death—the F-111*

boosting arms spending. But the consequences were an enormous and very risky level of debt and a huge trade deficit. These consequences are still with us.

They explain the strains between the US and its European allies. High interest rates to protect the dollar conflict with the interests of other countries. Protectionist measures in the US threaten a potentially damaging trade war.

These economic problems are translated into political problems around defence. America would want to shift some of the burden of its arms spending in Europe to the European nations themselves.

On the other hand the effect of the world crisis means that the European states are desperate to squeeze their defence budgets, which are a drain on resources.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the British case. Much of the evidence indicates that defence spending is at the expense of future investment. There is a contradiction between a laggard domestic economy and the need to fulfil military obligations.

The British case is a particularly acute one because of, on the one hand, a high



of all British industrial sectors according to the *Financial Times*, with half of that being funded by the government. So it is defence rather than civilian research that attracts the qualified scientists and engineers.

The consequence is that there is an imbalance between the military and civilian sectors of the industry. According to a report of the Council for Science and Society,

"British firms have failed to become leaders in most fields of semi-conductors or other electronic developments over the past thirty years, with the major exceptions of military electronics or areas within electronic computers and electronic instruments." (*Financial Times*, 29 September 1986).

This makes the electronics industry vulnerable to its international competitors. A trade surplus of £106 million in 1963 became a £876 million deficit in 1982. Only in electronics capital goods (dominated by military electronics equipment) is there a surplus (*New Scientist*, 19 June 1986).

So what the British state decides to spend on armaments, and who it looks to (British or foreign producers) to supply these armaments needs, has become an increasingly disturbing question.

Indeed it is now necessary for the British arms manufacturing industry to win shares of the contracts being handed out by the Pentagon for SDI (Star Wars) and other NATO arms spending. Without these contracts they are going to remain small fish in the big sea of global arms manufacturing.

This brings us back to Labour. One reason why even the right is now prepared to abandon Trident as a replacement for Polaris is that Trident is not particularly useful from the point of view of British industry.

The Armament and Disarmament Information Unit calculated that with 45



*With friends like these...*

percent of its total content being imported the domestic industrial lobby is not going to be too disappointed if it is cancelled (*ADIU Report*, May-June 1984).

Building up conventional defence might also be popular on the jobs front. The Tories have tried to capitalise on Labour's anti-nuclear policy by pointing out that the defence industry provides around one million jobs.

Of course some jobs would go if nuclear weapons were got rid of. But it might turn out that in boosting the defence industry by buying British Labour could pose as the true defender of employment in this sector.

Certainly the case has been made. TASS (the Technical Administrative and Supervisory Section of the AUEW), for example, has argued for unilateralism and a defence policy based on conventional weapons on the grounds that this would protect its members' jobs in the defence industry and preserve skills and jobs that might otherwise disappear in manufacturing as well.

Here we have the rather unpleasant spectacle of a supposedly left-wing union championing the interests of firms engaged in the more revolting aspects of British capitalism.



*...American troops in action at Greenham and Vietnam*

The government-backed success of the defence industry in exporting arms to regimes hell-bent on attacking fellow trade unionists and national liberation movements is a very lucrative business indeed.

We can see, then, that Labour's new defence policy represents more than an ideological shift. It has some material basis. The increasing dependency of the electronics industry on government defence contracts meshes with Labour's commitment to conventional defence as the key to Britain's future.

It would indeed be ironic if the one area of success of a future Labour government in the field of employment was the bolstering of the defence industry.

In conclusion we can say that Labour's defence policy is both utopian and (ultimately) reactionary.

It is utopian because Labour entertains the naive hope that it can use the national state to escape the very logic of the national state. The British state is inextricably linked to the international system that compels each major power to depend on nuclear weapons. It can no more remove the threat of nuclear destruction than it can solve the crisis of unemployment and social decay.

It is reactionary because it will be compelled to maintain a socially crippling outlay on defence, whatever the ultimate mix of nuclear and conventional weapons.

Unable to force capitalism into making any significant concessions designed to improve the quality of life of the vast majority of its citizens, Labour will promote in the area of defence the identification between the interests of workers and the interests of the capitalist state.

That can only be a retrograde step in the struggle for socialism. ■

Gareth Jenkins

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# Covert Contra-butions

LITTLE BY little the sordid details of the US government's secret dealings with Iran and the Contras in Central America have been squeezed out of a reluctant administration.

For two years, the government insisted that the Contras subsisted on "private" aid. The exposure of Contragate has broken through that lie as well, as the Congressional investigations are now revealing.

Former national security advisor Robert McFarlane has disclosed that Reagan approved the arms trade with Iran in April 1985—long before he is supposed to have known about the scheme.

Lt Col Oliver North, who was summarily sacked from the National Security Council, may have briefed Reagan as long ago as April 1986 about his scheme to divert money from the arms sales to the Contras.

North and other administration officials, claiming to have Reagan's backing, assured Contra leaders that the US government would still find a way to back them regardless of Congressional decisions on aiding the Contras.

No doubt the credibility of the US government and its foreign policy is suffering as a result of the scandal. That is why the investigators desire to do little else but find a few figures, like North, to take the blame.

The Democrats, though willing to milk the revelations for political advantage, are unwilling to challenge the roots of Reagan's foreign policy.

For example, Democrats as well as Republicans welcomed Reagan's appointment of "well-respected professional" Frank Carlucci to replace National Security Advisor Admiral John Poindexter.

Carlucci's expertise in covert operations includes the planning of the 1960 overthrow and murder of Congolese leader Patrice Lumumba and the short circuiting of the Portuguese Revolution.

"We must, all of us, help the President restore his credibility in foreign affairs," said the new Democrat chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Sam Nunn, last month.

Likewise, Democrat Senator Moynihan pleaded with Reagan in a November radio address: "This nation does not want and does not need another destroyed presidency."

It should come as no surprise that the Democrats are willing to extend an olive branch to Reagan today. They have been complicit in Reagan's foreign and domestic policy offensive in the past six years.

In 1985 and 1986 Democrats provided the key votes which extended US aid to the Contras and to the mercenaries fighting the Angolan government.

And it is unlikely that the congressional select committees appointed to investigate the arms deal will act any differently. Eight of the eleven senators voted for Contra aid; among the Representatives the tally is nine to six.

Thus, most of the Democrat criticism of Contragate has come from the right, lambasting Reagan for "trading with terrorists" or for failing to live up to the principles of his foreign policy.

At the same time no mainstream politician has used the Contragate scandal to call for a cut off of aid to the Contras and for an end to the US war against Nicaragua. In fact the Democrat chairman of the House Armed Services Committee



"I see no Contras"

has called for a quick resolution of the crisis so that a drawn out investigation will not "damage the prospects for continued aid" to the Contras.

The Reagan administration has recently launched a new offensive for Contra aid. Congressional Democrats could stop the above-ground \$40 million grant to the Contras if they chose to block allocation of funds approved.

But that would require a number of Democrats, including presidential aspirants like Senator Bill Bradley, to go on record opposing Contra aid, reversing their previous positions.

Most Americans show continuing distrust of Reagan and his government. A poll conducted between 18 January and 21 January for the *New York Times* and CBS News showed that 52 percent of all US citizens think Reagan is lying, while only a third thought him more honest than most public figures.

The poll also showed that 60 percent of all Americans oppose aid to the Contras, and 52 percent disapproved of Reagan's foreign policy performance.

Some opinion polls have even turned up surprisingly strong minority sentiment for Reagan's resignation or impeachment.

This shift in mood has certainly served to throw the ruling class on the defensive, denting the aura of confidence in which it launched the 1983 invasion of Grenada and last spring's bombing of Libya.

Though mass dissatisfaction with the US government is apparent, it remains largely unorganised.

A decade ago the Watergate scandal, the publication of the Pentagon Papers, and the congressional investigations of CIA covert operations contributed to the creation of a so-called "Vietnam syndrome"—the reluctance of the ruling class to use global military intervention to enforce US interests.

This reluctance to intervene contributed to the triumph of freedom fighters in Southern Africa in the late 1970s. Currently it is one factor keeping the US government from launching a full-scale attack on Nicaragua.

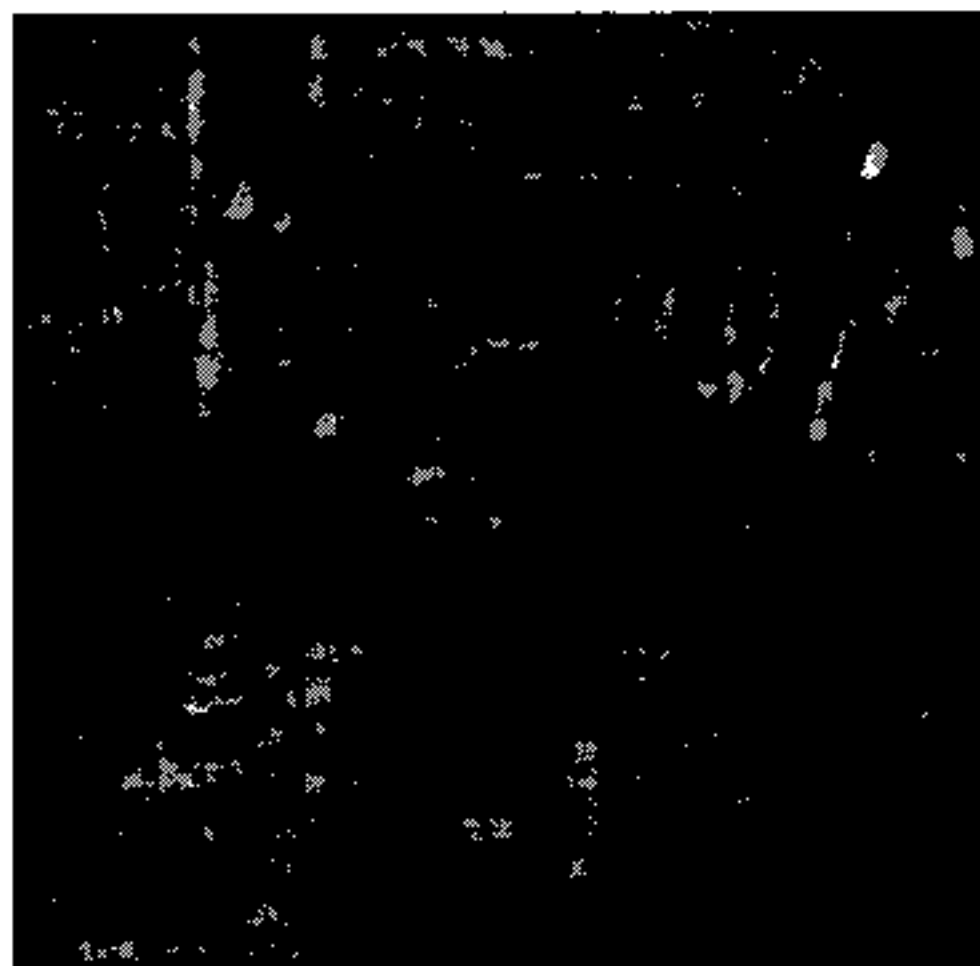
But the "Vietnam syndrome" was not simply the result of a crisis at the top of the US state. It was also a product of a massive anti-war movement which forced the US to withdraw from Vietnam and threatened domestic unrest for future military adventures.

If Reagan's foreign policy relies heavily on covert operations it is because the ruling class realises that certain interventions, such as an invasion of Nicaragua, are difficult to "sell" at home.

Because a mass anti-war or left wing movement does not exist today it is likely that the Democrats, rather than those looking for radical change in society, will benefit from the Contragate revelations.

However, a small minority will be open to the argument that the scandal is not simply the work of a few bad people, but that of a fundamentally undemocratic and vicious system. ■

Ahmed Shawki





# PUT PRINCIPLES FIRST

IN December's *SWR* we printed an article by Shaun Doherty which argued that teachers shouldn't have crossed picket lines in the Brent dispute over Maureen McGoldrick.

Here we print the response of Rashid, a Black Teacher from Brent.

IN SHAUN DOHERTY'S article on Brent the Black Teachers' Collective are criticised for not supporting strike action, for organising independently, and for supporting a council which failed to fight ratecapping but which has a policy for fighting racism in its education system.

The article contains the very arrogant assumption that there is only one correct way to fight racism, and that this may be spelt out by a certain political party. It also contains a fundamental lack of understanding of the perceptions of black teachers.

As Black Teachers, we organise independently in order to build our strength to struggle against racism in all its forms. This includes attempting to change the NUT in terms of its prejudices and power structure.

Brent NUT is run by Stalinists who disregard racism and sexism, and do nothing for working class pupils or lowly paid teachers. This Association's leaders attempted to isolate and discipline any teachers who dared to question the leadership's campaign against the council over the last four years.

The culmination of that campaign has seen opposition to Section II Race Equality Posts, opposition to the Code of Practice in Employment, and finally, the McGoldrick case itself.

That leadership saw McGoldrick as a means to isolate and destroy a council and anyone who stood for anti-racist action. They have been aided and abetted by Boyson, Kinnock, the media and the national NUT leadership.

The strike, which was never discussed by a general meeting, went far beyond the issue of suspension. In the letter accompanying the ballot, we were told that the strike was to force the council to radically alter its attitude towards the implementation of its policies.

This was going to the heart of the matter. The National NUT leaders do not want a council to discipline suspected racists or to hold a full enquiry. They like paper policies but do not expect councils to take action thereon.

To ask Black Teachers to support a strike against the implementation of anti-racist policy is to ask "turkeys to strike for Christmas". The strike was cooked up to intimidate all those who genuinely

believe that policies matter when you are fighting racism.

Racism is not only on the streets; it is also in the schools, in council offices, housing departments, the High Court, and all the institutions of society. Black people face racism every day in every sphere of life.

Racism has always involved the use of power, whether it be the power of slave owners, empire builders, fascists or Tories. It has always been used to divide and rule.

We have every right to call on socialists who are also anti-racists to support us. Socialist Teachers Alliance (STA) policy is clear on support for black groups. The union organisation in Brent insults and alienates us; we cannot allow them to have their way.

Thus we would never support a racist strike, nor would we sacrifice our

principles to appeal to the majority. That is not what Black Teachers Collective or the STA believe in, and watering down anti-racism will simply not work.

Black and white teachers with political understanding of racism must share the black perception just as women need to impress an understanding of sexism upon men.

The article should have looked at the record of the local NUT and their links with the National Executive. It should have looked at racism in all its forms. Black people cannot afford the luxury of distinguishing between "organised" and "unorganised" racists. We can see the organised ones coming, but what about systematic discrimination in employment and in institutions.

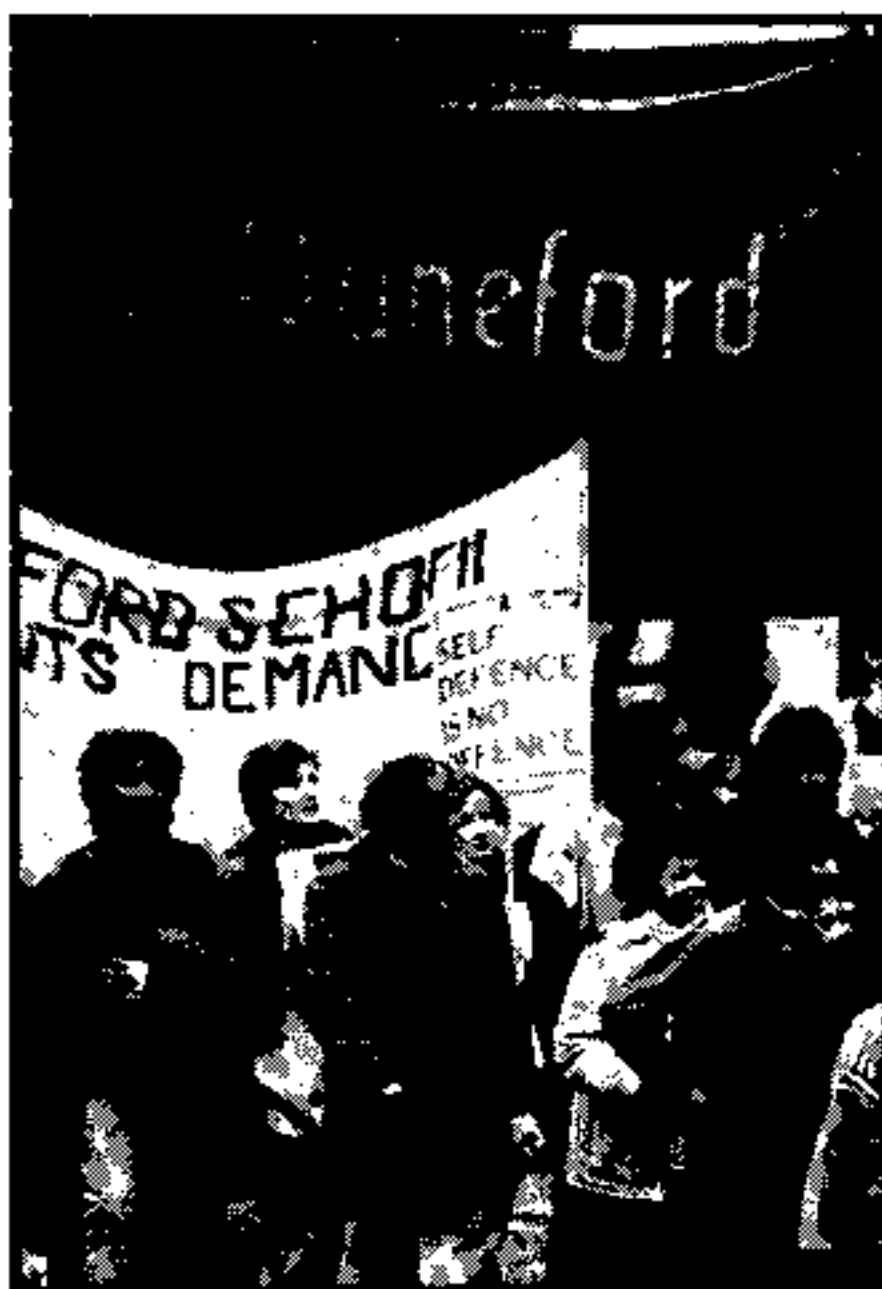
The Black teacher who might have lost her job opportunity has not been considered, nor have the Black Teachers facing union discipline for (a) reporting the incident and (b) for asking a question in a meeting.

Collective action is not an end in itself. It must be on the basis of certain principles. Anti-sexism, anti-racism and the removal of class differences must be the guiding principles. Hopefully they are central to socialism. So let us be clear what that collective action is aimed at before jumping in with both feet.

We seek to organise to win support for these principles; we do not wish to appeal to some silent majority along opportunist lines. It is hard to fight racism. It demands difficult choices.

For the Black Teachers Collective and the local STA and many non-aligned teachers, we choose to go on fighting a Stalinist clique and we look to larger groups like the STA nationally to support us on the principle of anti-racism. We see collective action as a means to its achievement. ■

Rashid



Teachers demonstrating against racism

## DEBATE ON THE INTERNATIONAL TROTSKYIST MOVEMENT TODAY

between the Socialist Workers Party (Britain) and Lutte Ouvrière (France)

in the February issue of *Class Struggle/Lutte de Classe/Lucha de Clase*, international journal of Lutte Ouvrière published in English, French, and Spanish, 70p inc postage & packaging

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# The eternal racism?

IS RACISM a product of capitalism? The argument that it isn't rests heavily on the existence of anti-semitism in both ancient Greece and Rome, and in much of medieval Europe.

On the surface this sort of argument seems plausible. Indeed it has been peddled (as often by crooks and reactionaries as by reformists) for centuries.

It is, for example, a central underpinning to Zionist ideology, which argues that because anti-semitism has always existed the only way Jews can protect themselves is to set up their own state.

But once we scratch the surface of the argument its plausibility quickly disintegrates.

Anti-semitism according to this analysis is part of human nature. Not only is this a doctrine of the most horrible pessimism—seeing pogroms and holocausts running off into eternity—it is also useless for explaining concrete cases of anti-Jewish prejudice.

For even the most cursory glance at history shows that there is very little similarity between the writings of some pagan Romans, the persecution of Jews in mediaeval Europe and the Nazi holocaust.

The difference between different forms of persecution lies in the class position the Jews occupied in *different sorts of class society*.

Thus in the ancient world we see anti-semitism directed against a merchant class (consisting almost wholly of Jews) by a patrician class which forbade its own members to engage in trade and drew its wealth from agriculture, not trade, from the country and not from the town.

It was this economic role which defined Judaism in the ancient world. Because of the peculiar geographical factors in the Levant the first traders in the ancient world came almost exclusively from this area. As the Greek, and later the Roman, empire grew, they emigrated to become traders in all the major trading ports of the Mediterranean.

The reasons for this development did not reflect anything special about the Jewish character but reflected material circumstances. The culture and religion of the Jews and its persistence through the ages are not unique—the Armenians, for example, played much the same role in the East.

As Abram Leon puts it in his excellent book *The Jewish Question*:

"Above all the Jews constitute historically a social group with a specific economic function. They are a class or more precisely, a people class..."

"This identification of a class with a people (or race) is far from being exceptional in precapitalist societies. Social classes were then frequently dis-

tinguished by a more or less national or racial character."

Identifying the Jews as a distinct class within pre-capitalist economies enables us to explain otherwise inexplicable facts. For example it explains why the Jews spoke Aramaic, not Hebrew, as early as the fifth century. Aramaic was the trading language of the whole Mediterranean region.

But the Jews were condemned for making money by the ideological warriors defending the dominant economic set up (Seneca, Juvenal and Quintilian, to name but three). The key point of the attack was not to get rid of the Jews, but to cement the Roman citizenry to the dominant mode of production. (Attacks on the Jews were far from being the only method of doing this—Roman citizens were actually forbidden by law from owning large trading ships.)

This then was the function of anti-semitism in the ancient world.

This can be seen when we examine the *actual* treatment of the Jews in the ancient world. While their religion was denounced as criminal and evil, Jews were still encouraged by the ruling class to maintain this religion.

## 'The persecutions of the Jews had a dual function'

In Greek Alexandria (the great trading centre of the Hellenic world) Jews were afforded certain privileges and allowed a large measure of self-government. Indeed a Jew, Tiberius Julius Alexander, was actually appointed governor of that city.

The explanation for this is simple.

Although the strength of the ancient economies rested upon agriculture, trade played a very important role—particularly in financing the huge armies and bureaucracies needed to hold the ancient empires together.

The decline of the ancient empires, culminating with the implosion of the Roman empire, spelled the end of trade on this scale for half a millennium. A society based almost entirely on agriculture (on use-values) was developing.

The two centuries before the collapse of the Roman empire were times of constant class struggle right across the empire. These struggles were defeated on a world-historic scale. The class which won out was the large land owners who, as the empire declined, removed themselves entirely from the towns and began to organise production of all the necessities of life on their estates.

But if trade had ceased to be a mainstay

of the economy the ruling classes still required luxury products from the East. With the chaos and collapse of the towns the Jews were the only group capable of carrying out such a role. They became the only intermediaries between the Eastern and Western worlds and the controllers of trade.

This distinct economic function put the Jews in a position where they were able to obtain favours and privileges from the ruling class. They themselves constituted a class on whom the rulers relied for luxury goods, and later for loans.

Most importantly it explains the large scale conversions to Judaism which took place in such cities as Alexandria. On the Caspian sea a tribe of traders called the Khazars converted wholesale to Judaism.

The ideology of Judaism fitted those people who carried out the distinct but subsidiary role of trading in pre-capitalist society.

The Jews played this role in an extremely rigid and stratified society. Their economic role meant that the ruling class was prepared to grant them some privileges—a measure of self-government for example. It also put certain prohibitions upon them.

But prohibitions and strict definitions of allowable economic activity were a central feature of the feudal system. Just as Jews were frequently forbidden to engage in agriculture so the peasantry was forbidden to lend money at interest—indeed to do so was a mortal sin in the eyes of the Church.

This situation was not to last. As trade became linked with native production the Jews became marginalised. Anti-semitism was the expression of the will of a growing merchant class to exercise its dominance over production.

As the Jews were pushed out of trade they turned more and more to money lending. But again because of the development of mercantile capitalism—as Europe moved towards a money economy (with lords charging peasants money rents and peasants selling their produce) the position of the Jews is undermined.

As Leon says:

"The transformation of all classes of society into producers of exchange values, into owners of money, raises them unanimously against Jewish usury whose archaic character emphasises its rapacity.

"Royalty, traditional protector of the Jews, has to yield to the repeated demands of congresses of the nobility and the bourgeoisie."

It is against this background that anti-semitic pogroms begin to develop. Contrary to popular myth they were not mystical outbursts of religious or race hatred, but the attempt of kings and nobles to rescue their economic position.

By the 12th century European monarchs were deeply in debt to Jewish money lenders. The King of England owed just *one* Jewish banker more than the annual budget of the country. In 1187 the King confiscated the property of this particular moneylender.

Two years later a spate of pogroms burst



out in London, Lincoln and Stafford. And a year after this came the notorious pogrom against the Jews of York, which culminated in a mass suicide by those attacked.

All these pogroms were orchestrated by the nobility. They all had just one aim—to destroy the letters of credit which were proof of the vast sums of money they owed to the Jews.

The York pogrom had a definite target, the destruction of the Scaccarium Judaeorum, the exchequer where all loans made by Jews were registered.

We can see then that the pogroms had a material basis. Furthermore they took place at the very moment when the feudal economy began to give way to a money economy. Anti-semitic pogroms began at the very same time that production for exchange—commodity production—began to take root in the towns.

As commodity production developed in the towns, the Jews were increasingly pushed to the margins of society. Once this stage is reached we begin to see the growth of systematic persecution of Jews.

Anti-semitism develops as capitalism develops. It begins in the great European cities embarking on commodity production and it is justified by a Catholic church which rapidly increases its power and becomes ever more rigid in its dogma.

One of the clearest examples of this process can be traced in 13th and 14th century Spain.

Feudal Spain had, like most of Europe, a Jewish community which played an essential financial role. Spanish monarchs had relied almost exclusively on Jewish bankers for loans.

But throughout the period Jews were becoming marginalised as native manufacturing industry began to grow. In 1391 massacres took place in Valencia, Seville, Barcelona and Toledo.

The massacres arose in just those cities where Christian Spaniards were marginalising the Jews economically by wresting trade away from them and making the first steps towards trade based on industries in the towns.

Along with this economic revolution went a change in the role of religion in society. The pattern under feudalism had been one of tolerance, in practice, of the Jewish faith. As mercantile capitalism began to develop, such tolerance was no longer acceptable.

The growth of the nation state accelerated this process as the ruling class developed the need and the confidence to impose a rigid ideology on the population.

Thus persecution of the Jews at the dawn of mercantile capitalism had a dual function. Firstly it was part of the process whereby the Jews' economic position was weakened.

But it was also part of a process to stamp Christian orthodoxy on the population of Europe. And there is no easier way of doing this than by scapegoating a religious group which stands outside of the main orthodoxy.

It was in this context that the Spanish Inquisition grew. It differed from the old mediaeval Inquisitions in that it tried to impose orthodoxy on the masses rather than sort out debates between warring factions in the hierarchy of the Church. Its chosen battleground was the "conversos"—the large numbers of people of Jewish descent who had converted to Christianity.

The Inquisition hunted down Jews it saw as having converted for reasons of convenience rather than because they were true Christians. In some cities the arrival of the Inquisition heralded mass judicial murder—in Seville 700 were burnt in one year.

Many more were "reconciled" to the Christian church—in other words bullied, bribed, tortured or terrorised into accepting Christian dogma.

The persecution of the "conversos" opened the door for the persecution of unconverted Jews. By the 1480s large scale expulsions of the Jews were under way. Atrocity stories were fed to the population and the supposed culprits of the crimes burned to popular acclaim.

By 1492 the Spanish monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella issued an edict

giving Jews four months to convert or leave the country.

Were these events merely an outburst of atavistic race hatred? We can clearly say no. In the first place the popular hatred which Jews were subjected to by the 1480s had been carefully cultivated.

It was cultivated by that wing of the Spanish ruling class which wanted to strengthen the nation state (often opposed by local ruling classes—for example the Catalans put up a long fight against the Inquisition—no inquisitor was allowed into Barcelona until 1487).

So what did the persecution of the Jews achieve for the Spanish ruling class? Firstly, although the Inquisition was sanctioned by Rome, all powers over it belonged to the Spanish crown. Thus we can see it was an ideological police force (mainly in the form of Dominican friars) independent of the Pope and an embodiment of the emerging national state.

The Inquisition was also a device to impose centralised rule over the Spanish regions—King Ferdinand was not above threatening to send the troops into towns which refused to accept it.

What was the end result of the Inquisition? Firstly the mass exodus of Jews who refused to convert left the field clear for the development of mercantile capitalism by Christian Spaniards.

Secondly it was the first great experiment in using Christianity as a weapon to bind a population to the ruling class.

Thirdly it was an integral part of the establishment of a national state in the modern sense. The monarchy used the Inquisition to establish both physical and ideological hegemony over the populace.

It also laid the basis for racist ideology. The victory of the Inquisition merely fed the fire of growing anti-semitism. By the 1480s those of Jewish descent were beginning to be banned from holding public offices even if they were Christians.

The notion of "limpieza de sangre"—purity of the blood—began to spread like wildfire. The roots of modern racism had been laid. ■

Ann Rogers

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# Fifty years on

***Tribune*, the paper of the Labour left, this year celebrates its fiftieth anniversary. Fifty years of more or less uninterrupted production is no mean achievement for a paper of the left.**

**During that time *Tribune* has been associated with some worthy causes—from anti-Fascism to nuclear disarmament—and it has had some distinguished contributors.**

**Among Labour politicians it has been closely associated with such noteworthy figures and talented writers as Aneurin Bevan and Michael Foot, and others who began their journalistic careers with *Tribune* include the cartoonist Cummings and the novelist John Braine. Ian Birchall looks at the paper's history.**

**O**N the occasion of *Tribune's* tenth birthday in 1947 George Orwell, perhaps the best writer ever to serve on its staff, wrote that *Tribune* was

“the only existing weekly paper that makes a genuine effort to be both progressive and humane—that is, to combine a radical Socialist policy with a respect for freedom of speech and a civilised attitude towards literature and the arts.”

It would be pleasing to be able to make a similar judgement in 1987. Unfortunately the historical record tells a rather different story. It is only by examining *Tribune's* failures and defeats that we can learn something of the inadequacies of the Labour left over the last half century.

1936, the year in which *Tribune* was conceived, was one of deep crisis for the left. Mosley was on the streets at home, while in Spain civil war was raging; a new world war was already looming on the horizon.

At Labour's Conference in Edinburgh the left, seeking unity against facism, had called for aid to the Spanish Republic and the right of the Communist Party to affiliate to the Labour Party. But the bureaucrats of the right held the line and these policies were defeated.

In the aftermath a number of Labour politicians—Aneurin Bevan, Stafford Cripps, George Strauss and William Mellor, met to discuss the founding of a new paper. Cripps and Strauss provided £20,000, no mean sum in those days, and on 1 January 1937 the first issue hit the streets. The cover, showing the British working class as a lion being subdued by a fascist, indicated the grim urgency of the period.

The campaign for left unity was central to *Tribune* from the beginning. But this was couched in a language of class struggle which few of *Tribune's* supporters today would dare to use. In the first issue William Mellor wrote:

“The defeat of capitalism depends upon the unity of the working class. If its forces are

divided, as in Italy and in Germany, it is defeated in detail. A united working class can take the offensive... A united working class can go forward to a defined goal.”

The goal of unity in action between workers belonging to the Labour Party, the Communist Party and the ILP was indeed a worthy one. But a real United Front must always combine the broadest possible unity in action with political clarity in analysing the situation and selecting objectives. From the beginning *Tribune* allowed the need for unity to blur its concern for clarity.

The thirties were a time of high hopes. But they were also a time when the politics of Stalinism led to a squandering of those hopes. The monstrous perversion of justice in the Moscow Trials disgraced the name of socialism; while Communist policies led to the loss of the Popular Front gains in France and the defeat of the Republic in Spain. In the name of “unity” *Tribune* failed to expose these disastrous policies. The Moscow Trials were passed over in embarrassed silence and even partially justified; Mellor enquired in February 1938:

“Who can believe that the transformation of old Russia into a socialist society could proceed without severity or without error?”

Barbara Castle wrote a series on women in Russia, “where women live with new assurance”, while Trotsky was slandered as “the madman in Moscow”. Certainly contributors like Bevan were not themselves naive about Russia, but they ducked the issues in the interests of unity.

Yet the compromises did not serve to win the unity that was needed. *Tribune* failed to defend the position of the Labour left and on the eve of the war Bevan, Cripps and Strauss were expelled from the Labour Party. Bevan and Strauss were readmitted only after making major concessions to the right.

**D**URING the Second World War *Tribune's* line was one of critical support for the wartime coalition. Churchill and his cabinet could be criticised, and on occasion were sharply criticised, for particular tactics and policies, but there was overall acceptance of the idea that it was possible to fight fascism in alliance with one of the most ruthless champions of British capitalism.

Certainly *Tribune's* line was considerably more healthy than the slavish admiration of Churchill shown by the Communist Party between 1941 and 1945. In May 1942 *Tribune* published an article under the provocative title “Why Churchill?”, which accused the Prime Minister of delaying military action against Germany in the interests of his own ambitions.

Since the author, who used the pseudonym Thomas Rainboro', was a serving soldier, his





### **Tribune opposed the Mosleyites**

articles soon attracted the attention of the War Office. But even here *Tribune's* radicalism was part of a rather bizarre "united front".

*Tribune's* campaign for a "Second Front"—a land invasion in Western Europe to take the pressure off Russia in the East—echoed the policy of the Communist Party. But it was also the policy of Lord Beaverbrook, the newspaper tycoon.

Beaverbrook, as a member of the War Cabinet, could not criticise Churchill in public, but he masterminded the campaign through his paper *The Evening Standard*. And *Tribune's* "Thomas Rainboro" was in fact one Frank Owen, until recently editor of *The Evening Standard*.

*Tribune* greeted the accession of a Labour government in 1945 with enthusiasm. While reserving its right to criticise, it placed its main emphasis on praising the achievements of Attlee's government. In November 1946 *Tribune* went so far as to claim that

"...the first session of the Labour Government's Parliament which ended on Wednesday did more revolutionary things to this country than the first three years after the 1917 Revolution did for Russia."

Whatever criticisms there might be in detail, there was certainly no inkling of a notion that Labour's nationalisation and welfare policies were designed to prop up capitalism, not to undermine it.

Certainly *Tribune's* initial enthusiasm for Attlee mirrored a widely shared feeling in the working class. But as the Attlee government went down the slippery slope to wage restraint, spending cuts, strike-breaking and the Cold War, there was a place for a voice on the left which could rally a socialist opposition to Attlee. But *Tribune* was not to be that voice.

In the last years of the Labour government its influence was on the decline, and in 1950 it was forced to move from weekly to fortnightly production. Transport House paid for two pages a week to put across official party policy, and the rest of the paper often differed very little from this.

*Tribune* went most of the way with Labour's capitulation to anti-communism and Cold War politics in the late forties. After initial hesitation

*Tribune* supported the establishment of NATO, though Ian Mikardo did resign from the editorial board on this issue.

In 1949 *Tribune* gave a platform to American trade unionist Walter Reuther, who had come to London to engineer a pro-American split in the World Federation of Trade Unions. When the Korean War broke out in 1950 one of *Tribune's* rising stars, Michael Foot, defended the American intervention saying that

"American soldiers are fighting in Korea...to uphold the principles of collective defence against wanton aggression."

**B**UT in the early fifties *Tribune* took on a new lease of life. Aneurin Bevan resigned from the Labour government in protest at health service charges and when the Tories returned to power in 1951 Bevan became the focus for a frustrated left.

"Bevanism" as a political current rapidly gained support, and *Tribune*, once again a weekly, became its public organ. For a while the paper was a public focus for labour left organisation; the famous "Tribune Brains Trusts", with panels of well-known personalities, were held in constituencies up and down the country, an effort described by one journalist as "the biggest, most continuous and widespread propaganda effort ever conducted within the Labour Movement."

*Tribune* intervened in the campaign against German rearmament, but in so doing allowed itself to lapse into some crudely nationalistic anti-German statements, accusing Germany of overrunning France "three times in sixty years". And in 1954 *Tribune* took a step that was virtually unique in its history, either before or since; it intervened directly in a trade union dispute lining up with the rank and file against the bureaucracy.

Normally *Tribune* respected the division between "political" and trade union issues, and was careful not to give offence to the bureaucracy.

In supporting northern dockers who joined the stevedores' union out of opposition to right-wing domination in the T&GWU, *Tribune* infuriated the right wing. But its motives were primarily to further its struggle against Arthur



Nye Bevan

Deakin, the T&GWU's right wing leader who wielded a massive block vote in the Labour Party. It was certainly not a conversion to the primacy of workplace politics.

But in 1955 Bevan was threatened with expulsion and was forced to "apologise" for his criticisms of Attlee. From now on Bevan set out to refurbish his position as a future cabinet minister, and his utterances became increasingly statesmanlike.

At the time of the Suez crisis Bevan treated *Tribune* readers to a ringing denunciation of the Egyptian leader Nasser for "stirring the pot of nationalist passion". As Bevan cut his links with the left, *Tribune*, which had linked its politics all too closely to Bevan's ambitions, was left disoriented.

**F**ORTUNATELY for *Tribune* a new campaign was to emerge. *Tribune*, to its credit, had taken up the issue of nuclear weapons and the threat they posed from the early fifties, and when the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament started to put thousands of people on to the streets, *Tribune* was there to welcome its new audience.

The front page carried a banner "The paper that leads the anti-H-bomb campaign", and the paper gave extensive coverage to the issue.

Bevan had now defected to a pro-nuclear stance and the paper's guiding spirit was Michael Foot, who, however, idolised Bevan and was unable to carry through a clear critique of his position.

Moreover, *Tribune's* commitment to nuclear disarmament did not lead it to break with its parliamentarism and deferential attitudes to the trade union bureaucracy.

*Tribune* contributed to the movement which produced the pro-unilateralist victory at Labour's 1960 conference; but when the block votes swung the other way and the policy was lost in 1961, *Tribune* had no strategy to offer.

It certainly had no sympathy for the wing of CND that turned to non-violent sit-downs; in April 1961 *Tribune* editorialised:

"The group of demonstrators who broke away from the massive CND demonstration in Trafalgar Square to stage their own 'direct action' protest outside the American embassy and Savile Row police station could not, if they had been Empire Loyalists or Mosleyites, have done the nuclear disarmament movement greater disservice."

There were indeed criticisms to be made of the "direct action" strategy, but to compare its proponents to fascists was to display a sectarianism towards the far left to which *Tribune* was to become increasingly prone.

In any case, as the chance of a Labour election victory appeared on the horizon, nuclear disarmament became an increasingly embarrassing issue. *Tribune* dropped its front-page anti-H-bomb banner and instead identified itself with the rather more respectable campaign against the Common market. Here again the nationalism which had marked the campaign against German rearmament became all too apparent.



Michael Foot faces threatened steel workers in Ebbw Vale

**H**AROLD WILSON'S election victory in 1964 was greeted with a "celebration issue" of the paper. Under the headline "*TRIBUNE* takes over from *ETON* in the Cabinet" there were pictures of former *Tribune* contributors (Crossman, Cousins, Castle, Lee) now in Wilson's government.

Wilson had been, at one time, a half-hearted Bevanite, and when Bevan was safely dead he delighted in quoting his name. In the run-up to 1964 *Tribune* had backed Wilson for the leadership and praised him fulsomely when he won it.

As Wilson's government moved from compromise to capitulation to betrayal, *Tribune* reacted sluggishly. Certainly there was sharp criticism on individual issues. When Wilson slandered the striking seamen, *Tribune* supported them, and when health service charges were reintroduced, *Tribune* headlined "The Shame of it all". But all this was within the framework of "critical support"; in 1966 *Tribune* warned:

"Every socialist has the right to criticise the design and performance of the Labour automobile—so long as he also helps to put some petrol in the tank."

*Tribune* was unable to mobilise against Wilson's policies. As a new, harder left emerged out of the Vietnam movement and the events of 1968, *Tribune* remained stuck in its obsessive parliamentarism.

From now on it was downhill all the way. The 1974-79 government was even worse than that of 1964-70, and *Tribune's* response was even feebler.

A brief flurry of activity on the anti-Common Market campaign led nowhere. In 1974 a rising star of the *Tribune* group in Parliament, one Neil Kinnock, proclaimed that *Tribune* supporters

"like millions throughout the world, refuse to accept the permanence and desirability of the 'realities' of capitalism and totalitarianism or even concede the 'realism' of changing those systems and removing the stupidities and injustices which spawn by feeding and appeasing them."

Unfortunately when Labour moved to control wages and cut public spending these fine words meant little. In October 1974 *Tribune* had expressed enthusiasm for Labour's proposed "social contract" with the unions; but when, in





1975, the "social contract" turned into good old-fashioned wage control, *Tribune* merely mumbled:

"The aim, we would submit, must be, with justified exceptions, to hold living standards for a year or two while we move ahead with our massive investment programmes and socialist policies."

The *Tribune* group in parliament was split down the middle and as long as the "social contract" was backed by left union bureaucrats like Jack Jones, *Tribune* would not fight it. Instead its columns were filled with mealy-mouthed equivocations. For those on the left, like the Right to Work Campaign, who sought to organise against Labour policies, *Tribune* reserved some of its most sectarian sneers and vituperations. Only the Anti-Nazi League proved too big to oppose.

At the beginning of the Thatcher government *Tribune's* response was equally feeble. In 1980 it warned the TUC that a day of action against Thatcher must not offend "the public at large", and during the 1980 steel strike *Tribune* was guilty of what can only be called scabbing by printing a full page advertisement for the British Steel Corporation, urging participation in the strike-breaking ballot.

*Tribune* was not, however, immune to the rise of Bennism in the early eighties. When Benn ran for deputy leader in 1981, John Silkin, backed by Neil Kinnock, stood to split the left vote and ensure Benn's defeat.

*Tribune* took a line of neutrality between Benn and Silkin, but published an editorial headed "The labour movement is more important than its leaders", implicitly criticising the Benn cult.

**C**HANGES came in May 1982, when Chris Mullin took over as editor from Richard Clements. Mullin was close to Benn's politics, though he denied that *Tribune* had become a Bennite organ.

While he remained committed to a parliamentary road to socialism, he saw the value of extra-parliamentary action and pressure more clearly than previous *Tribune* editors had done.

He was also prepared to engage in reasonably fraternal discussion with the revolutionary left, a sharp break from his predecessor's sectarianism.

Mullin proclaimed sharp opposition to the Falklands War and introduced some new and

livelier features to the paper—notably an "Extra-Parliamentary Column" which was open to anyone except MPs.

The new line brought a prompt rebuke from Michael Foot, who sent an open letter accusing *Tribune* of "infantile leftism". More seriously Kinnock's friend John Silkin launched a bid via share control and legal action to take *Tribune* out of Mullin's hands.

After the 1983 election *Tribune* backed Eric Heffer for the Labour leadership. If Kinnock was its second—and more realistic—choice, it urged that support for Kinnock be "without illusions" in view of his visible drift to the right.

Mullin, a talented novelist and investigative journalist, saw no long term future in the dwindling pool of *Tribune*; and after his resignation he left behind no political heritage.

*Tribune* soon swung back to its old traditions under Nigel Williamson's editorship. In October 1986, after Kinnock's vomit-provoking promise to Labour conference that he would "die for his country", *Tribune* published an editorial eulogy of the labour leader:

"He has set about rebuilding the party in a principled way. On nuclear weapons and international issues he has stood as firm as anyone could hope or desire. On issues such as social ownership, the policy has been modernised and made more attractive, but the basic principles remain."

And in January 1987 *Tribune* carried a half-page article by Mullin's former adversary John Silkin, denouncing the Campaign Group as the "authoritarian Left", an article replete with dishonest references to Aneurin Bevan.

In the same month, fifty years on from *Tribune's* founding, its editor, Nigel Williamson was with a Labour Party delegation to NATO headquarters, aimed at stressing Labour's loyalty to the nuclear alliance.

So, in this anniversary year, *Tribune's* future looks bleak. If *New Socialist* has gone down the road of pursuing style without content, *Tribune* has remained resolutely on the side of the "drabbies". Its clumsy layout succeeds in making even the odd interesting article look boring.

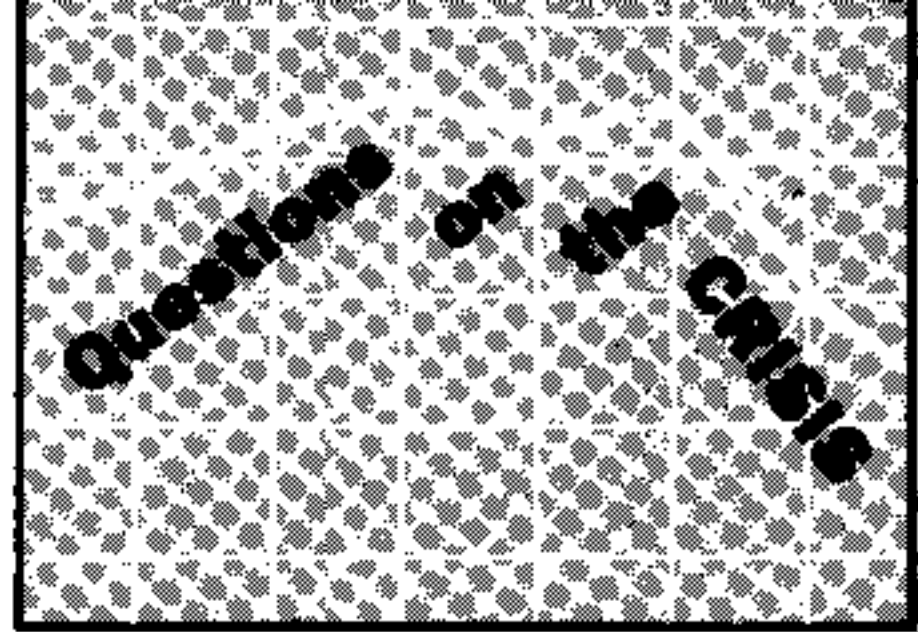
By the early eighties its claimed circulation was only twelve thousand; the reality was probably well below this. Before the war it had reached a sale of 30,000, but even in the high period of Bevanism it was no more than 18,000.

Financial difficulties are no secret; appeals for funds refer, not to expansion, but to "survival". The loss of GLC advertising was a blow and *Tribune* is now ever more dependent on donations and advertisements from trade unions.

But such dependence makes *Tribune* ever more incapable of leading a political fight against the union bureaucracy. It seems unlikely that *Tribune* will see a sixtieth, let alone a hundredth, birthday.

(Thanks to Andy Zebrowski for help with research and to Chris Harman for his invaluable articles in *International Socialism* [first series] 21 & 24.)





# Old Marx's almanac

*Can Marxist Economics Predict the Future?*

THERE are some people who seem to believe that the test of Marxist economics is its ability to predict the timing of the next Wall Street crash, or the value of the pound against the franc in six months time.

I've even known comrades ask me when they should take their holidays in the United States, on the basis of my suggesting that the dollar was going to fall (they went about nine months too early).

Unfortunately none of us has a crystal ball, though I gather that *Old Moore's Almanac* is predicting a world economic crisis in May, when Mars will be in opposition to Saturn and Uranus (honest, it was in the *Financial Times*).

That aside, there are some serious difficulties about forecasting the future which even the most astute Marxists cannot overcome.

One is that it's hard even to work out what's happening at the moment. We are forced to rely on sets of official statistics, many of which are about as reliable as Ronald Reagan's memory of where he was when he didn't tell his aides to sell arms to the Iranians.

To give an example, the total of world exports minus world imports should by definition (unless there's a bit of secret interplanetary trade going on as well) come to zero. According to the official figures, however, the world is in deficit to the tune of \$80 billion.

There's obviously rather a lot of smuggling (including suitcases filled with cash) which doesn't appear in the statistics.

Secondly, capitalism in a time of crisis is an extremely unstable system. For the last fifteen years exchange rates, stock markets, interest rates and inflation rates have been moving up and down like barometers in a typhoon zone.

We can explain why the system is unstable. We can rather less easily discern some patterns in the movement. But it's a foolhardy economist who claims more than that.

Thirdly, whilst capitalism is a system with distinctive "laws of motion" as Marx put it, it is also a system which depends upon the labour of millions of workers. It is vulnerable to the impact of the class struggle, and that, as every experienced revolutionary knows, is unpredictable.

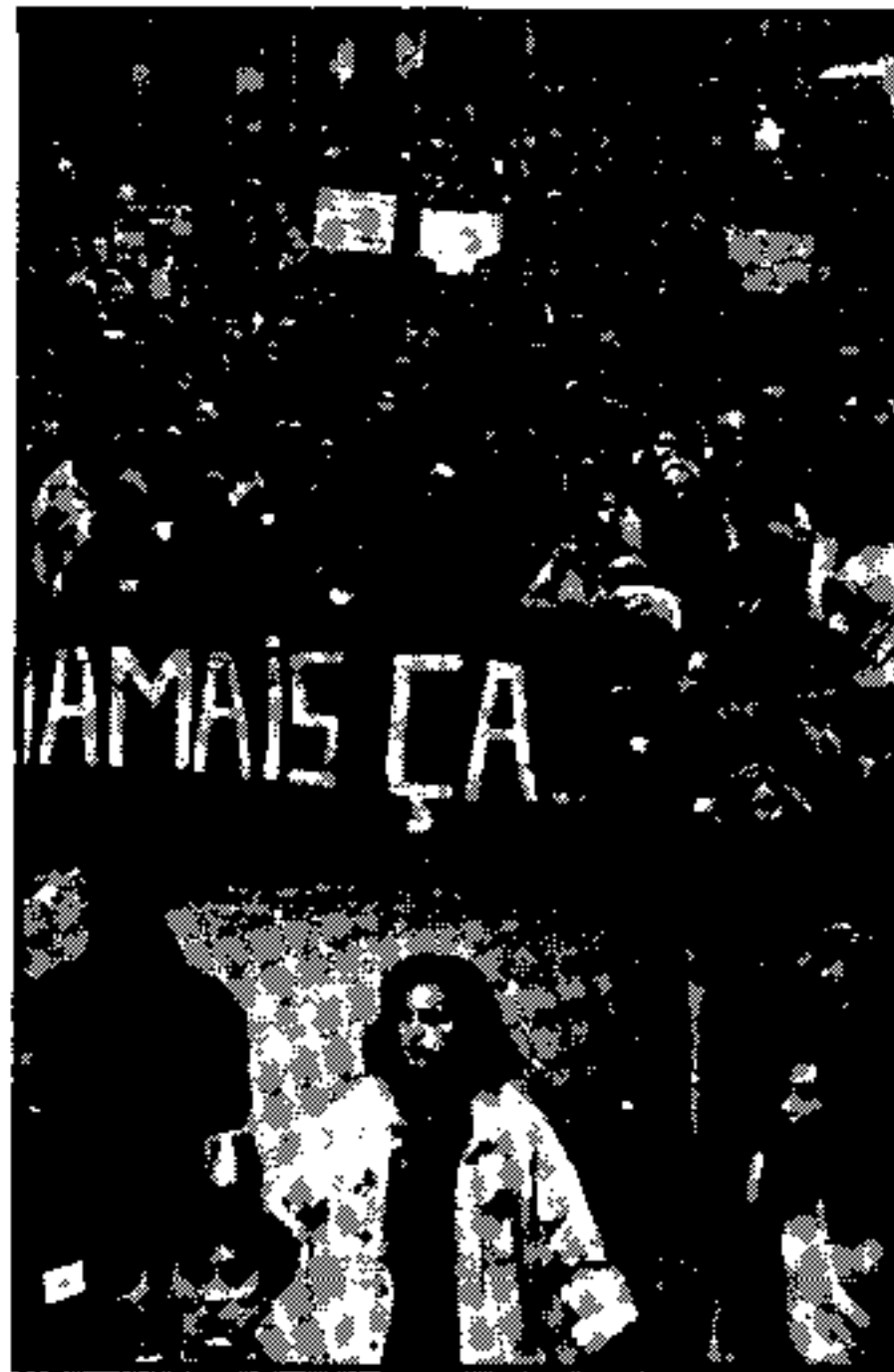
Nobody expected that the French student demonstrations would force Chirac to back down, leading to the railway workers' strike, pressure on the franc, and the disintegration of the government's whole economic strategy.

Bourgeois economic forecasters deal with these problems by trying to ignore them. Despite their elaborate computerised models, and expensive research

operations, most of what they do still consists of projecting with rulers.

What that means is that they take the trends over the last few years, stick them on a piece of graph paper, draw a line between the dots, and then extend that line with a ruler. They then add or subtract a couple of percentage points here and there according to the assumptions (political bias) of the model, and out comes the forecast.

That can work well enough as long as this year is roughly the same as last year. It's absolutely useless at predicting the turning points from boom to slump.



**French students on the march. Not even the best of Marxists could have predicted it**

In September 1974, as the world economy was *already* heading into its first serious slump since the 1930s, the distinguished US magazine *Business Week* could write:

"Five years ago the editors...foresaw a period of vigorous economic growth... The first five years of the seventies have confirmed these forecasts. It is indeed a super decade."

Again, last year, as the oil price fell sharply, most forecasters predicted that the world economy would boom. So the *Economist* on 25 January 1986 urged its readers to "keep calm and enjoy it", predicting that:

"Provided the dollar does not bounce back to its former heights [which it didn't]...most economies can shake off that part of their stagflationary malaise which was caused by OPEC in the 1970s."

What actually happened was that most of the world economy (apart from the financial markets) subsided into what is

now euphemistically termed a "pause" in economic growth.

But can Marxists do any better? Bourgeois economists are often inclined, by their faith that capitalism is the best of all possible worlds, to blame everything that goes wrong on acts of god, or the stupidities of governments which fail to take their advice, or of course the "greedy" workers.

Marxist economists are often accused of the opposite bias—of always predicting the final crisis of the system.

There is little basis for this in the writings of the best Marxists. It is true that in his private correspondence with Engels Marx was inclined to read signs of crisis into the slightest disturbance of the trade figures. But he never let such crude speculations enter into a major scientific work such as *Capital*.

Trotsky in the late 1930s correctly predicted the coming world war but also expected that it would be followed by an even deeper economic crisis of the system. He was wrong, but he had also issued a warning which unfortunately few of his followers were to heed:

"Every historical prognosis is conditional, and the more concrete it is the more conditional it is."

The simple truth is that Marx's record in analysing the "laws of motion" of capitalism, and outlining the fundamental tendencies of the system, cannot be matched by anything any bourgeois economist has ever produced.

For example on page 375 of my copy of Volume 3 of *Capital* Marx summarises three cardinal facts about capitalist production:

- 1) "The concentration of the means of production in a few hands..."
- 2) "The organisation of labour itself as social labour: through cooperation, division of labour and the association of labour with natural science."
- 3) "Establishment of the world market."

Volume 3 was written between 1863 and 1867, when capitalism was made up mainly of small firms, over a century before the fuss about microelectronics and "new technology", at a time when subsistence agriculture still prevailed in most of the world.

Didn't Marx argue, though, that capitalism itself was doomed to fall into ever deeper crises of overproduction culminating in an eventual crash? The answer is no, but the question deserves a whole column to itself.

Next month therefore the question will be, "Can capitalism get out of the crisis?", for which this column has been by way of a preliminary. ■

Pete Green





# Birth of our power

*The new democracy: the Petrograd Soviet 1917*

Today Russia is ruled by a corrupt repressive state capitalist clique which has nothing in common with revolutionary Russia. Here ANDY ZEBROWSKI outlines the forms of organisation and the gains of the Revolution, and PATRICK KANE provides us with two reports on present day Russian society.

THERE IS a myth that the Russian Revolution was a coup d'etat engineered by Lenin and the Bolsheviks which led inevitably to the despotism of Stalin. In reality, the Russian Revolution remains the supreme historical example of workers consciously taking power for themselves, not for a new set of bosses.

The power of the Soviets (Workers' Councils) was based on the organisation of factory committees and soldiers' committees. By June 1917 the Bolsheviks had won hegemony in the conferences of delegates from both the factory committees and the local borough soviets.

The Bolsheviks also led the push for an independent armed workers' militia. By the end of April 1917 a conference of Petrograd Red Guards had been organised to which 90 factories employing 170,000 workers sent delegates. On the eve of October there were 20,000 armed Red Guards who were the core of the successful insurrection.

The Revolutionary ferment among the workers extended to the massive peasant-based army which had been waging war with Germany. Soldiers committees were formed in the February Revolution.

After the insurrection of October such committees were encouraged throughout the army and navy. All officers up to the rank of regimental commander were elected.

The Red Army formed to fight the counterrevolutionary forces and invading armies after 1917 could never had been formed without the organisation and enthusiasm of workers and soldiers for the revolution.

The astonishing achievements of the Revolution in the early years of its life extended into all areas of society and culture. That was only possible because the Bolsheviks in 1917 found themselves at the head of an armed and organised working-class capable of leading the mass of the population.

The Soviet constitution of July 1918 gives us an idea of how the soviets were made up in the first year of the revolution.

The All Russian Congress of Soviets had one deputy per 25,000 in the towns and one per 125,000 in the country.

In the town soviets there was one delegate per 1000 people who were elected for a three month period. Categories of those not entitled to vote include those identified as exploiters or engaged in commerce, priests, ex-policemen, and members of the Royal Family.

The peasants in the countryside, as opposed to those in uniform, did not take part in the February Revolutionary. The revolution won the peasants' support by encouraging the land seizures which had mushroomed in the second part of 1917 after the return home of mutinous soldiers. In March there had only been 49 officially recorded peasant disturbances. By October there were 1,169.

The decree on land was passed a day after the insurrection. Lenin had "stolen" the programme of the Social Revolutionaries. They had told the peasants that the Constituent Assembly would grant them land when it met. The Bolsheviks simply said take it.

The big estate owners including the church had their lands expropriated without compensation. The land was divided on the basis of how much the peasant family could work and how many mouths there were to feed. The decree meant that the peasants were released from taxes, duties and debts.

Throughout 1917 between the two revolutions, the workers had won more and more control from their bosses. First they countered the management's right to hire and fire. Then they checked the raw material supplies to ensure a continuity of production.

After the October Revolution there was to be the maximum local control by the committee together with a centralisation of production. Without local control there is no democracy just bureaucratic diktat. Without centralisation modern industrial production is impossible. Separate factories would compete against each other. Or factories would be cannibalised.

Lenin's decree on workers' control was passed. It called for the exertion of more control by the factory committees whereas the executive of the factory committee delegates were concerned with more centralisation.

Workers had the right "to supervise management" and to determine a minimum of production. Commercial secrets were abolished. But the owner still had the right to run his factory. Workers were forbidden to seize the factory unless this was sanctioned by the Soviet.

To deal with the employers' sabotage the workers enforced nationalisation locally. The central authorities were in no hurry to nationalise. Nationalisation could come with growing workers' control.

In the first half of 1918 most nationalisations were punitive against the employers' sabotage. Of 500 nationalisations by June 1918 400 were by local initiative.

How did the new soviet system work? Lenin said:

"Socialism is not created by decree coming from on high. It has nothing in common with official bureaucratic routinism. Living socialism is the work of the popular masses themselves."

The decrees passed in the early months were aimed at encouraging the spread of the revolution. They often sanctioned what workers and peasants were already doing.

After October there was a spontaneous emergence, as well as encouragement of, popular justice by decree.

The few remaining courts were closed down by the Red Guards. Workers set up their own tribunals. Elections were either direct or people were delegated from the soviets.

The prosecutor and defence counsel would speak before the public in the courtroom. People were free to intervene in the debates. The verdict was taken by a vote from the audience.

The revolution split the Church from the new workers' state. People had the right to have any or no religion. There was no public religious teaching.

The churches and holy relics were handed over to religious groups of twenty people and over. Even religious processions were allowed provided they had the approval of the local soviet.

A good form of propaganda to disabuse people of superstitious religious beliefs was to look in the vessels which supposedly contained the holy relics. Instead of the hair or bones of the saints, all kinds of rubbish was found.

There were housing committees in all districts. The revolution had abolished the right of private ownership of large houses. This was a legalisation of the seizures of the big houses that were carried out in the towns.

The most vital need in the field of education was a massive literacy campaign. As Lenin put it:

"A person who can neither read nor write is outside politics; he must first learn the ABC, without which there is no such thing as politics but merely rumour, gossip, fairy tales and prejudice."

New libraries were built and cheap editions of the classical authors in all fields were printed. Theatres were thrown open to working class audiences.

A new system of schooling for children between the ages of 8 and 17 was set up. Children were taught an overview of society with the accent on active learning and reading.

The education was polytechnical. Children learned to work lathes and solder as well as academic disciplines.

Anyone over the age of 16 who wanted to enter university was allowed to do so. The number of students doubled in the first year after the Education Act was passed in October 1918.

Everyone concerned with the school; teachers, pupils, other school workers, local workers and the local Department of Education, was involved in discussing the curriculum and elected the head who was subject to recall just like workers' delegates.

By Autumn 1920, Lunacharsky, the Commissar for Education announced that there were 12,000 more schools than in 1914 and 1½ million more pupils.

Thirty-five percent of the working class were women in 1917. The institution perpetuating the oppression of women is the family. Trotsky wrote "the family cannot be abolished, it has to be replaced."

Only civil marriages had any standing after October. Marriage wasn't abolished completely because certain practises still needed to be maintained. For instance, women won the right to alimony which they didn't have under tsarism.

Divorce could occur instantly by mutual consent or after a brief hearing if only one partner wanted it.

In November 1920 Russia became the first country in the world to legalise abortion. Any woman had the automatic right to abortion before three months of pregnancy.

The tsarist legislation which subordinated the wife to her husband was

swept away. Article 107 of the tsarist law stated:

"The wife is held to obey her husband as the head of the family to remain with him in love, respect and unlimited obedience, to do him every favour and show him all affection as a housewife."

The wife had been legally obliged to follow the husband wherever he went.

Communal laundries, kitchens and dining rooms were organised. In Petrograd almost 90 percent of the population was fed communally during 1919-1920.

The Bolshevik aim was the separation of kitchen from marriage. Lenin argued:

"Notwithstanding all the laws emancipating woman, she continues to be a domestic slave, because petty housework crushes, strangles, stultifies and degrades her, chains her to the kitchen and nursery, and she wastes her labour on barbarously unproductive, petty, nerve-racking, stultifying and crushing drudgery."

Prostitution almost disappeared after the revolution. The February revolution had destroyed the system of 'yellow tickets.' These were certificates which prostitutes had to have instead of the normal identity papers.

In 1914 there were some 40,000 prostitutes in Petrograd. The prostitutes were forced to live in segregated housing and had to apply for police permission if they wanted to move.

This meant that most were stuck on the yellow ticket for life. They were forced to undergo humiliating medical examinations—the working class ones, that is.

In 1919 Zhenotdel (Women's Section or Department) was created. It took the revolution to the far corners of the republic. Among its campaigns were the organising of mass unveilings of Muslim women in Central Asia and encouraging women to seek divorce from tyrannical husbands.

Despite the erosion of many of the gains of the revolution by the mid-twenties, some women maintained the fighting spirit that had been unleashed years earlier. A sex strike was organised in Bryansk province. The women proclaimed:

"We agree to work at home and be our husband's helpers but demand in return that we shall not be given over to our husband's wills, that they shall not be so free with their hands, and call us such names as 'old hag,' 'bitch,' 'slut,' and other unmentionable ones."

The paragraph in the penal code punishing homosexuality with long term imprisonment was scrapped. Stalin reintroduced it in 1934 when homosexuals faced sentences of up to 8 years imprisonment.

The punishments for incest and adultery were also abolished.

The nationalities of the former tsarist empire were given the right to secede. Finland was the first to do so in December 1917. The Bolsheviks believed that it was impossible to force socialism on people who had been oppressed by the Russian Empire.

The most important act of internationalism was the creation of the Communist International in March 1919, in order to ensure the creation of parties on the Bolshevik model internationally.

But it was the failure of the revolution to spread, the isolation of Russia and the virtual disintegration of the working class amidst economic chaos, which paved the way for Stalin. To ensure the survival of the revolution Lenin and the Bolsheviks had no choice but to introduce harsh, repressive measures.

Yet a remarkable degree of toleration for opposing views and papers was maintained for as long as possible. Only the intensification of the civil war forced the Bolsheviks to ban other parties.

The tragic failure of the revolution is another story. What should be clear from the brief account of workers' achievements in this article is that the rise of Stalin and a new ruling class meant the defeat not the continuation of the revolution.

It would take the smashing of the Left Opposition led by Trotsky and the systematic murder of most of the old Bolsheviks before Stalin could consolidate his rule and finally strangle the gains of the working class. ■

## The struggle today

IN RUSSIA since the late seventies, there seems to have been an increase in socialist opposition groups. They represent a break with the more traditional dissidents of the human rights' movement.

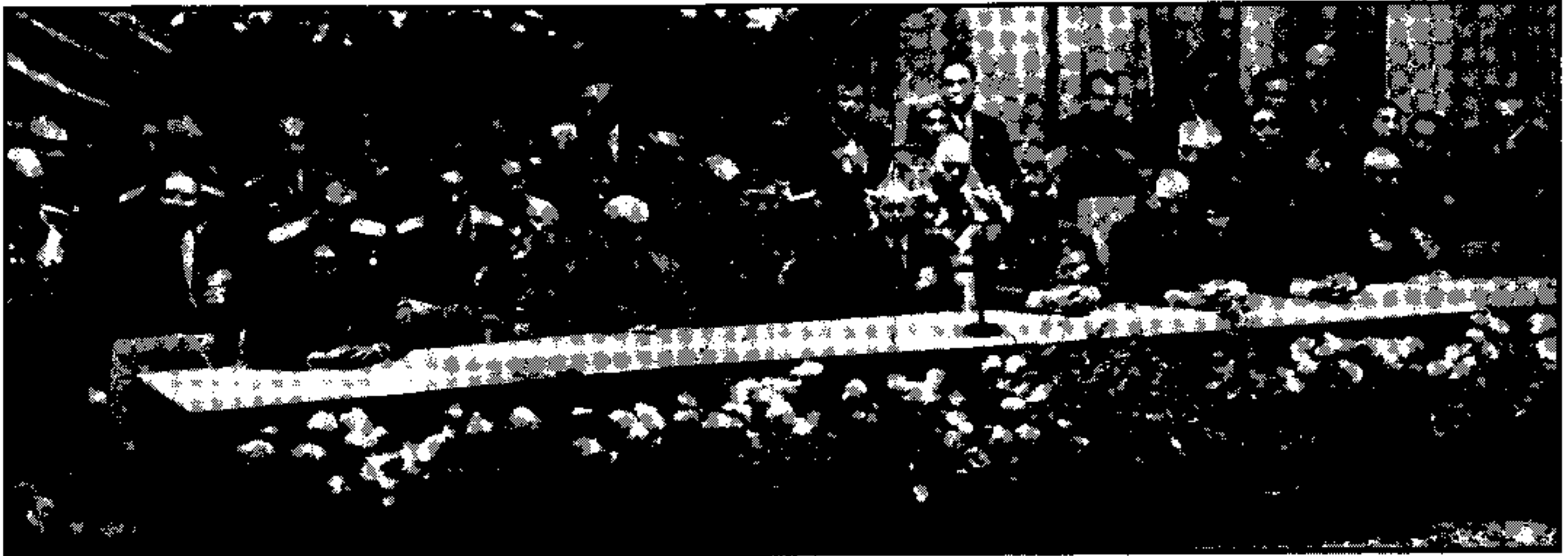
In Leningrad and Moscow, *Variations and Left Turn*—two opposition bulletins were published clandestinely from 1977 to 1982 by a group called the Left Opposition. In 1982 the group attempted to set up a federation of "Democratic forces of a socialist orientation". At least eight other

groups are known to have existed at this time.

The appearance of the Russian Social Democratic Party (RSDP) shows that despite the clampdown there are still dissident socialists in Moscow. One report claims it is a group predominantly made up of workers. It was formed in 1982 the same year the Left Opposition was broken up by arrests.

Since then there has been news of the arrest of RSDP members. The most recent





**The modern "Czars"**

was of a founder member, Alexander Chukaev. He was charged with the creation of an illegal organisation and "anti-soviet propaganda". He was sentenced to five years imprisonment plus five years exile.

The RSDP politics appear to be far more revolutionary than past socialist oppositionists. The groups of the sixties and seventies held that the regime was in some way socialist and were very reformist in character.

The programme of the RSDP talks about the ruling Communist Party as being a "bourgeois group of exploiters" and destroying "state capitalism". It is a somewhat confused document. It gives the impression of having been written by people who are groping towards revolutionary ideas.

There are some startling propositions

which are probably due to an inadequate translation of the programme. For example the courts should be abolished "having transferred the executive power to the national vote". This could mean a direct system of popular justice, such as revolutionary tribunals.

There is something the translation calls "anti-national" activity which is to be suppressed.

The programme contains some arbitrary reforms which seem to have been sucked out of somebody's thumb. The working day is to be reduced to five or six hours. All taxes are to be abolished apart from an income tax of 2 percent.

The RSDP is known to have links with a peace group, called the Moscow Trust, to which Alexander Chukaev's wife Larissa belongs. Some parts of the programme

seem to show some sympathy with them. For example RSDP "considers a peaceful transition to free life more humane" but it is pointed out that if peaceful means fail then revolutionary ones will have to be adopted.

Today Russia's rulers claim their power is derived from still functioning workers councils. That is probably why the programme uses the term "producers' councils" instead. The RSDP envisages a future society run by trade unions and producer councils, which will come about after the army and the police have been abolished.

Whatever our criticisms it is encouraging to see the existence of an opposition group in Russia that is looking for revolutionary answers. ■

Information supplied by PATRICK KANE  
Summary by ANDY ZEBROWSKI

## The hidden anger

ONLY MONTHS after Chernobyl and with the province of Kazakhstan under virtual military occupation, Gorbachev is faced with another possible outburst of opposition. This time it is in the country's industrial centre, the Donets coalfield.

Shortly before the New Year the Central Committee in Moscow issued a statement that a methane gas explosion had ripped through the Yasinovskaya-Glubokaya mine in Donets, Ukraine, causing loss of human life.

Neither the severity of the accident nor the number dead or injured has ever been released.

The lack of any real information did not have the expected effect. No sooner were the reports made than Alexander Lyashko, the regime's Prime Minister in the Ukraine, appeared on TV. He said that there would be "state aid for all the families of the deceased".

He also said that he would head a government commission into the accident and "not a single family will go without attention".

How the people in Donets reacted has never been officially reported. Flights to and from Donets were delayed for a full day and night—supposedly due to "bad weather".

No sooner had the problem appeared than I was told all was well and there was an alternative flight instead. This was probably because of the amount of people wanting to return to the city who were fed up with excuses.

Although it was nearly a week since the accident happened, the city was far from normal for a place with a population of over a million people.

The city's parks were lit up with decorations for the New Year. The streets were lined with huge placards of dedicated workers heralding the following year's work norms and glorifying the completion of the plan in time.

Yet despite the fact that trams were running and the bus stations were all open, the place was virtually empty—and this was the city centre on the New Year holidays. The reaction of the population

from what I could make out was of hidden anger and silent mourning.

While the population was staying off the streets, the authorities weren't taking any chances. The pavements and street corners were littered with the militia, side arms at hand. To back them up KGB patrols swept along the roads.

The most interesting reaction to events was that of the local bureaucracy. With a militia van on the street and militia at the door, they celebrated New Year in a high class hotel while the city mourned its dead.

Protected by KGB and militia the "Czars", as they are nicknamed, drank the finest and most expensive champagne and wines. They ate caviare and a selection of meats that you would not find in any of the shops. The local population rarely eat meat and normally survive on vegetables of the poorest quality.

It cost 20 roubles for a seat at that table—about half of what the injured miners might receive in an invalid pension.

No doubt the results of the investigation into the accident will allow those I saw celebrate the New Year to come out very safely. The real losers as usual will be the workers.

Despite the fact that production norms in the mines are continually fulfilled, miners' conditions have deteriorated. Resistance must be organised. ■

Eye witness account from Patrick Kane



# The bloody chessboard

THE GULF conflict presents one of the most dreadful spectacles in world politics. A million young Iraqis and Iranians are hurling themselves against one another on a killing ground just a few miles wide. Safe in their bunkers, the respective rulers urge greater sacrifice from populations which have already suffered six and a half years of bloodletting.

The victims are the people of two relatively backward countries, both formerly under colonial control, both long treated as the playthings of the superpowers. Socialists do not take sides in such disputes: we can only identify with the millions of Iraqis and Iranians who bear no responsibility for the conflict and who can expect to gain nothing from its continuation.

There are two levels on which the conflict needs to be understood: that of the political chessboard on which the superpowers are playing out their games and that of the internal politics of the regimes in conflict.

The roles of Washington and Moscow in stimulating and prolonging the conflict have been of great importance. Many countries have benefitted from the war by supplying arms, but in the last instance the US and Russia are the suppliers of the most sophisticated weaponry and are at least partly responsible for the level at which the fighting can be sustained.

It should also not be forgotten that it was the US which in 1980, anxious to see the Iranian revolution contained, gave Iraq's Saddam Hussain the go-ahead to start the war. Then, Moscow said little—while formally allied to Iraq it was trying to win favour with Iran, where the pro-Moscow party, the Tudeh, was supporting the regime.

Washington and Moscow have since worked hard to sustain the war. Once it became clear that Iraq's initial offensive had failed the superpowers reassessed their

positions. They reasoned that a victory for either Iraq's Saddam Hussain or Iran's Khomeini would be equally damaging to their interests, for each regime had ambitions in the region which could lead to the destabilisation of American and Russian allies.

Thus for several years after 1980 Russia supplied large quantities of arms to Baghdad and Tehran, while the US sold smaller but vital quantities to both parties.

But over the last year the superpowers have been panicking. Following a series of Iranian advances they have concluded that Iran may break through into southern Iraq, securing a quick victory. If this happens they believe that Islamic fundamentalists further afield might take heart and a new wave of enthusiasm for "Khomeinism" might spread across the region, threatening superpower interests.

Both Washington and Moscow have thus taken out "insurance" in case of an Iranian victory. Neither has abandoned Iraq but each is struggling to develop new links with Iran's rulers—it is this which accounts for Reagan's enthusiasm to supply arms to the Iranians and Moscow's rush to open trade links with Tehran.

The US fears that a boost for the fundamentalists could cause problems for its allies in pro-Western regimes such as Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt, Washington's key Arab ally. It would also certainly increase the confidence of Shi'ite fundamentalists in Lebanon, to the displeasure of Israel, the lynchpin of US policy in the Middle East. If the US is unable to exert influence on a victorious Iranian regime, Pentagon strategists believe there could be Iranian encouragement to the fundamentalist groups.

Above all, American strategists fear that unless they have established new links with Tehran, a victory for Iran could threaten the huge US investment in the oil fields of Arab Gulf states such as Saudi Arabia,

probably through an attempt to organise the large Shi'ite population of the Gulf states.

Moscow is equally paranoid. It has poured resources into Afghanistan in a partially successful effort to break the resistance of the Islamic Mujahidin. The victory of an Iranian government hostile to Moscow would lead to further problems in Afghanistan.

More important, unless there is an "understanding" with Moscow, a self-confident Iranian regime could again turn to the question of Russia's huge Muslim population. The recent riots in Kazakhstan have increased fears among Russia's rulers that religion could play a role in stimulating a separatist movement.

The effect of the superpowers' new relationship with Tehran has been to increase the Iranians' military advantage over Iraq. Iran has always had the asset of a larger population and now has some, at least, of the weaponry to match. Ironically, Iran has been able to use new supplies of US arms (through Israel) and Russian arms (through North Korea) to raise pressure on the Iraqis to a critical level.

An Iranian breakthrough near Basra could now spell real trouble for Iraq's Saddam Hussain. The superpower strategists hope that if he were to fall, their links with Tehran would be enough to guard imperialist interests in the region.

But this Machiavellian picture does not mean that the Iraqi and Iranian regimes do not have independent interests in the conflict. For Iraq's Saddam the war is a dreadful mistake, brought about largely by his own overconfidence. When he was appointed president in 1979 he had already been effective leader of the ruling Baath Party for ten years. During this period the party—representing the technocrats, military men and petit bourgeois traditionally drawn to Arab nationalism—had established a state capitalist system on the



model of Egypt, Algeria and Syria.

Nationalisation and strict control of the private sector were accompanied by massive development schemes financed by oil. This gave the appearance of rapid change, though much of Iraq remained extremely backward. At the same time Saddam repressed all opposition, fragmenting the Kurdish movement of the north and the Shi'ites of the south, and liquidating the leadership of the Iraqi Communist Party.

In 1979 the Iranian revolution removed the Shah. It also stimulated the hopes for change among the Kurds and the Shi'ites of Iraq. Saddam, with US and Arab approval, invaded Iran, confident that he could destroy the mass movement which had toppled the Shah as easily as he had crushed the opposition at home, so preventing a renaissance of the domestic opposition.

But within weeks Iraq's forces were bogged down and after a year of stalemate Iranian forces began to go onto the offensive. Since 1982 Iraqi troops have been retreating, inch by inch.

The war is a life and death struggle for Saddam and the Baath. In the manner of the other leaders of Arab nationalism—Egypt's Nasser, Syria's Assad and Algeria's Boumedienne—Saddam has bound together the party and the state. He is president, chief of the armed forces and effective party leader. Around him are gathered the "Takriti mafia"—the group of relations from his home town who monopolise the key positions.

No opposition is tolerated—at a hint of dissent in the party or the army, individuals or whole groups are simply eliminated. It is said that two years ago Saddam killed three senior army officers with his own gun.

The Iranians have failed to find an effective opposition around which they can organise resistance in Iraq. Saddam's reign of terror makes Iraqis disinclined to show dissent but it is also clear that in Iraq there is little affection for the Khomeini's alternative—an "Islamic Republic of Iraq".

Since 1979 the combination of mullahs, technocrats and businessmen who run Iran have engaged in an effort to destroy the movement which brought down the Shah and placed them in power. They long ago smashed the *shoras*—the workplace councils which were at the heart of the revolution.

They have also destroyed the women's movement and the national movements of Kurds, Turkoman and Baluch, and brutalised the left. Despite some factional differences the regime is committed to the full establishment of capitalist relations and to the redevelopment of links with Eastern and Western capitalism.

The Iranian regime has exploited the war to the full. It has played on religion and on Persian nationalism to create an atmosphere in which war with Iraq is a duty to God and country. Behind the military-religious smokescreen it has meanwhile murdered thousands of oppositionists. One result is that few Iraqis look toward



*Pawns in their game!*

Khomeini for liberation—indeed most reluctantly choose Saddam as the devil they know.

This ugly picture is unrelieved by any suggestion of a renewal of the workers' movement in Iraq or Iran. For the present the level of repression and the suffocating effects of nationalism are preventing the re-emergence of any coherent opposition. But when such a movement does reappear, will the left in either country recognise it and be prepared to identify whole-heartedly with workers' interests?

The Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) now condemns the war and calls for the overthrow of the Baathist regime. Alas, its enthusiasm for mass opposition to the

nationalists comes 20 years too late. In 1959, after ten years of rising struggle, the party led a mass movement capable of replacing the nationalists who had ousted the Iraqi monarchy. In the name of "democratic unity" it instead moved to a position of support for the new regime.

Repression of the left followed and, when in 1963 the Baathists took power for the first time, there was a massacre of ICP members and worker militants. The party had sacrificed the movement to the popular front.

Incredibly, the party learnt nothing from these bloody experiences. In 1970 it appealed to the Baath—which had seized power for the second time—to form a "progressive front". Saddam Hussain, exhibiting all his talents for opportunism, accepted the offer, and the party was given posts in the government. By the late 1970s, having used the ICP as cover for his campaign against the Kurds, Saddam was ready to unleash a new repression on the left and what remained of the party was destroyed.

Incredibly, today the party insists that its call for the overthrow of the Baathists be accompanied by the demand for "a patriotic democratic government". It is not too harsh a judgement on the ICP to assert that the plight of Iraqi workers and peasants lies in its own history of repeated folly.

In Iran, too, the left was paralysed by its Stalinist heritage. On the fall of the Shah the pro-Moscow Tudeh Party, the guerrillas of the Fedayeen and the "radical Muslims" of the Mujahidin, believing the country to be in the "democratic stage" of revolution, sought a front with the "progressive bourgeoisie". Khomeini was acclaimed as an "anti-imperialist" leader and when the war came, most of the left collapsed into the nationalist camp. Khomeini's reward for their backing was to murder thousands of activists.

Today the left opposes the war but has learnt only half the lesson that Stalinism—with its stages, fronts, blocs and alliances—must be rejected out of hand. The Tudeh still calls for "the formation of a united popular front", the Fedayeen for the formation of a "democratic-revolutionary government", while such is its lack of confidence in Iranian workers that the Mujahidin has collapsed into support for the Iraqi government.

In both countries there are now small groups of socialists seeking to establish a revolutionary tradition that views the independent action of the working class as the agency of change.

When mass movements reappear in Iran and Iraq they will have the opportunity to establish a new pole of attraction—meanwhile both countries stagger under the weight of dictatorship, war and, not least, the continuing cynicism of the superpowers. This is the price paid for the absence of the working class from the political arena—and for the errors of the past. ■

**Phil Marshall**

# Satan no more



**Anti-Khomeini demonstration**

LONG BEFORE they leaked out, the "secret arrangements" between those two sworn enemies—the governments of Iran and of the USA—were plain to anyone who listened closely.

In October, Hashemi Rafsanjani, speaker of the Iranian 'parliament' and the most powerful man in Iran after the Great Ayatollah himself, went on a state visit to Japan.

In an important speech he said: "Iranian leaders never pre-arranged to break with America; and had never decided to break with the West."

During the same trip to Japan, Rafsanjani got a secret message from President Reagan via Japanese Prime Minister Nakasone thanking the Iranian leader for his help in freeing hostages and promising a million dollars worth of American military equipment.

Rafsanjani was grateful. As he put it, rather modestly, in November: "For the provision of the complex tools of course we have always needed spare parts—and we still need them."

He means that Iran must keep up its war effort against Iraq. For that, its government is ready not just to make secret arms deals with the US government, but also, if necessary, to be seen to be protecting the valuable western interests in the Gulf. Thus Ali Khamenie, the president of the Islamic Republic has said, "As a country which has the longest coast in the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman area, we say our responsibilities in creating security in the area is greater, and we cannot allow the existence of any subversion around the area. This is not playing the role of gendarme in the area...we will continue to control the Straits of Hormuz, because otherwise our people and also people of other countries would not forgive us and international laws say this too."

But if both sides feel such an urge to build relations with each other, why do they have to hide it? The answer to this goes right back to the changes that took place in Iran in 1979 and the revolutionary forces which brought the present rulers of Iran to power. After the revolution the Western rulers thought that the new Iranian regime was not capable of holding on to power. Sooner or later the result would be a pro-Russian government.

At the same time, the new Islamic regime also wished to exploit the genuine anti-imperialist mood of the mass of workers and peasants who had overthrown the Shah, as a means of unifying the new state and diverting attention from the unfulfilled promises of the revolution. The sharpest expression of this was the hostage crisis in 1980, when the Islamic regime supported the seizure of the US embassy and its staff in Tehran.

This stand against US imperialism actually served as a cover for the regime to intensify its attacks on all opposition. It isolated the left, forcing sections of it to adapt to the regime. Those who did not adapt could be branded as traitors, pro-Zionist and pro-American. That same year Iraq invaded Iran starting the long and bloody Gulf War. The Iraqi government believed it could speed the fall of the Iranian regime. There were those in the West who thought so too, but they were wrong.

The war with Iraq began at a time when the Iranian army was in disarray because a majority of ordinary conscript soldiers had deserted the year before to join the ranks of the revolution. Until that point, efforts to reorganise it were regarded as suspicious. At the same time the urban population, especially the working class, were losing patience with the new regime and dis-

content was on the increase. But the war, which was supposed to help to topple Khomeini's regime, had the adverse effect. It rallied everybody behind the regime in the fight against the invasion of the country. The army could be rebuilt with public support. Genuinely mass revolutionary enthusiasm could be transformed into the 'revolutionary war effort'.

This is exactly what happened and has given the war, from the Iranian point of view, a partly popular character with which to withstand the superior military forces of Iraq. But this awful, pointless war need never have happened. One million Iranian young men have died believing they were giving their lives both for the revolution and "for God". They have died in vain.

When the war was started, the Iranian working class was far from defeated. There were still strikes. The shoras, the rank and file workers' committees, still existed. Workers' power existed, if only in embryo. It was the failure of the left to relate to this and campaign in the shoras to halt the war that led to the final decimation of the left itself. Worse, sections of the left approved the war effort. They too fell for Khomeini's rhetoric that the war was about expanding the revolution.

After six years of bloodletting, the Iraqi forces are showing signs of weakness and the Iranian army appear to have the upper hand. This is a change in fortune which has changed all previous calculations and has called for a series of realignments. Iran looks strong again. It is a force to be reckoned with again in the region. It can even begin to appear magnanimous. It can re-establish important diplomatic ties with its pro-western Arab neighbours.

There are a number of indications of this realignment: the apparent similarities of OPEC policy between Iran and the Gulf states and the sacking of Sheikh Yamani by the Saudi government to line up with Iranian oil policy. Furthermore there was the use of Saudi billionaire businessman, Khashshoggi, in the US-Israeli arms deals with Iran.

The Iranian leaders are also saying that they do not necessarily want a fundamentalist regime in Iraq after the downfall of Saddam Hussain and his regime.

This process of adaptation to western interests cannot be admitted in public. On the contrary, Rafsanjani has exploited America's embarrassment at the arms sale to Iran. But he has been careful to deny any link whatsoever with the Israelis. That would introduce far too great a contradiction with established Islamic rhetoric.

The contradiction between this rhetoric and reality is reported to be the cause of the leak of the American arms sales first appearing in a Lebanese Islamic fundamentalist newspaper which was fed up with the growing ties with the US. The intention was to embarrass the Iranian regime as well as the Americans. The exposure may well have provoked a crisis for the Islamic regime. Tragically, the left, both inside and outside Iran, is too weak and confused to be able to exploit it to its advantage. ■

**Ali Habibi**



# At the crossroads?



Face to face: the army and the people

**FOLLOWING THE** recent attempted coup in the Philippines *Julie Waterson* examines the forces of the left and *Alex Callinicos* contrasts the Philippines today with Portugal in 1976.

The much vaunted ceasefire between the army and the Communist guerrillas has been strained after the military gunned down 15 farmers at the end of last month.

The pro-Marcos military regime—mostly American trained—still remains intact and, as recent events have shown, continues only tactically to support Aquino.

Every coup and every resignation leaves her more at the mercy of the army chiefs.

Big business is seeking "stability".

This means compromising with or smashing the left opposition.

Aquino, herself a wealthy land owner, is desperately seeking a compromise. Sections of big business, and a large proportion of the army hierarchy, are impatient—they want the left obliterated.

The stakes are high. So what has been the response of left groups and organised workers to this situation?

**The National Democratic Front:** This umbrella organisation, founded in 1973 a year after Marcos announced martial law, demonstrates all the strengths and all the weaknesses of the left.

Its ten point programme unites the majority of the left. It is a programme of "national liberation".

It enshrines the politics of Stalinism, arguing for a "people's war against US imperialism and the local reactionaries".

Its first step towards socialism would be the establishment of a democratic coalition government—a "united front of both socialists and progressive nationalist capitalists".

Only then can socialism be achieved. The 21 million strong working class constitutes only *one part* of the struggle.

The NDF is still illegal. So too is the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP). Aquino gave an amnesty to the NDF's leadership, many of whom are CPP members or sympathisers, and recent nego-

tiations have brought the NDF onto the streets for the first time.

Its support is massive.

Government officials estimate it would get up to a quarter of *all* votes in an election. It has been barred from standing, because it advocates "class struggle".

Yet, despite the continued killing and imprisonment of left wingers and trade union activists, it continues to assure Aquino of its support.

**The Communist Party of the Philippines:** Undoubtedly the dominant political force on the left.

Unfortunately it is hamstrung by the politics of national liberation.

The CPP was a Maoist split from the Stalinist PKP in 1968. The CPP believed in "surrounding the cities from the countryside", and this led to the formation of their guerrilla wing, the New People's Army (NPA) in 1969.

The NPA is now estimated to have 120,000 fulltime soldiers. They now operate in over two thirds of the 72 provinces, controlling many areas and villages.

Although the indigenous peoples give support to the NPA, it is still a guerrilla fight. A fight based not on a strategy of worker's power, but on "people's power".

Many peasants and rural workers have been forced into the cities for work in the multi-national companies. The development of the industrial working class, and of accompanying struggle, has led the CPP into serious trade union work.

It is unfortunate that the CPP has carried forward the very politics it detested in 1968—Stalinism.

This means supporting the "progressive liberal-bourgeois" government (even if the aim, eventually, is a Popular Front).

It has everything to lose by its refusal to build an independent revolutionary alternative to Aquino.

**The Workers' Movement:** There are 21 million workers, half rural, the other half urban industrial, out of a population of 43 million.

There are over one million workers organised by militant national alliances, the KMU (the May First Movement) and the KMP (the Peasant Movement of the Philippines). These are affiliated to the NDF.

Strikes have increased by 60 percent under Aquino. Workers, who have fought long and bitter battles with their mostly foreign employers, have had a taste of their power. Their confidence, too, has increased.

Much organisational emphasis is placed on "people's strikes". They have become a feature of the Philippines.

They can be very effective. "People's strikes" over, for example, the building of a nuclear power station and more recently over the murder of KMU's leader Rolando Olalia, have paralysed whole areas for days.

But there are elements inside the workers' movement who argue the need for workers' councils—for the working class to be the central focus, not the "people". It is a positive and heartening sign.

The leader of the United Workers of Southern Mindanao (a heavily industrialised area vital for export goods) says: "The democratic coalition government would be run by the sectoral groups, who would elect their representatives from the bottom up and hold them absolutely accountable."

A recent observer in the Philippines noted that: "A significant number of workers approve of the concept of socialism based on workers' councils."

There is a desperate need in the Philippines to build an independent working class organisation—one which sees workers as the liberating force for all the exploited and oppressed.

The deep divisions that exist—for example, between the Muslims and Christians in the south—can be overcome through working class unity and revolutionary change.

This isn't achieved through guerrilla

warfare or popular coalition parties.

When the People's Party was formed last Autumn the CPP said it was "a continuation of our struggle in other arenas and other forms."

In fact it was an attempt to give Aquino

what she had been lacking—a coherent party structure with mass support. More worryingly, it was a further move away from the real agent of change, the working class. ■

Julie Waterson

## Portugal revisited?

The masses go into a revolution not with a prepared plan of social reconstruction, but with a sharp feeling that they cannot endure the old regime... The fundamental process of the revolution thus consists in the gradual comprehension by a class of the problems arising from the social crisis—the active orientation of the masses by a method of successive approximations. Leon Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*.

THE OVERTHROW of the Marcos regime in the Philippines in February 1986 was not a social revolution like October 1917, in which political power is transferred from one class to another. It rather resembled one of the changes in political regime in nineteenth-century France—especially 1830 and 1848—in which popular mobilisations had the effect of bringing about a reorganisation of the capitalist state, not its destruction.

The closest recent analogy to the Philippines' February revolution is the Portuguese coup of 25 April 1974, when the left wing officers of the Armed Forces Movement ended 50 years of fascist rule. In the case of the Philippines, Marcos fell because key sections of the armed forces, headed by defence minister Juan Ponce Enrile, and general Fidel Ramos, chief of national police, went over to the side of the masses mobilised behind Cory Aquino's presidential candidacy.

But, as the Portuguese case shows, the intervention of the masses into politics always opens up the possibility of a more radical change than a mere rearrangement of the form of capitalist rule. Working people take to the streets, as they did in Manila, in the belief that overthrowing the old regime will lead to concrete improvements in their conditions of life.

The problem facing the *new* regime is how to wean them away from this belief, to persuade workers to accept capitalist "normality", leaving politics to their rulers. Because the masses are reluctant to take this step, the result is a series of tests of strength, in which each side experiences both advances and retreats, until the final settling of accounts.

The first state in this process of "successive approximations" is a moment of good feelings between the classes. Marx, describing another February revolution, Paris in 1848, could have been writing about the cult of Cory in Manila after Marcos's fall:

"At that time all the royalists were transformed into republicans and all the millionaires of Paris into workers. The phrase that corresponded to this imaginary abolition of class relations was *fraternité*, universal fraternisation and brotherhood. This pleasant dissociation from class antagonisms, this

sentimental reconciliation of contradictory class interests, this visionary elevation above the class struggle, this *fraternité* was the real catchword of the February revolution... The Paris proletariat revelled in this magnanimous intoxication of fraternity."

Such also was the mood in the early days of Portugal's Revolution of the Flowers. But key sections of the ruling class — the big monopolies such as Champalimaud which initially welcomed the coup because it promised an end to the burdensome colonial wars in Africa — began to press for a restoration of order.

Their man was General Spínola, former colonial governor of Guinea-Bissau and head of the provisional government. He appealed for the "silent majority" to demonstrate in his support on 28 September 1974. The attempted coup failed: the workers' organisations mobilised massively in the streets and prevented Spínola's supporters from gathering. He was forced to resign.

### 'Marx could have been writing about Cory'

The right refused to accept defeat. A group of officers organised a second attempted coup on 11 March 1975. It was poorly organised and ill-supported, but the barracks of one left wing regiment, the RAL 1, was attacked. Once again, it was an enormous intervention by the workers' organisations, allied to left wing soldiers, which shattered the right's hopes.

There is an obvious analogy between these episodes and Enrile's attempt to stage a coup against the Aquino regime in November 1986. In both cases forces involved in the original revolution now sought to secure a balance of forces more favourable to the ruling class by overturning a government they believed to be too compromising towards the forces of "disorder"—in the case of the Philippines, the Communist Party-led National People's Army.

One of the points of drawing analogies, however, is to learn from their limitations. A crucial feature of the Portuguese revo-



Portugal 1974, the army and the masses united

lution was the development of independent working class organisation based on the factories of Lisbon. While the Communist Party had the allegiance of the majority of the organised working class, a significant minority supported various far left organisations—the centrist MES, Maoist UDP, quasi-Marxist, quasi-Guevarist PRP-BR. Moreover, the rank and file of the armed forces had themselves been radicalised, and large numbers of soldiers were willing to follow far left initiatives onto the streets.

The Philippines appears crucially different in this respect. Enrile failed, not because the left mobilised against him but because he failed to win the support of his co-conspirator against Marcos, Ramos, now army chief of staff. Working class activity, while considerable since the revolution, seems not to have thrown up the kind of independent workplace organisation which flourished in the factories of Lisbon after April 1974. And the domination of the CP over the left seems absolute.

And here one last crucial point of comparison must be made. Although the far left won a level of influence in Lisbon during the summer of 1975 unparalleled since Barcelona in 1936-7, they failed to develop a strategy capable of winning over the mass of workers from the CP. As a result, when pro-CP officers initiated a disastrous attempted coup on 25 November 1975, it was relatively easy for right wing commanders, in alliance with Mario Soares of the Socialist Party, to isolate the far left, restore discipline in the armed forces, and lay the basis of the austerity-ridden bourgeois democracy which Portugal has become.

Reformism—in the shape of Soares and the CP—made Portugal safe for capitalism. The party of order in the Philippines is far from finished. Unless a revolutionary alternative to the CP begins to develop, and to challenge its hegemony over the left, then the working class of the Philippines may pay a bloody price. ■

Alex Callinicos





# The forgotten lessons

Open Letter to the Party  
Kuron and Modzelewski  
Bookmarks £2.50

THE NATURE and the dynamics which govern the "Communist" countries remain central questions for the left.

Do the policies of state ownership of property, of centralised planning instead of market forces, and of a bureaucratic group whose privileges do not rest on private ownership provide sufficient evidence that these regimes are either socialist, or at the least better than western capitalisms?

The SWP's argument is that these countries can only be understood as state capitalist regimes because the form of ownership does not resolve the question "does the working class own and control the means of production?"

In 1965, two Polish dissidents published their *Open Letter to the Party*. Rooting their analysis of Poland firmly within Marxism, Kuron and Modzelewski drew three conclusions.

First, Poland is a class society in which the ruling class (what they refer to as the "central political bureaucracy") controls and determines the aims of production. These class goals are achieved against the interests of the Polish people.

Second, they offered a clear and relevant account for the necessity of revolutionary politics rooted within the activity of the working class to overthrow the class goals of production.

Thirdly, the corollary of a "victorious anti-bureaucratic revolution" in Poland is only the beginning of the struggle against international capitalism.

The book begins by dispelling the myth that state ownership through nationalisation amounts to socialism. Speaking to a Polish audience, the authors argue that public ownership in the West is not indicative of any degree of socialism and the fundamental problem is, who controls the state?

The bureaucracy in Poland constitutes a ruling class which pursues its own class goal through its control of the means of production.

The goal of the Polish ruling class is that of any capitalist, which is to accumulate capital. The need to accumulate is forced upon any individual capitalist corporation in order to survive in a competitive system where the least productive will go under.

The imperative to accumulate is forced upon Polish capital by the competitive pressures of the world market. The pressures of international rivalry compel the bureaucracy to expand its military apparatus and capital stock.

For the bureaucracy the consumption (the welfare, cultural and recreational

needs) of Polish workers is a cost of production which has to be minimised.

Investment in the agricultural production of foodstuffs has been kept at the minimum. Shortages are the rule in Poland while the agricultural surplus is exported to finance the costs of accumulation.

Although the mechanisms and institutions through which the Polish ruling class operates may differ from their Western counterparts, the drive to accumulate finds expression in the class goal of "production for the sake of production".

The term was taken from Marx who used it to define the singular characteristic of capitalist production.

The drive to increase the physical stock of capital and its value in the planning stages is the source of the periodic crises which afflict the economy. The relations of production between capital and labour lie at the roots of the crisis.

It cannot be resolved by reforms (decentralisation, managerial socialism) for "the economic crisis cannot be overcome within the framework of the present production relations... A solution is possible only through the overthrow of prevailing production and social relations. *Revolution is a necessity for development.*"

The class whose emancipation provides the precondition for the emancipation of other oppressed groups is the working class.

In practice, only the working class can unite and lead a struggle to overthrow the

bureaucracy. The reforms conceded by the bureaucracy in response to the 1956 revolts in Poland intensified the crisis in the mid-sixties.

This time round, the crisis

"forces the working class to come out against the system in defence of the present level of its material and spiritual existence... Today, at a time when the system is going through a general crisis, the interest of the working class lies in revolution."

The general crisis is not unique to Poland alone. Crises have always been international in nature. The threat of intervention by either superpowers can only be countered by seeking support from the working class of other countries, including the Russian working class.

A successful workers' revolution in any one country only lays the foundations for "an organised international revolutionary movement conscious of its goals..."

"Lenin, Trotsky and the other Bolshevik leaders realised that only another revolutionary power could be a genuine ally of the proletarian dictatorship."

They conclude with a revolutionary programme based on workers' councils. The vision of socialism which rests on working class power is a negation of everything which is Poland today.

The subsequent history of Poland bore out the prognoses of the authors. The crisis of which they wrote in the sixties was postponed by massive borrowing from Western banks.

Production expanded rapidly but the roots of the problem remained. The crisis reasserted itself in the late seventies with greater intensity.

Working class resistance in Poland brought the regime to its knees in 1980-81 with the establishment of Solidarity.

Every section of Polish society was drawn into struggle against the regime. Solidarity was a focus for the dreams and aspirations of all the Polish people.

Unfortunately, Kuron and Modzelewski had forgotten the conclusions they had drawn in 1965. In 1980-81, they fell into the very trap they had warned against.

Instead of arguing for a revolutionary programme to develop and lead the working class forward, they became exponents for a self-limiting role of Solidarity.

Perhaps the task in 1980-81 proved too much for two individuals. Whatever private reasons they may have had for their failure, the *Open Letter* is a brilliant work whose conclusions we can carry out in practice when working class struggle in Britain erupts to the point it did in Poland. ■

Lawrence Wong



*Solidarity—mass popular support but self-limiting*

# Shocking red

MORE THAN any other artist in history, Eisenstein developed theory and a way of working that was in line with the revolutionary ideas of Karl Marx.

He made a series of films in the twenties, including *October*, *Strike*, *Battleship Potemkin* and *The Old and the New* that not only dealt with central events and issues of the Russian revolution, but actually became tools in the struggle to consolidate working class power in Russia after 1917.

To begin to understand Eisenstein's work, we need to be clear about the conditions that nurtured his talent. His one trip to Hollywood in 1930 convinced him that he couldn't work in a commercial framework.

Producer David Selznick liked the script Eisenstein offered him, but he couldn't use it:

"I have just finished reading the Eisenstein adaptation of *An American Tragedy*. It was for me a memorable experience. The most moving script I have ever read. When it was finished, I was so depressed I wanted to reach for the Bourbon bottle. As entertainment I don't think it has one chance in a hundred."

In capitalist society, artists can play a very limited number of roles. Like commercial architects or ad directors they can join the search for flash new images for ageing institutions or products; like pulp writers or soap opera producers they can rework old stories of murder and marital breakdown to sell as "entertainment".

Occasionally the more thoughtful artist can use these formats to cast doubts and raise issues, but broadly speaking they can only produce what the capitalist is willing to pay for.

The Russian revolution briefly overturned this situation. After 1917 the Russian economy was coming under the control of the workers. When production is beginning to be turned towards need and not profit, artistic and cultural needs don't have to take a second place.

Despite the strains of the civil war and the desperate shortages there was an outburst of popular cultural activity. Mass active democracy was an immense inspiration for artists used to the vicious elitism of the tsarist empire, and for the first time they could begin to play a central role in the production process.

Meanwhile, the long-suppressed skills and creativity of the workers could be unleashed on the problems of planning and design.

Eisenstein was working at a time when he could say with conviction, "at the intersection of nature and Industry stands Art".

At a time of frantic experiment and

popular involvement in the arts, the staid old formulas broke down.

Painters like El Lissitzky moved out of the galleries and used the walls of public buildings or the sides of trains as canvasses. Poets like Mayakovsky wrote political essays in rhyme and pasted them up in shop windows. Stage directors like Meyerhold turned theatres into modernist music halls, intermarrying the latest European art trends with popular Russian satire.

Eisenstein started out in the theatre in 1920. He brought to it his experiences with the Red Army, high level engineering skills, and an "intellectual conversion to Marxism".

Such a combination was ideal for those years of experiment.

What Eisenstein hated most about the old theatre was escapism, the separation of "art" from "real life",

"for if you can get your enjoyment through fantasy, who is going to find in real experiences what can be had without moving from the theatre seat."

He preferred the idea of theatre as a series of shocks that could shake the



Sergel Eisenstein

audience into self-consciousness. He was not after a dramatic reality that would reflect the outside world, he wanted the world to flood onto the stage.

His productions featured trapeze artists and elaborately engineered cubist costumes. He used gunpowder blasts and back-projected films in productions that were not just plays or circuses but an explosive combination of elements from all kinds of entertainment. He called them "attractions".

Film turned out to be the medium which Eisenstein could best use to channel his aesthetic energies to the service of the revolution. To this day his first films—*Strike* and *Battleship Potemkin*—are fresh and shocking.

They are not conventionally developed

## ART and the RUSSIAN revolution

stories but a series of images that collide to produce meaning.

Workers' control of the factories and offices, of the central structures of society, gave artists like Eisenstein the confidence to try and control the way their art worked on the emotions of their audiences.

Far from being the mouthpiece of a muse, passively accepting inspiration from above, he saw himself as "a calculator of stimulants, carefully plotting the course of the artistic missile".

To Eisenstein the study of images and the way they interrelate was a science like any other. And his overall aim was clear:

"The work of art...is first of all a tractor, which works to plough up the psychology of the spectator in a given class direction."

At his most radical, in *October*, made in 1926-7, Eisenstein had completely abandoned the conventional plot structure. He was using a series of interacting visual "shocks" to make political points, not to tell a story.

So, a series of solemn images of god figures from around the world, all claiming to be the one "Universal Godhead", makes a mockery of world religion. At the same time the sequence never fails to raise a laugh.

Eisenstein understood that it is only under capitalism—in which most people have no creative input into society—that learning has to be dull. When the producers can also be the planners, understanding becomes a key to ever greater control. Eisenstein saw the process of understanding as being the highest form of ecstasy.

After finishing *October*, Eisenstein spent a year planning what could have been his ultimate achievement; a popular film of Marx's densest work *Das Kapital*, it was only the rapidly changing atmosphere in Russia that kept him from attempting what must be the most bizarre and adventurous project in film history.

Despite the growing power of Stalin, Eisenstein managed to turn his next project to his own advantage. *The Old and the New* shows exactly how a revolutionary upheaval can break down distinctions between entertainment, education and practical advance. The film is like a cartoon epic, a marxist textbook and a technical instruction manual rolled into one. One of its themes is the way technology lightens the load of peasant labour. A central sequence shows a new mechanized milk-churn being delivered to a peasant commune. The local communist delegate



shows how the churn works. As the pistons turn and the milk spins, the peasants' faces are shown in tense anticipation. The pace quickens and finally the separated milk spurts skywards from a pipe. The peasants laugh and shout in appreciation. The clear sexual imagery is not gratuitous. Both on the screen and in the real world, the new milk churn spells an increase in fertility for the peasants, and relief from tedious labour.

Films like *The Old and the New* were seen by peasants and workers all over Russia. They played a major role in explaining basic revolutionary lessons.

*Battleship Potemkin* helped bring the significance of the revolution home to hundreds of thousands of workers internationally.

The British government reckoned it was dangerous enough to ban. When it opened in New York, thousands of police were called in to avert a riot.

The film was cited in court as the cause of a mutiny on a French war ship sailing off Malaysia in the 1950s.

The film is both a visual statement of the logic of revolutionary action and an emotional call to solidarity. Few artists have achieved that combination.

Like the revolution itself, Eisenstein's experiment was crushed by Stalinism. Stalin censored Part 2 of *Ivan the Terrible* and banned Part 3, but the destruction of workers' democracy by the civil war and Stalin's bureaucracy had already taken its toll on Eisenstein's work.

By the 1930s Eisenstein's commitment to promoting understanding through "discordant visual shocks" had given way to quieter ideas of harmony and counterpoint within individual shots and scenes.

Eisenstein's early concept of "montage"—that conflicting visual shocks could force the audience to consider contradictions in the real world—was over simple. But it does bear striking similarities in practice to some of Marx's ideas of a dialectical understanding.

Towards the end of his life Eisenstein became more interested in the dynamic of the work of art for its own sake, in other words he moved back towards a bourgeois, classical view of film.



A still from *Ivan the Terrible*

Artistic interaction with the interests of the masses disappeared as mass democracy itself was smashed. But Eisenstein's theories have a funny way of bouncing back whenever working class struggle becomes widespread.

In Germany in the Twenties and Thirties Brecht developed a popular theatre that crossed the boundaries between entertainment and instruction, epic and music hall, he too tried to bury the traditional "storyline" and create an "intellectual theatre". During the late 60s in France, film makers like Godard rediscovered the Russian urge to involve the audience in an intellectual process by leading them along the same creative path as the artists themselves had travelled.

Such "avant-garde" techniques do become valid when workers are involved in struggle to the extent of asking questions about class power.

But any artist who applies Eisenstein's theories mechanically now won't find an audience.

In fact the tired old formats of escapist fantasy and monotonous storytelling that fill our screens at the moment are appropriate at a time of demoralisation and

passivity amongst workers.

Equally, the kind of artistic freedom that progressive artists could have after the revolution just isn't available now.

The Russian workers' state pumped vast resources into independent cultural organisation. Neil Kinnock has recently shown that the Opposition is not prepared to suggest even a Ministry of Culture with any real powers.

Despite earlier promises he has ensured that under any future Labour government, broadcasting will remain firmly under the control of the Home Office.

The debacle over the *Real Lives* documentary, and the current smothering of the "Secret Society" series, shows that Liberal and left wing film makers are firmly on the defensive.

They are forced to beg money off a basically hostile state to make programmes in conventional forms that can only snipe at the system.

It is only a widespread fightback that will sustain innovative and exciting culture that can play a role in changing society. It is only then that Eisenstein's heritage can be taken up once more. ■

Chris Nineham

REVOLUTIONARY CLASSICS

## Britain on the brink of revolution 1919

by *Charlie Rosenberg*

In 1919, a year of mass strikes and mutinies — even the London police were on strike — prime minister Lloyd George told the trade union leaders: '... in our opinion we are at your mercy.' This book looks at just how close Britain came to revolution.

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by *James Connolly*



On 12 May 1916 James Connolly was executed for his role in the Irish Easter Rising. Yet his part in the rising was an enigma, since this, his best-known book, was a challenge to the nationalists alongside whom he was to fight and die: an account of Ireland's struggle for freedom which clearly outlined the class struggles beneath its surface. It is the second in Bookmarks' 'revolutionary classics' series, with a new introduction by Kieran Allen.

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# Whither feminism?

## Is the Future Female? Troubled Thoughts on Contemporary Feminism

Lynne Segal  
Virago £4.95

## Divided Loyalties: Dilemmas of Sex and Class

Anne Phillips  
Virago £5.50

"I WANTED to write this book because I was disturbed by what has been emerging as the public face of feminism in the eighties." So writes Lynne Segal in the introduction to her new book.

She speaks, I am sure, for many women who still call themselves socialist feminists and who consider themselves part of the women's movement.

Their political ideas have often been eclipsed by a strident, vocal and very confident form of radical feminism, which denies that men or male political processes have anything to do with women's liberation. Writers who attract a wide readership like Dale Spender, Mary Dale or Robin Morgan preach the value of so-called "female virtues" such as pacifism or maternal love.

The problem, so the argument goes, with the drive to war is that it is symbolic of male aggression. The problem with the values of capital is that they are not female values. And at the heart of the problems is, according to the radical feminists, the power of the penis—man's ultimate weapon of violence which allows all men to dominate all women.

This idea leads radical feminists to see campaigns against male violence, rape and pornography as absolutely central to the fight to overthrow male oppression. "Porn is the theory, rape the practice," as the slogan goes.

Lynne Segal deals with all these arguments in *Is the Future Female?* and effectively destroys them. She shows that the division in this society is not simply one of gender; that there is no such thing as a fixed "male" or "female" sexuality; that heterosexuality is not necessarily a compromise of feminist politics.

She dismisses the notion that rape and pornography is primarily about male power. In the process she develops some interesting insights on the question.

"The billion dollar pornography industry has flourished in the West precisely as women's economic independence (a far cry, of course, from women's economic equality) has increased, and the power and control of men over women has declined."

Yet the complete separatists didn't arrive

out of thin air. Their increased influence from the mid to late seventies onwards, the increasingly bitter arguments over lesbianism and heterosexuality, the gulf between the women's movement and working class women, are all the results of the inability of the women's movement to become more than a movement for the consciousness raising of (usually middle class) women; and of the massive concessions which socialist feminists have made towards radical feminist theory.

This is particularly true in terms of the theory of patriarchy. As Lynne Segal puts it: "In the early seventies, radical socialist politics of some sort were integral to a feminist outlook in Britain."

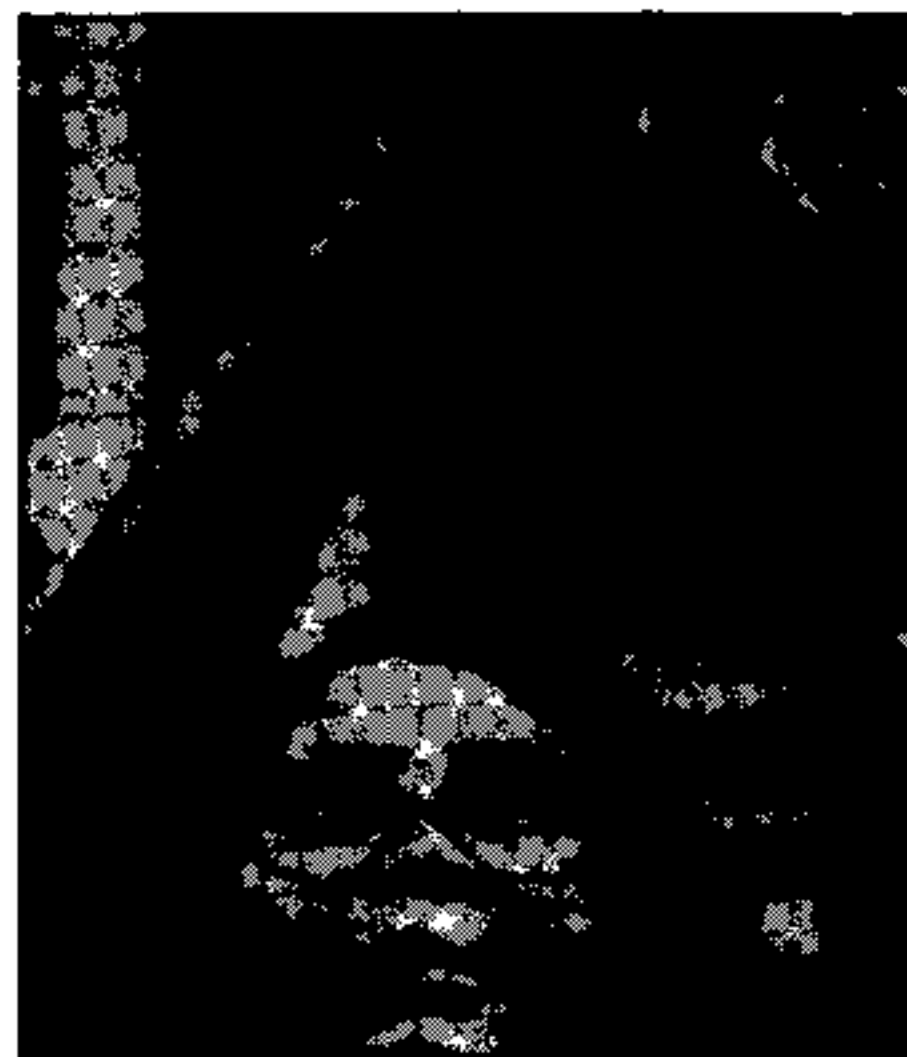
A few years later, however, things have changed. "By the end of the decade many if not most socialist feminists were convinced that patriarchy was at least as basic a structure as capitalism."

So what oppresses women? Is it gender or is it class? Lynne Segal says it is both: "The structures and ideologies of male dominance and the requirements of production for profit have been braided together."

Men therefore become at least as much of an enemy as capital—and of course a rather more visible and attackable one. So the emphasis becomes more and more on men as the enemy, rather than capital.

The converse of this emphasis is that all women have something in common. Hence separate organisation for women. Patriarchy theory is already well on the path to total separatism—and there is an increasingly unbridgeable gap between it and ideas of fighting class society.

It is this unbridgeable gap which causes Anne Phillips so many problems in *Divided*



Men or capital her enemy?

*Loyalties*. She sheds many of the concerns of Lynne Segal and wants to assert socialist feminist politics, so she tries to deal with the problems of sex and class.

The difficulty is we never receive a clear definition of what class is. Marx is rejected, as are sociological definitions. Conclusions remain up in the air. Take this example:

"As far as class is concerned, it is crucial to note how much it has changed, how far from obvious is the middle versus working class divide. But tracing its course through the last two hundred years we see differences dissolve and then recompose; what class means for women has altered almost beyond recognition; that it still means a lot is beyond our doubt."

This tells you precisely nothing about women, class or the relationship between the two. Yet what is obvious about Britain today is that the class divide is as deep and as fundamental as ever.

And there is a real difference in class interests between the women workers who now compose nearly half the workforce and women managers (whose number has doubled in recent years) or the professional women who employ young working women as nannies.

These class differences are referred to guiltily, but Anne Phillips cannot admit that they are central to our lives. To do so would be to deny the validity of a movement of all women, or to minimise the importance of middle class women's oppression. "And for those who had been dogged by the ambiguities in being both middle class and socialist, it was part of the appeal of women's politics that it seemed to sweep these away. Speaking for myself, I can remember the extraordinary relief of discovering that I too was oppressed."

This sums up the weakness of politics based simply on oppression. Everything is reduced to the individual's problems, not to the way in which working class women, as part of the exploited class can overcome their oppression.

The conclusions of both books demonstrate this weakness in another way: the answer for feminists (reluctantly, of course) is the Labour Party. Lynne Segal was one of the authors of *Beyond the Fragments* in the late seventies. It was an attempt to build a loose alliance of the fragments of socialist, feminist and campaign groups. She now admits that it didn't work.

So Labour is the only alternative. This conclusion sums up a number of political features of Britain today: the retreat of the left and tacit acceptance of Kinnockism; the pessimism over genuine working class struggle; the failure to build any revolutionary alternative to Labour; and perhaps most strikingly the poverty of most theory on the left today.

After reading both books you can't help feeling that socialist feminism has nowhere to go. ■

Lindsey German



## Left in Focus

**Deadly Parallels—Film and the Left in Britain 1929-39**  
Bert Kogenkamp  
*Lawrence and Wishart £6.95*

ON THE 27 August 1939 members and supporters of the Sussex County Communist Party were treated to a special showing of the CP election film *Peace and Plenty*.

The film was considered too good to be left till the actual election before getting a screening. It had even been favourably reviewed in *The Times*. Elizabeth Young writing in the Labour paper *Tribune* called it the "Film that flays Chamberlain".

The film climaxes with Communist Party Chairman Harry Pollitt delivering a speech.

Unfortunately for Harry Pollitt, the film makers and the Sussex County Communist Party, the Soviet Union had signed a non-aggression pact with Nazi Germany only a few days before the special screening. This might not have made the film any less impressive a viewing experience, but it did rather make obsolete most of Pollitt's political analysis in his keynote speech.

The unpredictability of world events was just one of the problems faced by British Political film makers in the 30s. There were many others, most immediately there was the problem of money.

Money to produce left wing films was very hard to come by. Even when the film was made there was the problem of distribution to be contended with. Commercial cinema just didn't want to know. The Tories had no such problems.

As early as 1925 the Tories used cinema vans to enliven their electioneering. These vans could screen short electioneering films in broad daylight.

By 1930 the Tories could boast the ownership of twelve daylight vans with another twelve vans available for the transportation of projection equipment to be used at indoor meetings. The Labour Party had none. The Labour leadership deemed cinema propaganda too expensive.

That left wing documentaries and news-reels were made and distributed to working class audiences during the 30s was no mean achievement and it is to the small group of film makers—working in organisations like Kino and the Workers Film and Photo League—who did succeed that this book is dedicated.

Thanks to them we actually have film of the 30s anti-fascist struggles and the hunger marches.

It is also thanks to them that Soviet films like *Battleship Potemkin* ever got seen.

The coming of the Second World War effectively brought an end to left wing film making. When Labour came to power in 1945 the need for an oppositional cinema seemed to have gone.

Something of the tradition of radical film making was revived with the student revolts of the late 60s and the resurgence of working class militancy in the early 1970s.

Today one can see something of the tradition living on during the Miners Strike of 1984-85.

Even in the age of Channel 4 there is still a place for the work of the politically committed film maker. If the struggle is big enough they might even be able to reach a large audience. ■

Peter Court

## Monty the Murderer

**Monty: The Making of a General 1887-1942**  
Nigel Hamilton  
*Coronet £4.95*

**Monty: Master of the Battlefield 1942-1944**  
Nigel Hamilton  
*Coronet £4.95*

**Monty: The Field Marshal 1944-1976**  
Nigel Hamilton  
*Coronet £15*

Montgomery's importance, so Hamilton argues in this massive three volume biography, lay in his absolutely single-minded devotion to the waging of war and in his obsessive pursuit of military professionalism. His personality, Hamilton admits, was seriously twisted by his almost manic devotion to the army, but he was to prove his usefulness to it.

After World War 1, the huge British military machine was quickly dismantled. The army was transformed into little more than an Imperial police force, officered by men whose main interests were hunting and polo. Montgomery stood aside from the prevailing atmosphere. He was fanatically committed to preparing himself for the waging of modern war.

When that war came in 1939 the army suffered defeat after defeat. Only when Montgomery took command of the Eighth Army in Egypt in 1942 did this change.

The British Chiefs of Staff had developed a strategy that had the concept of attrition at its centre. However, unlike WW1, they were determined that this attrition would take place not on the Western Front, but on the Eastern, because they had no confidence in the ability of the Anglo-American armies to successfully invade France until the German army had been seriously weakened.

While the most terrible conflict raged in Russia, the British concentrated their efforts in the Mediterranean, which it was believed would help weaken Germany and also guarantee British supremacy in an area vital to the Empire.

The dreadful war of attrition in the east exceeded in horror that of the Western Front in 1914-18. Moreover, the Russian generals showed a lack of concern for the lives and welfare of their troops that makes British WW1 generals look almost humanitarian. They have escaped the same condemnation because much of the British left was and still is taken in by the rhetoric of "the Great Patriotic War"!

According to Hamilton, Montgomery's greatness as a battlefield commander was proven by his crushing defeat of the German forces at the Battle of Normandy. What is most interesting in the period after Normandy is the conflict that developed between Montgomery and the American generals.

Britain had declined into the junior partner in the alliance, by now America's contribution in both men and material was overwhelming and accordingly it was Eisenhower and the Americans who took the decisions.

After the war Montgomery became chief of the Imperial General Staff under the Labour government. He was the most vocal advocate of a standing British Army commitment on the European mainland and played a major part in preventing any reduction in the length of military service in 1948. Predictably, he was a staunch supporter of NATO and from 1951 until 1953 served as Deputy Supreme Commander.

The numbers killed and maimed in conventional conflict this century are huge and far exceed those killed by nuclear weapons and yet opposition to militarism is focused almost entirely on the latter. Indeed, the Labour Party today actually promises to increase the level of conventional armaments, providing more employment for men like Montgomery.

As for Montgomery, when he lay on his deathbed, he complained of being unable to sleep because of the memory of all the men he'd killed. ■

John Newsinger

## Roots of resilience

**Solidarity Forever (100 Years of Kings Cross ASLEF)**  
John Rose  
*Kings Cross ASLEF £2.95*

THIS slim compilation has a good stab at telling the story of one branch of one union

in one workplace over a hundred year period.

While early material is necessarily taken from branch and union records, the bulk of the book is based on reminiscences of train drivers who have been based at Kings Cross station for up to 40 years or more.

It is from these oral records that some of the flavour of union organisation on the railways comes across most. Best of all are the observations of footplateman, Charlie Mayo, a man with a talent for drawing out the character of his workmates.

Throughout, the emphasis is on the rank-and-file traditions of the branch, rare enough in an "official" anniversary publication.

In recent years the branch has done some excellent work, particularly the blacking of *The Sun* during the miners strike, and has become something of an irritant to the leadership of both ASLEF and the NUR.

However, although the branch has an impressive record over the years, the prevailing impression is of a place, like many others on the railways and elsewhere, where trade union loyalties are dyed in the wool but where sectional interests still have a firm hold.

Worth a shuftie, if only to see what "resilience" means and how deep are its roots. ■

Jack Robertson

## Patronising clap-trap

**Joe the Engineer**

Chuck Wachtel

Marion Boyers £9.95

JOE THE ENGINEER is a water-meter inspector. He spends his days skulking around people's basements and his nights skulking around Mary's Bar accompanied on both occasions by his workmate Joe

Flushing Avenue.

*Joe the Engineer* is not a book about the middle or upper classes which is certainly a point in its favour. It is however a book about what Chuck Wachtel regards as the working class.

Chuck Wachtel is not a socialist. He is a novelist though and as we all know novelists tend not to write their books alongside others in offices or on factory shop floors.

Instead they tend to write in varying degrees of isolation in varying degrees of comfort or discomfort depending on their last success or failure. Unfortunately the consequences of Wachtel's isolation are only too apparent throughout this book.

Joe's problems are at all times portrayed as intellectual and psychological rather than social. We never meet any of his workmates except for Joe Flushing Avenue with whom he has a love-hate relationship—sort of Harry Cross and Ralph from *Brookside* without the humour.

One of the few workers we do meet, a retired underground guard who now spends his days playing with a model railway and who seemed to impress Joe, could only advise him that "you'll be alright if you do it for yourself".

Wachtel's attitude to women I found appallingly patronising. Rosie, Joe's wife, uses sex with him to secure a holiday while other women meekly succumb to Joe's charms, charms I certainly missed, as Rosie sits dutifully at home.

The whole thing reminded me of a fairly poor soap opera like for instance *The Waltons* which Wachtel makes a vague attack upon at one point. He argues that programmes such as *The Waltons* along with TV commercials and quiz shows cheapen the lives of those that watch them. Pseudo intellectual clap-trap like *Joe the Engineer* does little better.

Unless your only other option is watching *The Waltons* I shouldn't bother with this book. ■

Lee Humber

## Cardboard incompetents

**THE SISTERS**

Robert Littell

Pan £2.95

THIS IS supposedly "the ultimate thriller". "The American Le Carre" blares the cover. In fact it is nothing of the sort. It is another cold war conspiracy, and, worse still, another Kennedy assassination conspiracy (whoops! I've given away the "surprise" ending).

Le Carre's plausibly mundane eccentrics have become cardboard grotesques. More importantly for socialist readers, though Le Carre may be deeply reactionary, he has enough of a materialist grasp of the world to project utter disgust at a system that allows his machinations and conspiracies to occur.

Littell is far more concerned with minor psychological motivation, so any wider social vision is lost.

His plot is so unlikely that characters are lead to exclaim: "This is more like the plot of a spy novel than life". Pauses are filled with turgid attempts at philosophy, lurid sex and mindless violence.

Finally, the spies are simply incompetent. A KGB agent posing as an American talks about Lenin's wife and the Steppes, thus giving himself away, and he is claimed to be the best his school ever produced!

If you want to know about spies, conspiracies and thrills read Le Carre. The best that can be said about *The Sisters* is that it's easily readable and soon read. ■

Ken Olende

### BOOKCLUB LIST Spring Quarter

**Labour in Irish History**

by James Connolly

Newly published edition of Connolly's classic essays on the development of the republican movement in Ireland.

£2.50 (normally £2.95)

**1919: Britain on the Brink of Revolution**

by Chanie Rosenberg

New account of a year which our rulers would like to forget when powerful strikes, flying pickets of policemen(!) and soldiers' strike committees reduced the government to impotence.

£1.90 (normally £2.25)

**Let History Judge**

by Roy Medvedev

Classic account of the Russia of the Moscow Trials.

£2.95 (normally £5.95)

**Twilight of the Comintern**

by E.H. Carr

Definitive account of the Stalinised Communist Parties from the Third Period to the Popular Front.

£7.60 (normally £9.50)

**The Panda's Thumb**

by Stephen J Gould

Brilliantly written book on natural history: chapters include "Women's Brains", "Wide Hats and Narrow Minds", "Were Dinosaurs Dumb?", "Sticking Up for Marsupials" and "A

**Quahog is a Quahog"**

£2.95 (normally £3.95)

**AIDS: the Deadly Epidemic**

by Carim & Hancock

Detailed yet accessible account of an issue which is likely to remain a focus of argument.

£2.40 (normally £2.95)

**A Lost Left**

by D Howell

Useful account of McClean, Connolly and John Wheatley.

£7.20 (normally £8.95)

**Death in Leningrad**

by David Lear

In which the British and Russian states compete to see who has the most devious and untrustworthy spies.

£2.95 (normally £3.95)

**Empire of the Sun**

by J.G. Ballard

Novel set during the fall of Shanghai and its occupation by the Japanese in the Second World War.

£1.95 (normally £2.50)

**The Politics of Irish Freedom**

by Gerry Adams

Concise exposition of Sinn Fein's politics.

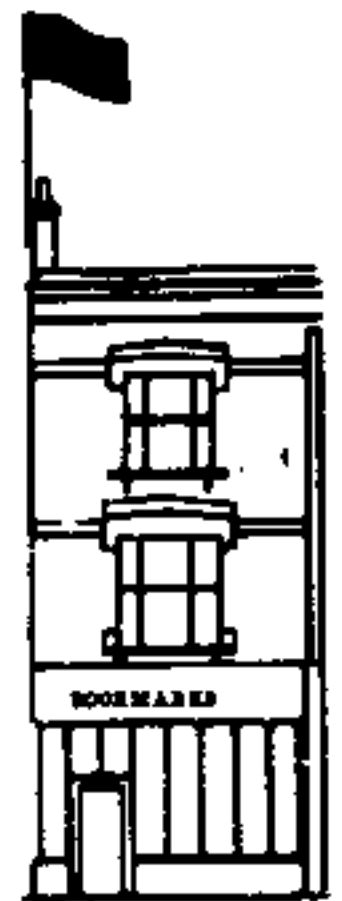
£3.10 (normally £3.95)

**Lenin's Political Thought**

by N Harding

Excellent and painstaking account of the development of Lenin's political theory.

£11.90 (normally £15)



**BOOKMARKS, 265 Seven Sisters Road, Finsbury Park, London N4 2DE.**



## Just who benefits?

IRENE BRUEGEL'S letter (January *SWR*) stands reality on its head. The bosses simply did not recruit women into clerical jobs to bring down wages of some fantastically privileged group of male office workers.

Before the First World War most office workers laboured in very small work units, suffering the most appalling conditions of hours and pay.

Of course, there were a few well paid personal secretaries. They used to be called "typewriters" after the newly invented machine. Women were said to be too delicate to withstand the strain of typing for twelve to fourteen hours a day!

Women entered the clerical workforce on a mass scale because the boss class was forcing millions of young male clerical workers to fight and die in the war. The bosses had to hire women in order to sustain industry in the midst of war. And on the same terrible pay.

If you look at the history of almost any clerical trade union, APEX, CPSA etc, the same general pattern emerges. Before 1914 there was a small clerks union. After the war, particularly around 1920, men and women clerical workers joined up in their thousands to fight for decent conditions.

One reason these first attempts at organising usually failed was because nice middle class feminist ladies, who had learnt all the wrong politics from the recent fight for women's suffrage, set about organising "women-only" clerical and secretarial unions.

Clerical pay stayed low until after the Second World War when male and female workers together amalgamated dozens of small trade unions into united workers organisations that were able to fight and win better pay and conditions and recruit workers as workers not as women or men or black or white, etc.

The real upsurge in white collar organisation came in the 1960s and only when the class as a whole was on the move. The first major Civil Servants strike came in the wake of the miners' victory in 1972.

Let us lay for once and for all the overblown myth of overpaid male NGA members somehow benefitting from women's oppression.

I wish Irene had been with me on the gates at Wapping one freezing cold February morning

last year. Off the scab coach came two naive school leavers from Gravesend. The girl was to start her first day doing *my* job. The boy was starting as a library assistant doing the clerical job of my striker colleague standing next to me on the picket line!

We were both women strikers, both earning before the strike more than £180 a week. The fresh faced youths were innocently happy to get their jobs at £80 a week. Just who benefits from this?

Murdoch and all the big bosses must laugh themselves sick everytime some feminist raises the argument about well paid men benefitting from women's oppression.

One final point about Wapping. Perhaps if Irene and other feminists had come down on our pickets more often they would realise that it isn't just male printworkers who are sexist. Some of us have had to argue long and hard for a whole year against the sexist songs sung (in effect, against themselves) by women strikers and printers' wives.

It is the women who sing the loudest those appalling lyrics like: "Margaret Thatcher's got one, Rupert Murdoch is one ..." The only way to defeat sexism is to be challenging those ideas as a socialist totally committed and fighting alongside even the worst racist and sexist worker. Socialists can't stand back and wait for a pristine politically pure class struggle.

Irene is correct when she says we can't simply say to women that they must wait for a bigger slice of the cake. But we don't want just a bigger cake for women. We fight for the working class as a whole to take over the entire bakery. And the only way to capture the bakery is by being there in the midst of every messy struggle arguing the way forward, challenging every rotten idea but actually getting your hands dirty in the here and now. ■

**Sherri Yanowitz**  
SOGAT Clerical striker  
Kilburn SWP

## One pot or two?

I WOULD like to raise a question that arises from Pete Green's article (Jan *SWR*) on "Questions on the Crisis".

Pete explains in his article how capitals with different levels of automation, say oil extraction and window cleaning, contribute surplus value to a general pool of surplus value. Capitals then compete with each other for a share of this pool. The larger the capital the greater the share they

are likely to take.

In this way capitalists whose factories have a high level of automation, a large capital outlay and a small workforce, can grab a large share of surplus value even if the workers they employ only create a small amount of value.

Whereas capitalists whose factories have a low level of automation and a large workforce can only grab a small share of surplus value even when the workers they employ create a large amount of value.

It was Marx's discovery of these transfers of value that enabled him to reconcile the law of value with the equalisation of the rate of profit. Something which earlier economists, notably Ricardo, had been unable to do. If transfers did not take place then each industry would have a different rate of profit.

The difficulty with this argument is that it is at a high level of abstraction. When Pete talks of a "pool" or "pot" of surplus value is he referring to just one world pool of surplus value? If not how many pools are there? ■

**Nick Moore**

## Paul misses the point

I WAS quite astonished to read Paul D'Amato's dismissive letter on Hal Draper's most recent book, *Dictatorship of the Proletariat*. Indeed, it was Pat Stack's enthusiastic review that encouraged me to buy it.

Paul's criticism is that it is "tangential" and like a "giant footnote". It is certainly true that Draper indulges himself in dealing with every misinterpretation of Marx, and correcting grievous errors on the part of Marx's detractors.

Additionally, the footnotes are unusually large, but to be expected considering that Draper is clearly intent on putting a number of bourgeois writers firmly "in their places".

Yet are we to reject it on the basis that it doesn't deal with the class struggle in Chicago or Wapping. If that was the criteria, we might as well reject as "tangential" all historical theoretical writing if it isn't bang up to date with the current perspectives!

On the contrary, the strength of Draper's book lies in that area of struggle concerned with rescuing Marx's ideas from the abominations of the University textbook. Not an unimportant concern considering that one piece of misinformation gets transformed into an entire opus,

when the original meanings and interpretations have been long forgotten.

The fact that Marx *wasn't* a Blanquist was clear to me before reading the book, but if I had relied on the many other works I have read which state this misnomer over and over again, answering such a charge would have been more difficult.

Theory is an important means of clarification, particularly after a century of distortion. And on that basis I would recommend Draper to anyone who has the will and interest to approach what appears to be a difficult subject. In fact Draper's style is highly accessible and very humorous. ■

**Ged Peck**  
Luton

## Better book by far

LESLEY HOGGART chose *Eleni* by Nicholas Gage as a book for Christmas (December *SWR*).

Although it has all the merits she listed, it has been widely praised and will, no doubt, be dragged out endlessly as evidence of the inhumanity of the left.

Next to *Eleni* on the bookshelf at Bookmarks is *Greek Women in Resistance* by Eleni Fourtouni which would make a far superior present.

This book is a collection of the memories of the girls and young women who resisted the Italian and German occupation throughout the war. Almost as soon as the war ended the persecution of the left-wing resistance started.

The second part of the book is a record of the imprisonment of those women who'd been involved in the resistance or who refused to renounce men who'd been involved.

The book is edited by Eleni Fourtouni who left Greece at the age of 19, spent the next 20 years in the United States and has produced this inspiring book as her contribution to the fight for a fairer society. ■

**Julie Boston,**  
London

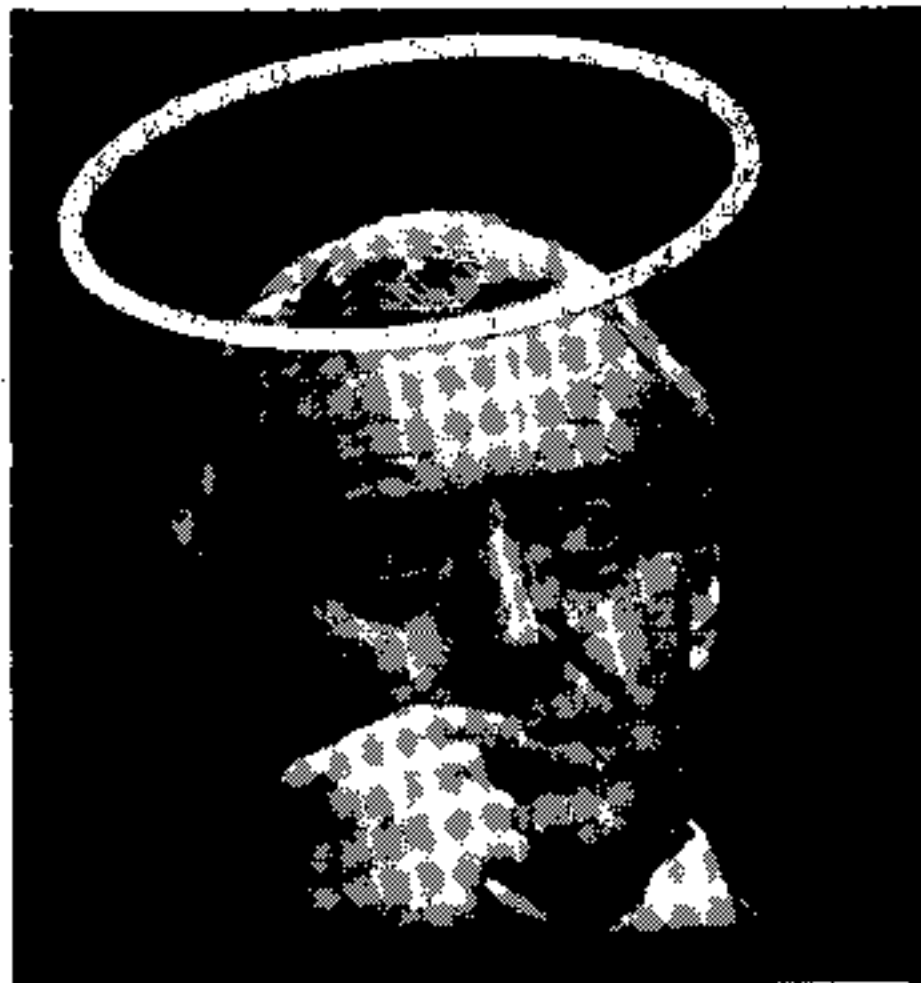
We welcome letters and contributions on all issues raised in *Socialist Worker Review*. Please keep your contributions as short as possible, typed, double spaced if you can, and one side of paper only. Send to: *SWR*, PO Box 82, London E3 3LH.



# Never saying sorry

THOSE OF a nervous political disposition should stop reading NOW, because what I am about to write constitutes a major act of political outrage. I think Tony Benn is a bullshit artist.

I wouldn't have said this a few years ago, you understand. Not because I didn't think it—I did—but because Benn was under such vicious attack from the Right that, the



**Saint...**

Left had to keep Mum. But Bennery is strictly a minority interest now, so I hope it's safe to let a personal opinion out of its closet.

What has brought on this outburst is an article by Benn in *The Guardian Agenda* page a couple of weeks back. This is the same page where just four years ago Benn revealed to a stunned world that socialism had really won the 1983 election (only the Returning Officers missed the point). But Tony has moved on since those heady times.

This was an article commemorating the publication of Hugh Dalton's diaries. Dalton was a senior figure in the 1945-51 Labour Government under Clem Attlee.

The Attlee government has always occupied a place in Labour mythology. While every other Labour government had been a political disaster area, the Attlee government at least achieved something. Not much but something: it introduced the National Health Service and it nationalised the commanding depths of the economy.

This—the argument goes—proves that Labour governments can bring socialism (albeit slowly). Without Attlee the reformists don't really have many reforms to speak of.

But Tony doesn't see it like that anymore. Sure, he opens with a ritual nod towards Attlee, but having praised him, Benn then proceeds to bury him. This is what Benn now says about the post-war government:

'Hailed at the time as the beginning of a

process that would lead to the transformation of Britain into a fully fledged socialist state, it can now be seen as *nothing of the kind*. What Attlee introduced was not socialism (whether fully or partially fledged) but 'welfare capitalism'. And even this 'owed as much to Harold MacMillan and to the Liberal traditions that Churchill brought with him'. (Yes, he did say Churchill).

Now this is a highly diluted measure of the truth; but to many in the Labour Party it is real head-spinning stuff, and there's more. Benn now sees that parliamentary democracy is not about fundamental democratic choices but:

"The slow evolution from one consensus to the next, limiting debate to the argument as to which party is best able to administer contemporary consensus."



**...Of...**

As an example, the Attlee-Churchill-MacMillan

"statist consensus...ended when the boom ended opening the way to a harsher monetarist consensus from 1975 onwards."

The conclusions Benn draws need not detain us long. He ends with the usual call for a "new progressive and democratic alliance". Not a mention of the working class; not a mention of the Labour Party come to that! Its the familiar Popular Front wet dream: an idea so tired that it is comatose.

Its Benn's zig-zag logic that interests me. Think again about what Benn is arguing. If the *best* of Labour Governments didn't take us nearer to socialism than Churchill would have done—then what possible use is the Labour Party to socialists?

Secondly, if this all-embracing "monetarist consensus" limits government policy—then Kinnock's government

would be as bad as Thatcher's.

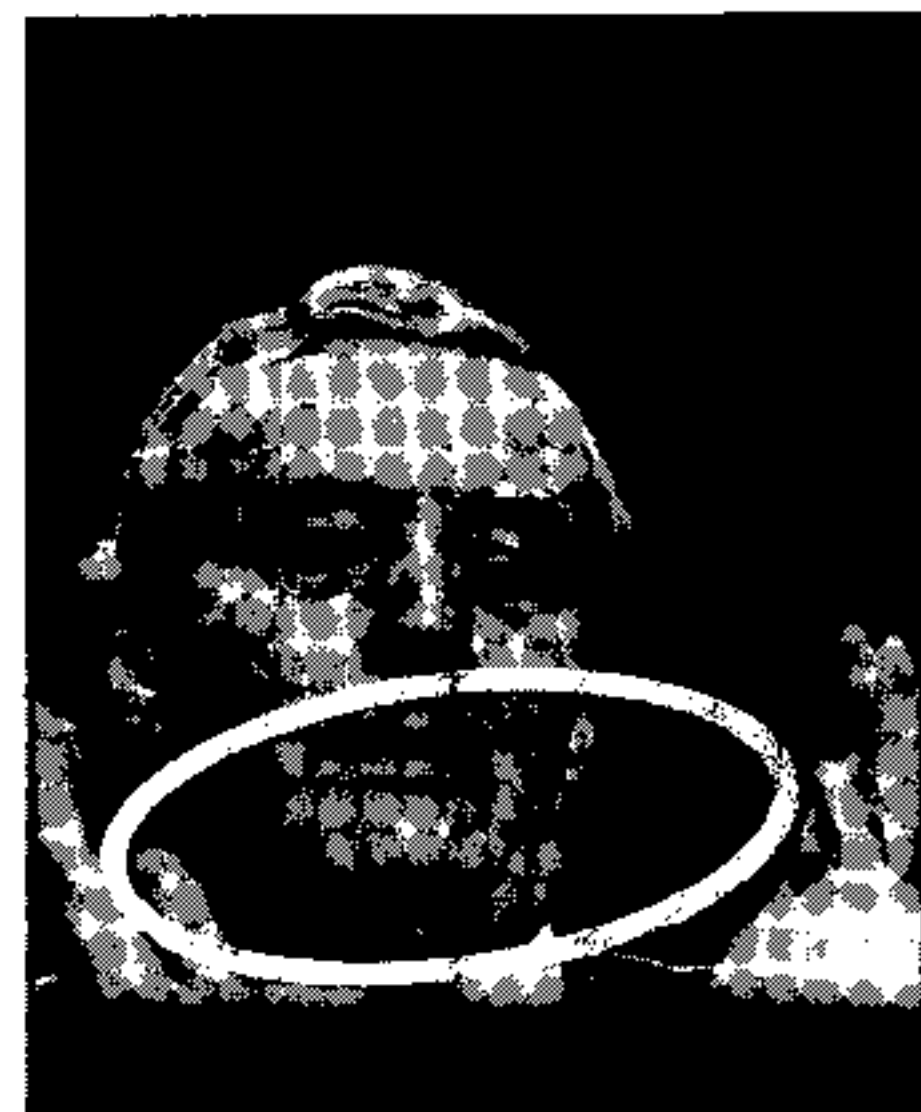
And most fundamental of all: if parliamentary democracy is about whether Tweedledum or Comrade Tweedledee follow the same policy, then what earthly point is there in socialists trying to "use" Parliament?

If Benn believes what he has written, then the conclusions are inescapable: A Kinnock government would be Thatcherism with less hair; the Labour Party has been proved to be useless, and parliamentary democracy is worse.

But—I'm sure you've guessed it—Benn does escape from his own logic. He always does: he has escaped from more political wreckage than Evil Kneivel.

The welfare "consensus" didn't "end" in 1975; it was ended. The new "monetarist consensus" didn't emerge in 1975; it was a conscious political decision. On a broader level, working class militancy (which, after all had just destroyed a Tory government) didn't "die" in the mid-70s—it was killed. And it was the 1974-9 Labour government which did for all three. And Tony Benn was a member of that government from the first day to the last.

Now I know that Benn opposed much of what Labour did. But the fact is that Benn was part of the rightwards process he describes: and yet he never, ever acknowledges it. He writes about history as though it were on automatic pilot, all impersonal forces



**...sinner?**

moving first this way and then that. No-one is ever to blame, especially yours truly. Bennism—like love—means never having to say you're sorry. In the words of Eddie Murphy I think that is BULLSHE-IT.

And that's why listening to—or reading—Tony Benn, I get exactly the same vibes I get from Steve Davis. You have to admire their skill; both are great professionals; but I, for one, wouldn't buy a used car off either of them. ■

**Bob Light**