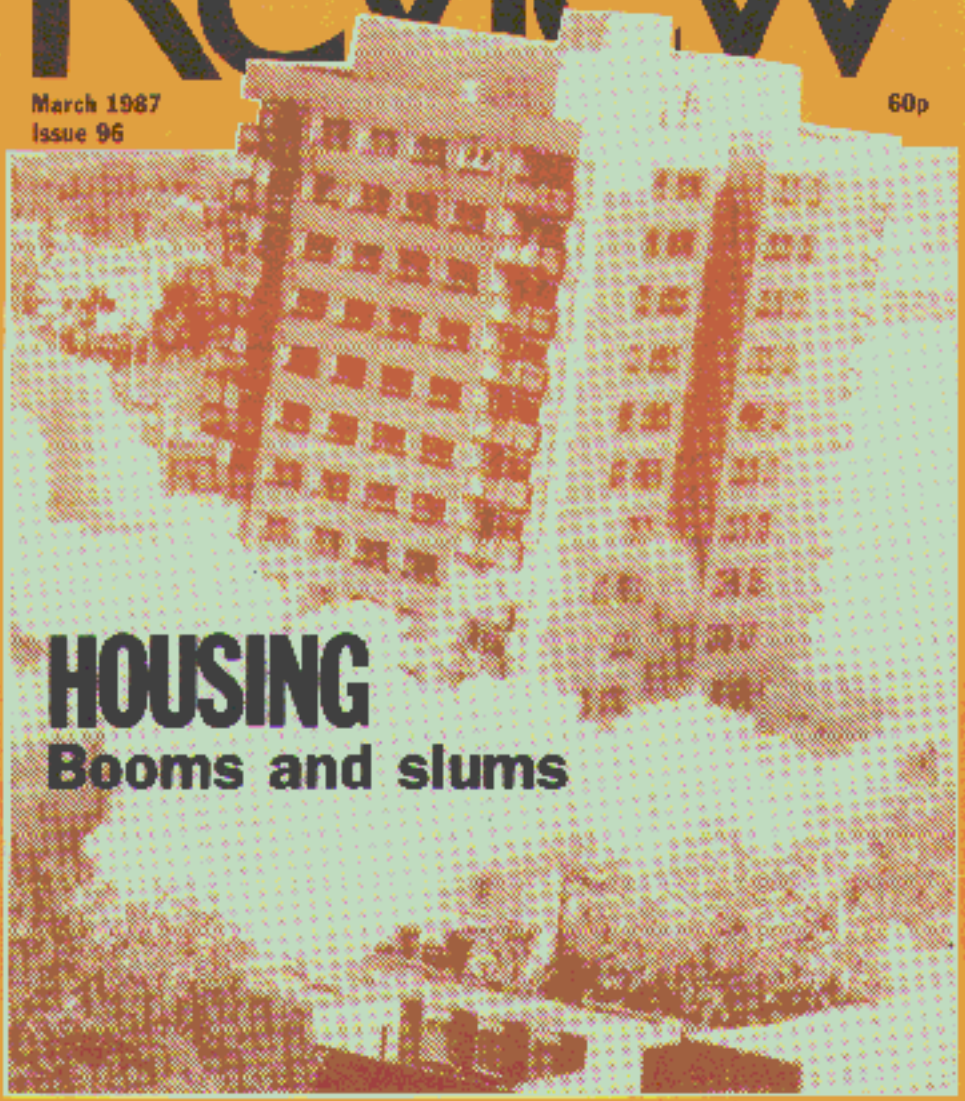
socialist worker
Review
March 1987
Issue 96
60p



HOUSING
Booms and slums

Roy Hattersley's new book reviewed

Public opinion

Is the Third World finished?

socialist worker Review

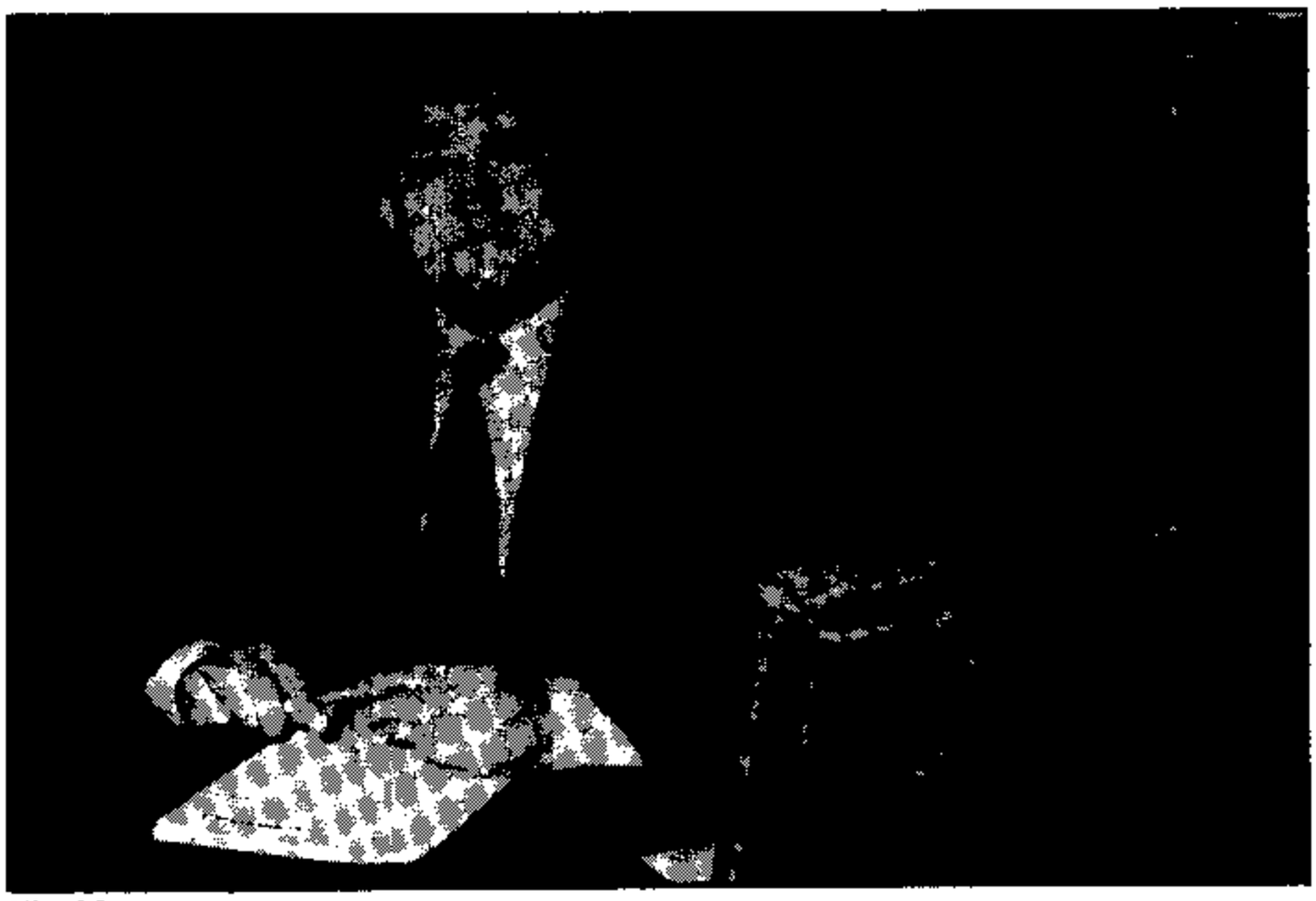
Subscription rate for one year:
Britain and Ireland £8
Overseas surface £9
Europe Air £11
Elsewhere Air £14.50
(institutions add £7.50)

Cheques and postal orders payable to Larkham Printers and Publishers.

Socialist Worker Review is sent free to all prisoners on request.

ISSN 0141 2442

Printed by East End Offset Ltd (TU), London, E3.



Nigel Lawson

NOTES of the month

ECONOMY

Boom for a few

DESPITE the Guinness scandal, the Zircon affair, and swings in the opinion polls, the Tories and their friends are in an optimistic mood in the run up to the election.

One reason is that Labour's leaders are so anxious to prove their respectability, and competence to govern to big business, that they're incapable of any serious attack on the Tories' record.

Another is that thanks to a combination of luck and good timing the government has successfully engineered a pre-election economic boom.

Boom is perhaps a bit strong. Samuel Brittan in the *Financial Times* noted on 5 February that

> "...Britain is enjoying the nearest thing to a boom that it has experienced since the world wide oil shock of 1973."

When Nigel Lawson makes his budget speech on 17 March we'll be treated to some carefully selected figures, and a lot of prattle about the sixth or seventh year of sustained economic recovery.

In reality economic growth in 1986 was little more than two percent and is unlikely to be much more than that in 1987. Growth since 1979 has averaged under one and a half percent or about the same as in 1974-79 under Labour. Manufacturing output is at a seven year high, or still over 10 percent below its level in 1979.

Unemployment is falling only because of the wave of new schemes pushed through in a desperate rush by the Manpower Service Commission.

What has happened in the last year is a consumer spending boom, fuelled by wage increases and an explosion of credit. Ironically both the wage rises and the credit expansion indicate the Tories' failure to meet two of their central objectives, cuts in pay and strict controls over the money supply.

Nevertheless Lawson plans to stoke the spending spree with tax cuts in the budget. He will almost certainly knock a penny or two off the basic rate (now at 29p in the £) of income tax. He may even have the nerve to follow Reagan's example in the United States and slash yet again the higher rates of tax on the rich, although senior Tories are reported to be worried about the impact of that on the election.

Even if he only cuts the basic rate and fiddles around with the rest, the rich will reap most of the benefit. Indeed most people are paying more tax now than they were in 1979 thanks to the hefty increases in VAT introduced by the Tories. Only the top five percent are significantly better off.

The consumer spending boom has itself pushed up the Treasury's revenues (and VAT has to be paid whether goods are produced in Britain or elsewhere). Combined with the proceeds from privatising British Gas and British Airways that's given Lawson room for increases in government spending, and tax cuts.

Yet even Lawson's closest supporters in the City and the financial press are uneasy. For the moment the Government is benefiting from two pieces of luck. One is the slight recovery in the oil price. The other is the steep fall in the dollar. Together they've helped divert the international pressure, and the speculators' attention away from the pound.

With the pressures of the world economy relaxed for the moment, it's possible to present a case that British capitalism really is leaner, fitter, and more competitive. Bits of it are.

For the British economy as a whole, however, the underlying weaknesses are as serious as ever. The paradox in the situation can be indicated by two contrasting figures.

On the one hand the stock market's FT Index measuring the value of shares in major companies has reached new record levels. On the other hand, investment in new equipment, buildings, etc in the private sector rose by a minute 0.1 percent last year. In manufacturing alone it fell by two percent (leaving the level of manufacturing investment still 17 percent below its 1979 peak).

Placed in its historical context the rise in the stockmarket is not as staggering as it can seem when dated from 1981. Share prices collapsed in 1974—a crash which is now rarely mentioned.

The rise in share values does express the fact that profit rates are also back to the level of 1973. In 1986, whilst the oil sector was devastated, the windfall from falling raw material prices still helped boost profits in the rest of the economy by 14 percent.

The most successful British companies have rationalised, closed down their less profitable factories, sacked thousands of workers, and increased productivity. They have used the gains to take over weaker companies or expand overseas.

The most revealing figure of all is that the handouts of profits in dividends to the shareholders increased by a whopping 36 percent in the first nine months of 1986 (according to Labour Research in their February bulletin).

If you want to explain why the stockmarket is booming you need look no further than that increase plus the belief that the Tories will win the next election.

Lawson's tax cuts may well be greeted by the stock market hitting new highs. For a tiny rich minority that will be a sign that they at least have gained from eight years of Tory rule and are now bold enough to celebrate the fact.

Yet the simple fact that investment is still so depressed indicates that this minority is far from confident about the future of "their" Britain.

For one thing the more far sighted of them know that the consumer boom will not last much beyond the election.

NOTES of the month

Whilst profits are higher, the capital stock based in Britain as a whole is smaller. Since 1973 large chunks of industrial capacity have disappeared. The inevitable result is that any increase in demand for consumer goods sucks in imports.

North Sea oil revenues can no longer cover the deficit on manufactured goods which last year was almost £6 billion.

Estimates of the overall state of the balance of payments this year vary. But most agree that it is slipping rapidly into the red.

At the same time inflationary pressures are mounting again. Prices in 1986 rose much more slowly because of the fall in raw material costs, and the ferocious competition in world markets. But the inflation rate in Britain has crept up again to almost four percent, and would be even higher if house prices were included in the figure.

If the pound's value falls again on the foreign currency markets the Tories' much vaunted "anti-inflation" strategy will be in ruins.

Even an increase in inflation wouldn't be so bad for them, if they could hold down wages. But there is still serious resistance to this in most workplaces as this *Review* has emphasised on many occasions.

The Telecoms strike, despite the appalling sell out, encapsulated the dilemma facing many companies. To push up the share price and impress the City they have to publicise their profits so that every worker knows how much they're making. Yet they still face the necessity of squeezing the workforce now to pay for both the dividends of the future and stave off any competitive threat to their position.

For the sake of winning the next election the government has been forced to abandon plans for major cuts in public spending, and any further offensive against the wages of public sector workers (leaving aside the teachers, for the moment alone in the front line). They have carefully avoided, with the help of union leaders, moves that might lead to a major confrontation.

Instead Lawson has been forced to risk his reputation for "sound" financial management, and abandon much of what were until recently the totems of monetarist economics, in a blatant attempt to buy votes.

Tax cuts may help the Tories win the next election.

But the disquiet amongst many of Lawson's associates in the Conservative Party, and big business circles, was expressed in an editorial in the *Independent* newspaper

> "The truth of the matter is that in a deflationary world we stand out as having an inflationary economy. Rather than seeking to cut interest rates the Government should be viewing with alarm surging domestic credit and money supply. Rather than seeking to boost demand further by cutting personal taxation after a year in which consumption has leapt by five percent and the underlying deterioration in the balance of payments has become pronounced, the Government should be concentrating its efforts on the supply side."

By the supply side they mean what they now like to call labour market "rigidities", and what we would call trade union and workplace organisation in defence of wages and basic conditions. For the ruling class that remains, despite all their gains in recent years, the decisive political question.

The precise timing of the next economic downturn or slump is impossible to predict. Much will depend upon the world economic situation where the dark clouds loom larger every day.

But the response of the bosses, and whichever government is in office is entirely predictable:

They will demand that workers pay the costs of their system's crisis.■

IRISH ELECTION

Now for specifics

THE STRANGE feature of the recent Irish general election is that there were no real winners.

The final outcome has meant a return to power once again for Fianna Fail under the leadership of Charles Haughey, at the expense of outgoing Taoiseach (prime minister) Garret FitzGerald and his Fine Gael-Labour coalition.

However Haughey's victory is considerably dampened by his inability to gain an overall majority. This is the third time in succession that he has failed to do so and once again raises questions about his position as his party's leader.

These questions are likely to be left alone for the time being, but others are not, particularly those concerning the new

FitzGerald: not the only loser

government's policies towards the economy, and the Anglo-Irish deal.

What are Haughey's policies?

A good question and certainly not one answered during his election campaign. The strategy of that campaign and its shortcomings were described by one prominent Fianna Fail spokesman as follows:

"We were doing fine until the last week. A four-week campaign made it very difficult for us to sustain our strategy of not being specific."

In particular they were "not being specific" about the economy. The general devastation of the economy, the raging unemployment, alarming rate of emigration and grossly unfair tax system were all described here last month.

How will Haughey's government deal with them?

There was much talk of the "progressive element" of Fianna Fail policy, and also of their having to do a deal with various independents.

There are four independents, one claiming constitutional republican credentials, two generally seen as being left wing.

There was also talk of Haughey coming to an agreement with the Workers Party, and even the Labour Party

All of these would force a reform packet or so the thinking went. In reality though, the Haughey budget will differ little from the budget which brought down the outgoing Government.

In other words it is the other ruling class parties of the South that Fianna Fail will have to accommodate.

The *Irish Press*, a pro Fianna Fail paper ran the headline "Haughey to keep tough Fine Gael budget" on the Monday following the election.

He has already had talks with his predecessor on the economy, and will no doubt hold talks with the Progressive Democrats.

The PDs, led by a former Fianna Fail minister, Dessie O'Malley, are about the only party who can be really pleased with the election result. Fourteen seats at the first attempt was impressive.

Whatever else the PDs are or aren't they are not progressive. They were demanding even greater cuts than the last government intended, and will certainly want a tough anti-working class budget.

They are almost certain to get one!

There are one or two areas on which the new government may differ with Fitz-Gerald's such as privatisation. Given the state sector's rather weak role in Irish capitalism, privatisation is not of the same

import to the Irish ruling class as it is to the British.

Nevertheless the budget will be viciously anti-working class.

As for those who hoped Haughey would deliver the South from the Anglo-Irish deal, they are clearly going to be disappointed.

Haughey's initial hostility to the deal has all but evaporated, in the face of both its popularity with the electorate and its importance to the Irish ruling class.

The disastrous result for Sinn Fein will probably strengthen his bond to the deal.

There is no doubt that Sinn Fein's result was a disaster.

They achieved less than two percent of the poll, and even in areas where they expected to do well, only achieved something in the region of five percent.

In their defence, they will argue that they were not really expecting to do well in this election, that their sights are more firmly set on the next election.

They have admitted that organisationally they are weak in the South and argue that the enforcement of section 31 of the Broadcasting Act, which forbids interviews with Sinn Fein representatives on radio and TV was a major obstacle.

Nevertheless their vote was some 20,000 down on their standing in EEC and local elections.

What is worse is that this came against a background of a fairly high protest vote against the major parties, which saw four independents and four Workers Party deputies elected.

And of course this was the first time that Sinn Fein had pledged to take their seats if elected, a move that they must have hoped would boost their vote.

Sinn Fein's failure must be seen against the background of their overall strategy. The main line of Sinn Fein thinking goes that the national question must be solved before the struggle for socialism can commence.

For the working class of the South this can have little meaning as the national question is not the problem that they appear to confront each day. This makes much of what Sinn Fein have to say seem irrelevant.

In order to overcome this Sinn Fein attempt a sort of community politics; advice centres, "we'll unblock your drains, get rid of your drug pushers etc". This style of politics can get the odd individual elected but will make little impact at a nationwide level.

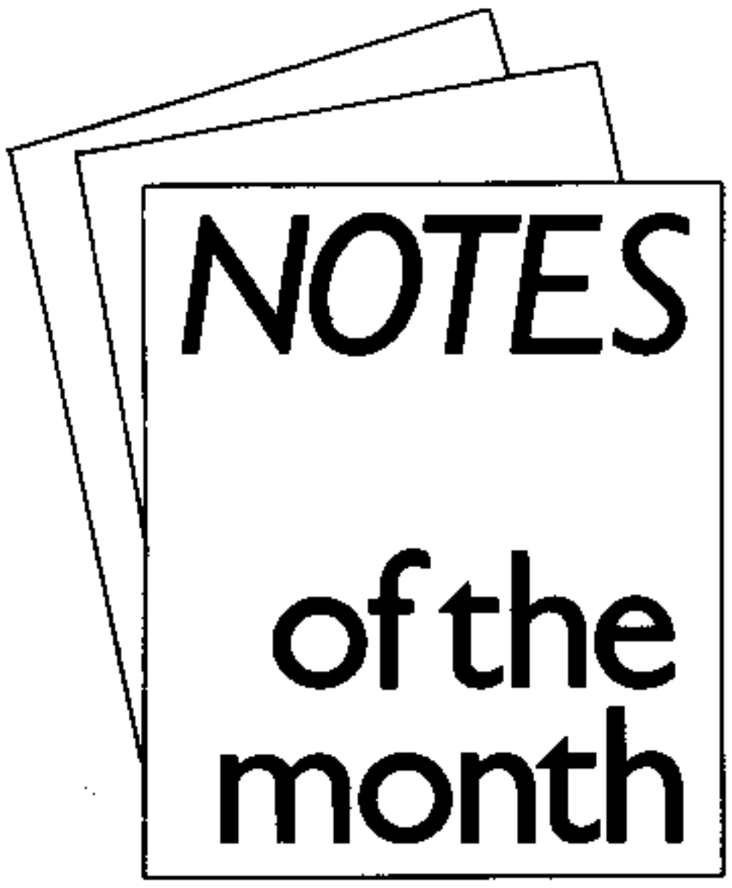
As long as Sinn Fein see the struggle being fought in stages, (first national, then class) they will find it hard to make a breakthrough in the South, and as a consequence be no nearer to winning in the Northern struggle against the British.

The only party of the left to come out of the election in any way happy were the Workers Party (the old Official IRA/Sinn Fein) who doubled their representatives from two to four, mainly at the expense of Labour. Indeed they got a higher vote than Labour in Dublin.

Yet they are far from making a major breakthrough, their vote went up very little, and they still only got 3.8 percent of the total poll.

They and Labour were helped by the eccentricities of the proportional representation system. Labour's vote fell to less than seven percent and their leader Dick Spring only got in by five votes, yet they ended up with only two seats less than before. A fact that helps hide just how badly they did.

All in all then not a pretty picture for the left, and in the months ahead, a very ugly one for the working class.■



LEBANON

A sad state

THE LEBANESE roundabout goes on: its armies, gangs and militias; its sieges, battles and bombings; its alliances made and constantly broken.

Out of the chaos of recent months just two things stand out: that once again the Palestinians are the main victims of the contending groups; and that once more Syria is the Arab regime most determined to destroy the PLO.

The Syrian troops who poured into Beirut last month were not involved in a mercy mission. Their objective was to do what Syria's Lebanese allies could not do—bring the city under control and increase the pressure on its Palestinian camps.

The policy is not new. From the early 1970s Syria's ruling Ba'ath Party under Hafez al-Assad has been determined to weaken and, if possible, remove the PLO from Lebanon.

Syria's rulers recognised that the PLO—then a mass armed movement—constituted a major threat to the stability of the whole region. In 1970 they watched King Hussein in neighbouring Jordan savage the movement in order to protect his dictatorship.

When the PLO moved its activities to Lebanon, they realised that it had the potential to play an equally destabilising role in a country Syrian rulers had long regarded as their fief.

The Damascus regime's worst fears were realised when in 1976, during Lebanon's civil war, it became clear that the PLO and the Lebanese National Movement (LNM—a grouping of liberals, nationalists and the local Communist Party) were on the brink of defeating the right.

Over 40,000 Syrian troops were sent into Lebanon—ostensibly to help the left. In fact, together with the right, they opened a savage offensive on the PLO and LNM, all but wrecking the Palestinian movement.

Arab leaders responded to the bloody spectacle with rhetorical opposition and private glee. They too recognised the Palestinian movement as a potentially subversive force and were willing to pay Assad to keep the PLO under control. Oil-rich states such as Kuwait and Saudi Arabia were quick to reward the Syrians—to this day Saudi Arabia gives some $500 million annually to Damascus.

But the Syrians could not destroy the PLO. Even after Israel's invasion in 1982, it resurfaced in the camps, and in 1983 Assad was forced to send the Syrian army to drive supporters of the mainstream PLO group Fateh out of Lebanon. Since then Damascus has used a series of proxies to do its bidding in Lebanon.

These groups, notably the Shiite Amal militia, have failed. For the past six months, the Palestinians have been rearming in the camps of Beirut and in the southern city of Sidon.

Under Assad's direction Amal assaulted the Beirut camps last summer—and was humiliatingly defeated by the tougher PLO fighters.

In November, Assad instructed Amal—armed and financed by Damascus—to lay siege to the camps. This looked like being effective until an alliance of West Beirut's "leftist" militias, frightened at the implications of another defeat for the PLO, launched their own attack on Amal, which quickly lost control.

This was the sign for Assad to intervene. He has argued that Syrian troops are needed to "restore order", but there is little doubt that his main aim is to exercise real control over the Palestinians. He also seeks to bring the rest of the country's Muslim militias to heel, and prepare to impose a new political order.

Once again he has Arab backing, most governments in the region applauding his intervention.

There is also more than a hint that Israel and the US have been party to the plan.

The Palestinians' future in Lebanon looks grimmer than ever. Syria is likely to mount more assaults on the camps.

Is there a way out for the Palestinians? The answer is yes—but only if they can break from the worst of the PLO's nationalist traditions.

These dictate that the movement must never "interfere" with the affairs of the Arab rulers: a formula which has

effectively sealed off the PLO from the mass of the Arab populations for a generation.

As long as the PLO seeks alliances with the Arab rulers (for years it has even attempted to build bridges to the Syrian regime!) it will remain insulated from the real force for change in the region—the Arab working class.

As long as the PLO seeks accommodation with the Arab regimes, instead of attempting to remove them, more disasters like those at the Lebanese camps are inevitable.

After almost 70 years of struggle against the imperialist powers, Zionism and the cynicism of the Arab rulers, Palestinians deserve something better.■

BRAZIL

In whose interest ?

ON February 20, the Sarney government of Brazil announced suddenly that it was suspending any payment of interest on its $104 billion debt.

That decision may well mark a new stage in the international debt crisis.

This is not a matter of a radical regime taking a bold stance against its Western creditors. The Sarney government has been desperately affirming its desire to negotiate better terms with the bankers, and is moving towards imposing a ferocious austerity programme inside Brazil itself.

The *Financial Times* issued a reassuring editorial suggesting that "much of the Sarney government's unhelpful rhetoric is strictly designed for domestic consumption".

Brazil's economy they argue is fundamentally strong, and still capable as in 1984 and 1985 of cutting back drastically on the level of imports and thus finding the money to pay off the bankers. According to the *FT* the question is "merely" whether the government will "take sufficient unpopular steps at home to rescue the Brazilian economy".

That sort of argument may for the moment reassure the international banking community. But newspapers like the *Financial Times* and the *Wall Street Journal* know that if they don't take a reasonably optimistic line they could themselves contribute to a panic which would throw the financial markets into chaos.

As this *Review* goes to press it is still too early to say whether or not Brazil's decision will lead to a new international banking crisis. The banks are divided.

Many have virtually written off their Latin American loans over the last four years, and would prefer to cut their losses and run, leaving Brazil and the others to rot.

But some of the largest American banks are still heavily exposed, and want to continue with the rescheduling programmes in which they lend Brazil a bit more to help it pay off the interest.

Those divisions amongst the bankers have already led to serious delays and problems with the rescue package painfully cobbled together for Mexico last year.

In the case of Brazil the dilemma for the bankers is even greater because Brazil has been refusing, for political reasons, to deal with the International Monetary Fund which normally takes charge in such crises.

It may be true that the Sarney government is simply looking for a better deal from the banks (lower interest rates, etc) on the one hand, and to defuse opposition to its austerity programme inside Brazil.

Nevertheless the fact is that Brazil is for the moment unable to pay. In 1985 it ran a massive trade surplus of $12 billion which just enabled it to pay $11 billion in interest.

In 1986 however the rapid growth unleashed by the government's Sarney plan holding down prices, led to serious shortages inside Brazil and has sucked in imports.

The Sarney plan has now collapsed. Inflation is soaring again, and the trade surplus has dwindled to virtually nothing at all in January. The class struggle has ebbed in recent months but tensions are building up which could explode if the government moves to end the "trigger", the system of indexing wages to price rises.

Internationally there has been yet another meeting of the world's finance ministers producing no more than reassuring platitudes. Yet as another *FT* editorial on 23 February caustically noted, the difficulties facing Brazil, and other big debtors are also "a reflection of the sluggishness of world economic growth". "Against this backdrop" they suggest, the attitudes of ministers in the west look "a touch complacent".■

Additional notes: Pete Green, Pat Stack and Phil Marshall.

NIGEL HARRIS

Store wars

WHAT A pity! After all the huffing and puffing Reagan climbed down and the long threatened agricultural trade war between the United States and Europe fizzled out.

If the two had started to fight, there was just a chance that the Common Agricultural Policy of the EEC would have received such a battering, it would have folded—the ageing New World would once again have rescued the Old from its lunacies. But it ended with a whimper, not a bang.

What was it about?

The US claimed that when Spain joined the Common Market in January of last year, the increases in the tax (or tariff) on the Spanish imports of maize and sorghum (for animal fodder) from the US cost Americans 400 to 500 million dollars (not a lot on the EEC bill for imports from the States of 53 billion dollars).

Washington demanded compensation—the EEC should agree to import an extra 4 million tonnes of grain, reserving 2.8-3 million tonnes for US suppliers. If the EEC refused to do this, the US would impose a tax of 200 percent on European exports to the US of cheese, white wine, brandy, ham, gin, olives and other things.

Europe offered to increase its grain imports from the rest of the world by 1.6 million tonnes, 1.2 million tonnes of which might be taken up by the US.

Furthermore, if the US tried to punish Europe by taxing other imports, the EEC threatened to levy an extra 50 percent tax rate on imports from the US of 395 million dollars worth of maize gluten, wheat and rice.

Both sets of gangsters were fast on the draw, standing tall, as Reagan might say, on Main Street.

Two days before the US-set deadline, both sides climbed down. The EEC agreed to import two million tonnes of maize from the rest of the world, 300,000 tonnes of sorghum, and an extra 450,000 tonnes of other cereals. Furthermore, it would cut import duties on 20 other industrial items for four years to help Washington.

The skirmish is over, and disappointingly so, but the war must continue. In agriculture the EEC is the rogue shark and must collide with the largest agricultural exporter, the US.

The new Congress is keen to find popular targets for American hostility, and it is easier to attack the importers of US goods than expand US exports or cut Reagan's heroic budget deficit (as the result of arms spending).

But what they see as hitting foreign importers by punishing their exports in fact punishes American consumers.

A 200 percent tax on US imports of European cheese punishes American cheese eaters more than it hurts European cheese makers. Furthermore, this "cost" is not justified by any other gain.

Import controls have saved no jobs in textiles where there have been controls on imports for 30 years. The price of Japanese-made cars is increased by 15 percent in Britain as the result of import controls—and by nearly £1,000 in the United States. The buyers are fleeced with import controls, not the foreign exporters.

Reagan is not driven just by the new Democrat dominated Congress. The Congressmen are baying against foreigners to persuade American voters that, contrary to all appearances, someone in Washington cares. But Reagan is also desperate to avoid increasing taxes as he keeps up spending on arms.

To do that he must cut non-military spending—and the subsidies to agriculture are a prime target.

US farm policy has shifted from paying heavily to persuade American farmers not to grow crops to trying to force an expansion in exports to get rid of the surpluses.

This is impossible to do by fair means while the EEC so massively subsidises agricultural exports. The issue is not the European market, but all the third markets of the world where the US and Europe compete.

The problem is getting desperate as farmers produce more and more on both sides of the Atlantic. World grain stocks—now about 375 million tonnes—have increased 50 percent since 1984 (you thought there were famines!). US exports of wheat, peaking at 50 million tonnes in 1981, were under 20 million in 1985.

If the Americans could only eliminate the European share, about 20 million tonnes, then Reagan's budgetary problems would have some slight relief.

This is where everybody starts playing dirty, while claiming a monopoly of crystal virtue. In mid-1985 Washington announced an "Export Enhancement Program" to subsidise exports to whatever third markets the EEC exported to. Since then 655 million dollars have been spent in the campaign to beat Europe.

Late last year Poland was offered grain to beat off the EEC. In early January Switzerland was offered 250,000 tonnes of barley and sorghum. In February China was offered one million tonnes of wheat—all subsidised.

Of course, the US paid little attention to countries that exported grain without subsidies (Australia, Canada, Argentina, for example). Nor was much consistency introduced—as the US dumped its grain abroad, it cut sugar imports from the Caribbean by 40 percent. All issues were subordinate to confronting the marauder shark of the EEC.

It has to be war—or so everyone should hope. The racket in agriculture is too extreme. The eighth round of GATT (General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs) talks held to liberalise trade began last autumn in Geneva, but here the Americans and Europeans cosily collude to exclude agriculture and reject the demands of other major exporters and the Third World.

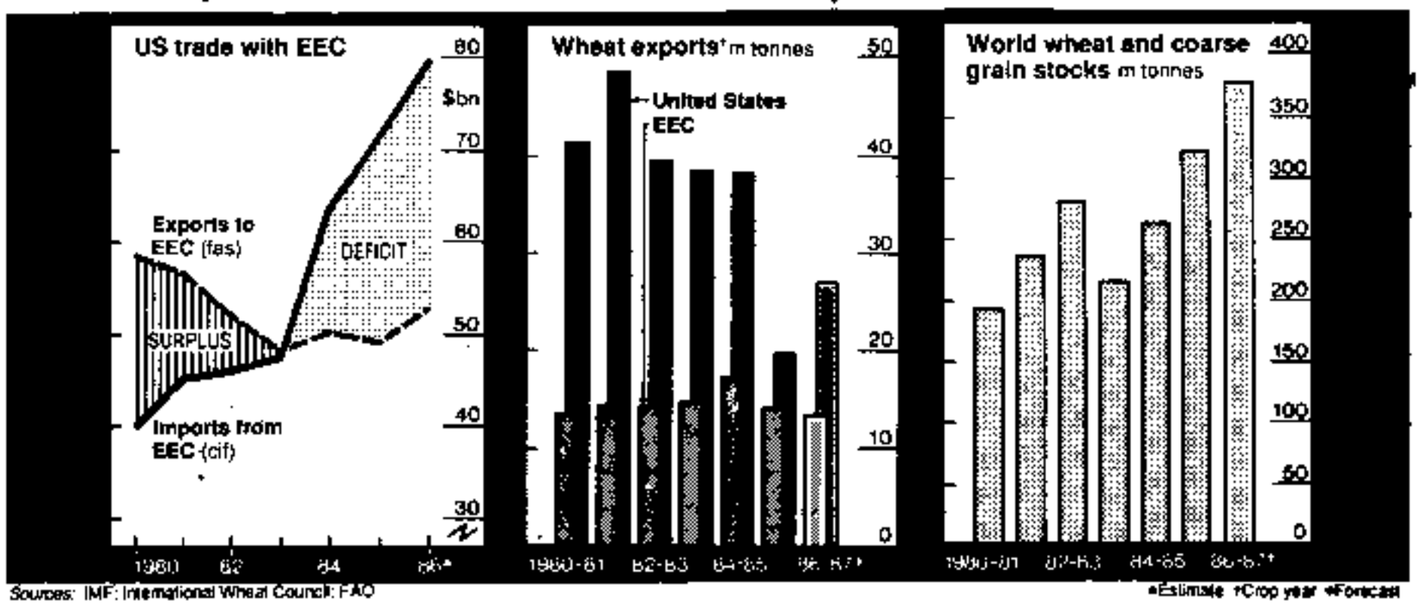
The two arch champions of efficient capitalism thus block the exports of the efficient in favour of their own inefficient and heavily subsidized exports. In such circumstances one can only hope for a war between the two wings of the Mafia on each side of the Atlantic.

The battle between Washington and Brussels epitomises the lunacies of the system. For punishing the foreigners is actually punishing the home population, especially the poorest.

Western controls on the import of garments from the Third World punish the buyers of garments here, especially the poorest ones.

The poor of Britain are able to buy fewer cheap clothes as the result of protection. It is a mark of how much we swallow the arguments of the employers that everyone chatters about saving jobs, not about protecting the poor. Own goals are the means to punish the wogs!

Pray for war. ■



Street of defeat

Murdoch: king of the gutter

WITH A good deal of help from Labour and trade union leaders, the employers have succeeded in smashing one of the strongest sections of workers in the country—Fleet Street.

The News International dispute is, of course, the most spectacular and horrible defeat of all. Having fought for one long bitter year, more than five thousand workers have lost their jobs, and Rupert Murdoch's scab plant is virtually non-unionised.

But throughout that long year every other newspaper employer has taken advantage of the print unions' dilemma. They have been greatly assisted by the union leaders' strategy of boycotting News International titles rather than collective action to stop them being printed.

This means that from the beginning they were prepared to co-operate with other titles seeking to pinch Murdoch's readership.

Any groups of print workers who weren't prepared to go along with higher productivity, speed-ups, cuts in conditions, wages and finally massive job losses were given short shrift by their officials.

And they only had to look down the road to what was happening at Wapping to see how much support they were likely to get even if they did defy the leadership.

The result is the almost complete decimation of jobs, conditions and organisation in the national newspaper industry.

Even before Murdoch finally moved production to Wapping 13 months ago Robert Maxwell at the *Mirror* was on the attack. In September 1985 he announced he was shifting the *Sporting Life* out of Fleet Street.

Print workers walked out. Maxwell responded by locking out 4,500 employees. Within a week a deal had been signed—245 jobs lost, up to £60 a week wage cuts for some of those remaining, and the loss of the *Sporting Life* from Fleet Street.

Within weeks Maxwell was predictably back on the attack. At the end of November he sacked 3,500 *Mirror* workers after they struck against the company's "survival plan" involving massive cuts in jobs and conditions.

The *Mirror* workers' solidarity was never built on, however. The print union leaders agreed to instruct their members to go back to work and negotiate over the plan if Maxwell withdrew the sacking notices.

By mid-January Maxwell had everything he then wanted—2,000 jobs gone, much greater flexibility between departments and unprecedented demoralisation among the workforce.

Soon after, Murdoch unveiled his well-prepared weapon—the scab print works at Wapping—and the News International dispute was on.

Within two weeks every other national newspaper employer was assessing the competition and piling in with demands for massive redundancies and changes in working practices.

The *Daily Mail* demanded an immediate 20 percent cut and announced another 30 percent later.

The *Express* and the *Telegraph* announced they would be looking for up to 50 percent job cuts.

Maxwell: the "left" alternative

Maxwell began attacking his Glasgow workforce, sacking 400 print workers.

The union leaderships' response was not to fight but to sit down and negotiate.

One year later we can see the result.

In March SOGAT, NGA and NUJ officials agreed to 20 percent job cuts, a longer working week, possible far reaching changes in management control and the direct input of copy.

The next month the officials agreed to 2,500 redundancies at the *Express* and all the other concessions made at the *Mail*.

They then sat down with management at the *Financial Times*, agreed to major changes in demarcation, signed a no-strike deal and conceded direct input. Since then 400 print workers have been made redundant.

Management at the *Guardian* then sent every member of staff a letter warning them of an "inevitable reduction in staff" when it moves to Docklands next year.

The biggest bombshell was the *Daily Telegraph* agreement last September. Then there were 1,650 working on the presses. With the move to Docklands that figure has been cut to 679. With direct input the number of NGA compositors jobs is being cut from 276 to 56. At least 600 clerical workers are losing their jobs.

As significant were the details of the agreement. A joint standing committee has replaced negotiators from the five unions with members on the paper. One clause entitles the company to lay-off employees if industrial action leads to a loss of papers.

Another clause allows for outside arbitration in the event of a dispute, binding on both sides. Lastly, although not a legally binding collective agreement with the union, all the provisions of the deal are being included in legally binding individual contracts of employment.

Contracts are being rewritten at the *Guardian*. They will detail managements' rights to stop paying every employee in the event of two issues of the paper being lost because of industrial action.

The man who negotiated the deal for SOGAT, Bill Miles, claims the agreement is a good one. In September he was even more glowing about the *Telegraph* deal saying, "The agreement is a milestone if you relate it to what has happened at Wapping."

Miles' remark, however, sums up the attitude of the print union leaderships. As far as they are concerned they have managed to hold off employers armed with two very powerful weapons—new technology and the Tories' anti-union legislation.

The print unions' future in the provincial press could be even messier. They have already suffered some very nasty defeats. After Wapping management will be looking for more.

The attitude of the officials to all the carnage around them is almost philosophical. The inevitable has happened, new technology has arrived. And as for the anti-union laws—vote Labour and everything will be alright.■

Alan Gibson

Classroom struggle

THIS MONTH teachers are being balloted for token regional half day strikes against the impending Baker bill, seven months after the NUT executive tried to tie up a deal with the local authorities.

After a two year campaign, which started out as a demand for a 12 percent pay increase and turned into a protracted defence of pay, working conditions and state education, teachers now face a two-pronged offensive from the Tories and the local authorities.

The Tories made clear from the outset their determination to tie teachers' pay to worsened conditions in the form of a written contract.

After a year and a half of a low level campaign of token strikes, a ban on voluntary duties and "No Cover", the NUT executive followed the lead of NAS/UWT, the second largest teachers' union, into talks with ACAS.

The NUT then made common cause with the Labour local authorities and came up with a deal which gave the Tories most of what they wanted.

This deal, known as the Nottingham deal, was finally accepted in an NUT ballot before Christmas, although a substantial minority, 42 percent, voted against.

Baker, the new Tory education minister, sensed victory. He knew the NUT executive had broken the momentum of the pay campaign, and that NAS/UWT was unlikely to mount more than verbal opposition despite having refused to sign the Nottingham deal. So he used the power of the Department of Education and Science (DES) to veto the deal and introduced his own Education Bill.

This will not only empower him to enforce his own pay and conditions proposals by abolishing the negotiating rights of the unions, but also paves the way for a full frontal assault on state education and the extension of the private sector.

The NUT executive, having called off the action, decided to appeal to their worships in the House of Lords to stop Baker's bill. By the end of January even the NUT executive had to accept that this was a waste of time.

In the meantime the organised left in the union, the Socialist Teachers' Alliance, had campaigned actively against the Nottingham deal and the Baker bill. On 13 January there was an extremely successful unofficial strike of 8,000 teachers led by the Inner London Teachers' Association (ILTA), the strongest base of the STA. From that strike a call was made for a further national unofficial strike against Baker on 19 February.

Although the whole of ILTA council and officers were suspended for organising the strike, their successful campaigning combined with the obvious failure of the executive's own strategy forced both the reinstatement of ILTA council and officers and the calling of national half day strikes jointly with NAS/UWT.

The NUT executive was no doubt spurred on to this action out of fear that NAS/UWT might have gone ahead with token strikes and undercut the NUT's position in schools.

Baker's bill is set to become law by April. On top of that, the failure of the Labour councils to fight the Tories over funding is now coming home to roost. Up and down the country Labour councils face huge cash crises. The Inner London Education Authority has a deficit of £125 million.

Teachers face a determined offensive...

Council after council is busily planning rent rises and cuts in services and jobs.

A year ago the Labour councils were only too willing to make common cause with the teachers' unions against the Tories. Today they are going to be only too happy to hide behind Baker in order to make cuts.

Teachers face a determined offensive by the Tories which will be carried through by Labour authorities and are being led by an executive which firmly believes that effective industrial action can only jeopardise the election of a Labour government.

For militants in schools the situation will not be easy. To argue for a real fight after two years with an executive which calls off action one minute and reinstitutes token strikes the next, is no easy matter.

The left's strength is overwhelmingly in London.

The greater ability of socialist teachers in Inner London to resist, as illustrated on 13 January, is important both for maintaining a real campaign of opposition alive and flying a flag of opposition inside the national union. However, teachers in London being able to fight is not the same as persuading teachers in Manchester, Leeds or Birmingham to do the same.

In the coming months socialist teachers will have to push for the NUT nationally to step up the industrial action against Baker—more widespread strike action, "No Cover" and a ban on voluntary duties. The popularity of "No Cover" is shown by the agenda for this year's NUT conference. The motion calling for "No Cover" got twice as many votes for prioritisation as any other.

At the same time socialists need to argue with the Labour Party locally to refuse to implement Baker's law and to support teachers' action against it.

In the longer run the imposition of Baker's law will undoubtedly lead to rear-guard action in schools. The rash of strikes in councils up and down the country testifies to the continued willingness of workers to fight, albeit under much worse conditions than two years ago.

We can expect the same amongst teachers. Socialist teachers need to be in the forefront of making such resistance as effective as possible.■

Sheila McGregor

A world of difference

AT THE turn of the year dramatic events occurred in different parts of the world. There were student demonstrations in China, riots in Russian Kazakhstan and—most importantly of all—student demonstrations and workers' strikes in France.

It is therefore worth examining the state of global class struggle.

For socialists the starting point must be that we live in a period of global economic crisis. But the crisis takes different forms in different parts of the world and this fact makes class struggle assume different rhythms.

Three major divisions in the world today on which this article concentrates are those between the Newly Industrialising Countries (NICs), the state capitalist bloc, and Western capitalism.

It is in some of the NICs that the class struggle is currently at its most intense—countries like the Philippines, South Africa and Brazil.

These are new centres of independent capital accumulation, where there has been a rapid build-up of industry, usually as a result of state capitalist intervention, oriented on the world manufacturing market.

However, tremendous contradictions have emerged. First, dependence on the world market makes these economies highly volatile, as the debt crisis has proved.

Secondly, industrialisation has created a large, skilled working class, which is increasingly unwilling to accept the low wages, poor housing and working conditions under which accumulation originally took place.

Thirdly, the political regimes which presided over industrialisation were usually highly authoritarian. Their continued existence is itself an obstacle to further progress. It would suit the more farsighted elements of these local ruling classes to move to a more flexible political regime, able to act as a safety-valve for working class discontent without blowing the lid off the system.

They would like a transition to something like the system of bourgeois democracy we know in the West, with the legalisation of mass workers' organisations tied to a parliamentary regime.

However, that is easier said than done. The more reactionary elements in ruling circles, particularly military elements, retain a bunker mentality resistant to any type of change.

Equally, the sheer depth of the crisis and the militancy of the working class render the possibility of a smooth transition highly doubtful.

The threat of revolution rather than reform dogs the process of liberalisation.

The unresolved nature of what has happened in the Philippines since the fall of Marcos gives us one example. The other is South Africa, where attempts to reform the apartheid regime have gone hand in hand with the social and political explosions we have witnessed since 1984.

(Although Poland strictly speaking is part of the state capitalist bloc, the events in 1980-81 fit the same pattern: a debt crisis related to Poland's attempt to break into the world market led to an upsurge of militancy against an authoritarian regime quite unable to cope with workers' demands.)

In this situation very militant working class movements can rapidly develop: there has been the growth of black trade unions in South Africa, the Workers' Party (PT) and militant trade unionism in Brazil, as well as Solidarnosc in Poland.

Gorbachev—shaking up the bureaucrats

Despite their militancy, these movements contain enormous confusions. PT, for example, has within it social-democratic, centrist, third world nationalist and Trotskyist currents.

The problems this sort of confusion creates can be seen in South Africa, with the oscillation between "workerism" and "populism", that is, between a concentration on purely workplace issues and a belief in the politics of the community (where the ideas of the ANC dominate).

Unless a revolutionary party develops there is the danger of a repeat of the defeat suffered by Polish workers.

The price of that defeat can be seen within the state capitalist bloc. Since the smashing of Solidarnosc there has been only minimal initiatives from the working class.

However, long term problems of slow growth and low productivity face the ruling bureaucracies in the state capitalist countries. These problems reflect both the general crisis of world capitalism and the specific limitations of bureaucratic state capitalism.

The model that emerged in its classic form in the 1930s no longer fits. Then the need was for the total mobilisation of national resources in order to compete with rival national economies. That had the advantage of partially insulating the national economy from the full force of the international market.

Now the concentration of national capital into a single state capital poses more problems than it solves. There can be no permanent insulation from the international market and, largely because the world's productive forces have become more and more internationalised, state capitals have fallen behind in the race for greater efficiency and productivity.

With sluggish growth rates and declining profitability, the pressures for reform designed to gear the economy to the demands of the market have increased enormously.

Where this process has gone furthest is in China, with Deng pursuing integration of the country into the world market.

However, greater integration into the world market means greater economic instability as the national economy responds to the ups and downs of the international system. This is, as China demonstrates, extremely dangerous politically, since it also weakens the control of the bureaucracy over the economy. The regime is further destabilised because of resistance from powerful vested interests in the status quo coming from central planners, local party bosses and managers. Yet, if there is to be progress beyond purely cosmetic reform, real political changes are required. Hence Gorbachev's urging of secret ballots in the election of party officials to shake up the system, a move that necessarily entails conflict with the bureaucracy.

The danger then is that conflict spills out beyond the bureaucracy. As the Chinese students showed, the rhetoric about democracy was taken seriously.

Bureaucratic infighting may also provoke popular reaction. Kunaev, the old, corrupt boss of Kazakhstan was sacked by Gorbachev as part of the liberalisation process. The riots that then followed may partly have been stirred up by conservative elements in the hierarchy. But equally, because Kunaev was a Kazakh and his replacement was a Great Russian, the riots may also be due to nationalist, even Islamic fundamentalist, sentiment.

Historically there have been two roads to independent working class activity in the state capitalist bloc. One is that revolts start from below against attacks by the state (for example Poland in 1970, 1976 and 1980).

The other is that splits in the bureaucracy give an opening to initiatives from below, the last example of which was Czechoslovakia in 1968.

It may be that the next explosion in the Eastern bloc will be precipitated by a split at the top, perhaps even in the Kremlin itself.

Finally there is the Western capitalist

bloc—or more precisely Western Europe. At first sight this seems much less exciting.

The picture here can be summed up as trench warfare between the social classes rather than outright conflict. Unemployment is high and economic growth slow.

The ruling class is under economic pressure to solve its problems by attacking workers' living standards. But it is unable to mount an all-out offensive. It is forced to be more reliant on attrition.

A mirror image of this can be seen in the opposing class. Workers are on the defensive. But their organisations are more or less intact despite defeats. The working class is far from being smashed.

There have been efforts by the ruling class to make a decisive breakthrough (what might be termed blitzkrieg). The miners' strike was one such example. But the outcome is so far indecisive.

This is not to say that the period lacks struggle. But the struggles—even when major—have been defensive and controlled from the top.

This aspect of control by the trade union bureaucracy (the bureaucratic mass strike) has characterised the large-scale struggles we have seen in the public sector strikes in Belgium and Holland over the last two years, the Danish general strike of Easter 1985, the British miners' strike of 1984-5, and the recent anti-austerity strikes in Greece.

However, there is nothing in principle that prevents such strikes being the beginning of an upturn in working class struggle.

They can change their character if they escape the grip of the trade union bureaucracy and threaten to go onto the offensive. Such was the pattern of development of the events of May 1968 in France.

It could have happened in the miners' strike, for example, if the mass picketing at Orgreave had taken off, or if, when the dockers came out in July 1984, the isolation of the miners' had ended.

Quite possibly the upturn in Britain will start from a bureaucratic mass strike, provoked by a ruling class attempt at a decisive breakthrough, that gets out of control and passes into the hands of the rank and file.

However, the upturn may develop along quite different lines. The events in France give us a concrete idea of what this might be.

First there was the student movement which grew with quite unexpected speed, militancy and elan. It forced the government to retreat on not only its education "reforms" but its racist nationality bill and privatisation plans for prisons.

This was then followed by the rail strike, clearly inspired in part by the example of the students' victory. What was significant about the rail strike was that from the first it was controlled from below, never by the trade union bureaucracy.

Indeed many of the strikers were not even in the unions. The strike saw the development of rank and file organisation in the shape of some 90 strike committees and two "coordinations" at national level, one for drivers only, the other across all categories.

The union leaderships were completely taken by surprise and did their best to obstruct the course of the strike.

The revolutionary left had some real influence. Lutte Ouvriere, the Trotskyist organisation with the most serious orientation on the working class, claim to have initiated 20 strike committees in the first week and held leading positions on the bureau of the Coordination Intercategories, which represented 18,000 strikers.

Thus the strike marks a partial break with the general pattern of the downturn in workers' struggle which has been characteristic over the recent period.

But there were limitations. First, apoliticism was widespread among the students, in contrast with May 1968 which coincided with and was inspired by the Vietnam liberation struggle.

The contrast is not surprising: the experience of Mitterrand's "socialism" has bred cynicism and hostility to political parties.

Secondly, the government had learned the lessons of 1968—and retreated very rapidly to get the students off the streets.

Thirdly, there was the sectionalism of the drivers, the key group among the striking railway workers. While 90 to 95 percent of drivers came out on strike, only 50 percent of the other categories did and only at the height of the strike. That meant that out of 230,000 railway workers a maximum of 100,000 took action. Furthermore, the 18,000 drivers felt little need for action from the other categories, and those other categories tended to feel dependent on the striking drivers.

Consequently, strikers were slow to spread the action within the railways and then beyond to organised groups of workers.

Fourthly, the role of the trade union bureaucracies was to exploit this sectionalism. The socialist CFDT encouraged drivers to preserve their own separate organisation and took initiatives to push them to work. The communist CGT played a more ambiguous but equally rotten role.

Fifthly, the failings of the revolutionary left cannot escape attention. The French section of the Fourth International, the LCR, tail-ended the Socialist CFDT and the sectionalism of the drivers.

Lutte Ouvriere played a better role. Yet, despite its considerable influence and its opposition to sectionalism, it did not operate as an independent political force within the strike or put out political propaganda of its own.

So the need to generalise or link up with strikers in the rest of the public sector was never agitated for openly as a minority political position. The 300,000 leaflets appealing to other workers to support the rail strike went out in the name of the Coordination Intercategories, and then only on 12 January—three days before the end of the strike.

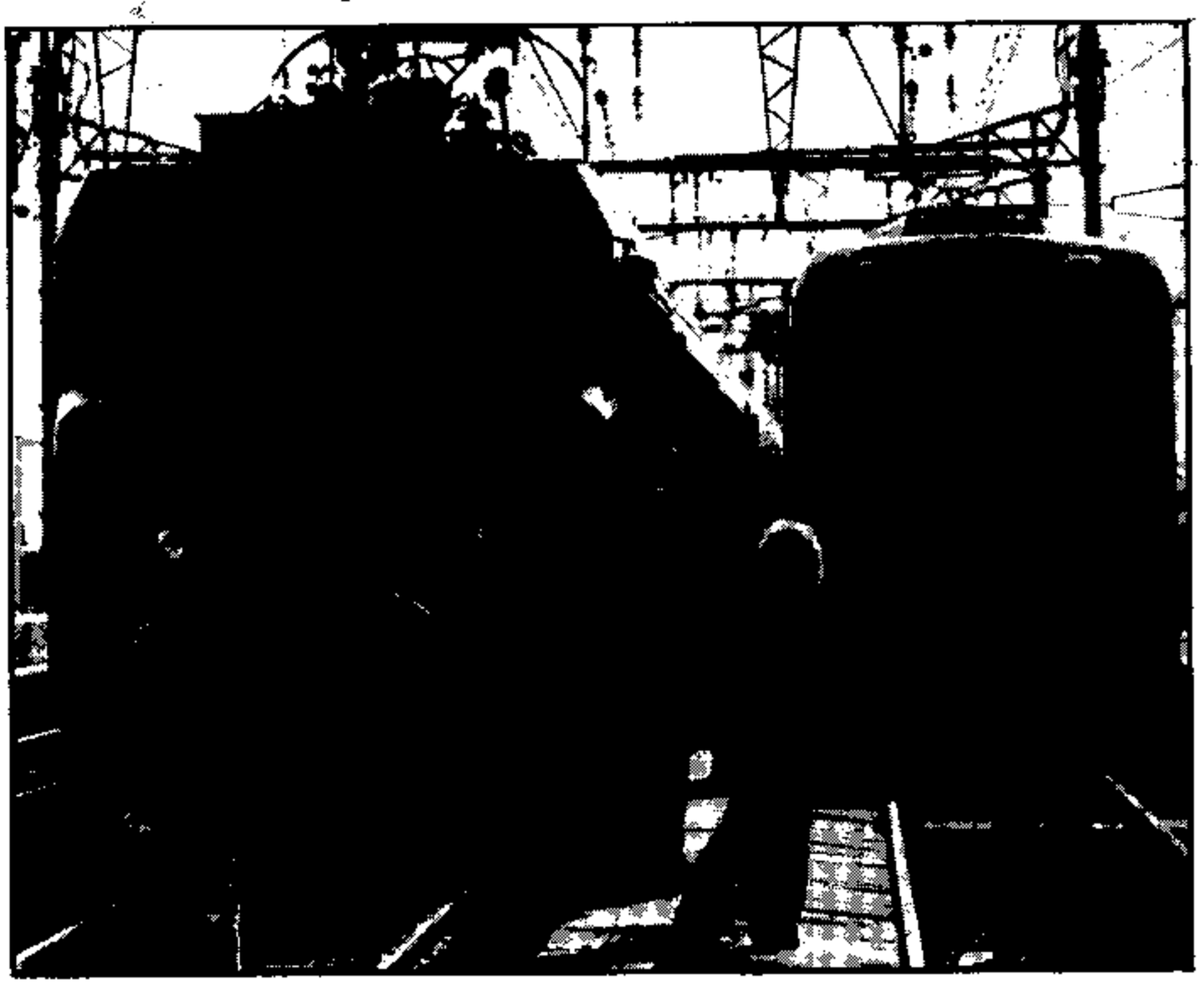
A tremendous opportunity to build an open revolutionary leadership among rank and file workers in struggle was squandered.

The significance of the French events is two-fold. They give us an idea of how the situation can begin to break in favour of socialists.

They also underline the importance of what socialists should be doing—building an organisation with the strength and flexibility to break from routine and openly to intervene, whether among students or workers. For that an independent political presence that does not hide itself in the movement is vital.

The upturn will come, and in conditions even like those in France it will be possible for revolutionary socialists to increase rapidly in numbers and influence.■

Alex Callinicos



French rail workers–they took their leaders by surprise

Opinion polls apart

ACCORDING TO conventional thinking public opinion is a powerful political force. It represents the majority and is peaceful. It is easily distinguished from undemocratic forms of pressure, like strikes, which represent minorities and are disruptive.

Although these ideas have been around for some time they are increasingly being adopted by trade union and Labour leaders as a justification for their rightward shift away from ideas of class struggle.

The new realists of the unions see public opinion as a vital ingredient in negotiation and counterpose it to militancy which, in their view, loses public sympathy, leads to defeat and loses Labour votes.

For Neil Kinnock public opinion is absolutely central. He sees his supreme task as creating an acceptable public image for the Labour Party in order to win the next general election. For reformist campaigners like Bruce Kent public opinion is also vital. He sees it as the means by which CND will rid the world of nuclear weapons.

The overwhelming impression given is that public opinion is a powerful influence that intervenes throughout the democratic process.

But what is myth, and what is reality, about public opinion? It has a strangely ethereal nature. You can neither see it, hear it, nor feel it. Indeed when opinions do appear publicly, in pickets or demonstrations, they are denounced as the actions of undemocratic and aggressive minorities.

However, although public opinion cannot be sensed, it can be counted, by the opinion pollsters. There have been many criticisms of the techniques of opinion polling, but they do provide a mass of data which is of great interest when carefully interpreted. In particular, the polls provide a factual basis for asking whether public opinion is as influential as it is portrayed.

What is its role in industrial disputes? The 'winter of discontent' of 1978-79 is often quoted as illustrating the strength of public opinion. The wave of strikes against the Labour government's 5 percent pay norm was unpopular. Months later, a Tory government was returned in a general election.

Such a conclusion ignores the circumstances of the strikes. Workers had endured three years of the 'Social Contract.' Living standards had fallen, unemployment had risen and services had been cut. When Callaghan tried to extend the policy the TUC was split. Strikes soon followed. Though large numbers were involved the strikes were fragmentary, bitter and poorly led. They did not involve key groups of workers and were largely unsuccessful. The strikes and the subsequent electoral defeat involved the same process of demoralisation. No separate concept of public opinion need be invoked.

Other examples completely discredit the new realists' account. In December 1971, during a fuel crisis, the miners went on strike demanding massive wage increases. They sent flying pickets to power stations and railway depots. They called for support from the engineers and with them closed the Saltley coke depot, forcing the outnumbered police to withdraw in humiliation. Far from being alienated public opinion was enthusiastic. In January 1972 55 percent of those polled sympathised with the miners and only 16 percent with the employers. In February, the figures were 52 percent and 20 percent respectively. The miners won the dispute through militancy and public opinion cheered them on.

Two years later the miners came back for more. Their overtime ban rapidly paralysed the country and industry was put on a three-day week. Once again public opinion was supportive. In December 1973 44 percent supported the miners and 30 percent the employers. Tory Prime Minister Ted Heath defiantly called a general election on the issue of "who runs the country?" The electorate voted him out of office. Militant action, in these instances, gained the support of public opinion and put Labour into office, though only by a narrow margin.

In the miners' strike of 1984-85 about one third of public opinion supported the miners as opposed to 40 percent, rising to 50 percent, which supported the National Coal Board. Considering the sustained attack by politicans and the media this level of support is rather higher than the new realists might anticipate. The *Economist* in June 1984, quoting a finding that 35 percent of those polled supported the miners, commented, "To the sort of people who read or write in the *Economist*, this level of public support is astonishing." Moreover Labour's standing in the polls stayed close to the Tories for the first half of the strike. Indeed Labour edged ahead in the summer months when picketing was at its highest.

Public opinion wasn't enough for the nurses

During the autumn the strike entered a more defensive phase and defeat appeared increasingly certain. The fact that the Tories pulled ahead at this time may be explained in part by the strike. But a more obvious factor was the Brighton bombing.

The health workers' dispute of 1982 involved low levels of industrial action and successfully sought popular support. After the TUC day of action in September a MORI poll showed that 83 percent wanted the government to increase its pay offer to the nurses. Some 70 percent even wanted the ancillary workers to get a better deal. The government's handling of the dispute was roundly condemned in the polls and appeared to be affecting Thatcher's public image. But despite this massive amount of public support the health workers got no improvement in their final settlement.

It is thus not true that a vigorously fought strike is bound to lose public opinion and weaken the dispute. Nor is it the case that a dispute in which tactics are moderated to gain the support of public opinion is more likely to be successful.

Public opinion has often been quoted as an important consideration for campaigns. CND, for instance, came to gauge its success by the progress of its various anti-nuclear proposals in the opinion polls. This approach corresponded with the desire of the leadership of CND to present a popular non-political image not aimed at any one section of society.

At first it seemed to work. Opposition to Trident then opposition to Cruise rose beyond 50 percent. Opposition to American nuclear bases also became a majority view and support for unilateral nuclear disarmament became accepted by a substantial minority.

But nothing happened as a result. The government launched a propaganda campaign against CND, characterising them and the Labour Party as "one-sided disarmers". Ever mindful of public opinion CND shifted its emphasis onto Cruise and Trident and away from the controversial issue of unilateralism where they knew they were unlikely to win the majority view. They then put their faith in the election of anti-nuclear candidates in the 1983 general election. In the event, despite the continuing high level of opinion against Cruise and Trident, many anti-nuclear candidates got defeated and the Tories were returned with a massively increased majority.

Even policies which have massive public support may not be implemented. About 75 percent of those polled are in favour of the return of capital punishment. Thankfully no party seems likely to implement such a policy. This has not prevented the Tories from cynically turning the issue to their advantage. In their 1983 election campaign law and order figured prominently. Thatcher promised a 'free vote' in the new

parliament on the question of capital punishment. Immediately after the election the press changed its tune on the issue. Bishops and former prison governors were quoted saying that, on balance, capital punishment was a bad thing. In particular no opinion polls were published before the vote.

Thatcher let it be known that she personally favoured the death penalty. But Tory MPs must have got a different message, for they voted against it. A poll published the next day showed 75 percent of the public in favour of capital punishment, the same huge majority that has been obtained on previous occasions. The whole affair had been cleverly managed.

A survey of relevant opinion polls shows about half in favour of government policy and half against. In addition to those topics already mentioned there are poll majorities for: closing nuclear power stations, removing troops from Northern Ireland, withdrawing Britain from the Common Market, banning hunting with dogs, reintroducing national service, refusing public money for trade union ballots, abolishing restrictions on Sunday Trading, the compulsory screening of everyone for AIDS, and the introduction of proportional representation.

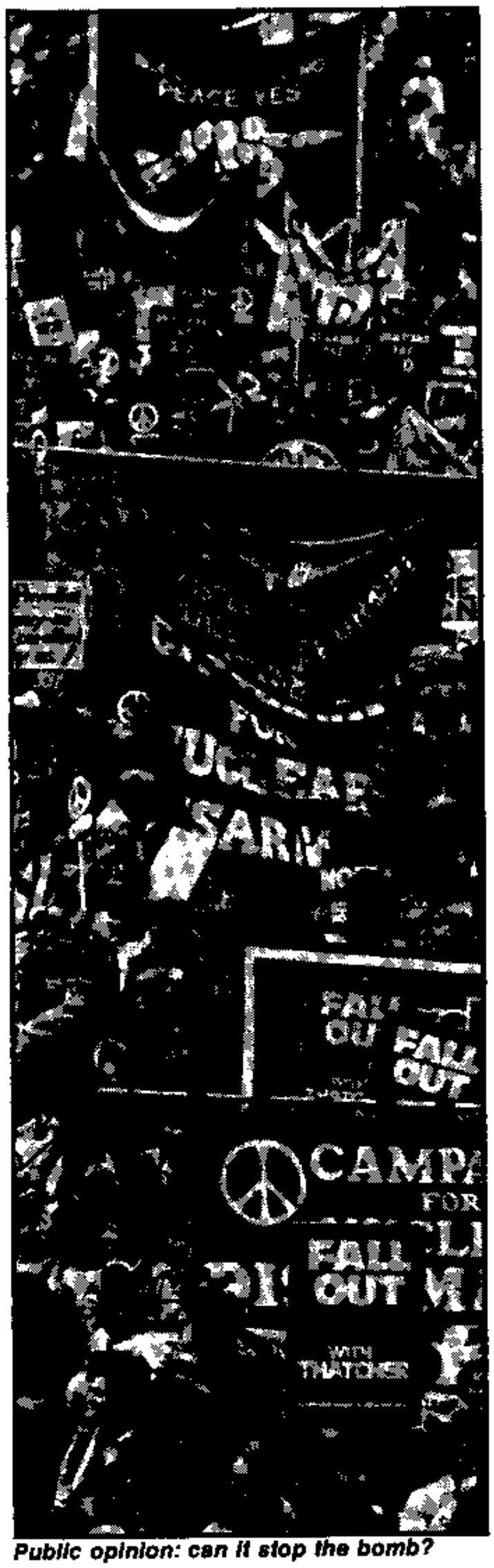
Few of these policies are likely to be implemented by the present government or by Labour should it get elected. In a society largely regarded as democratic successive governments have systematically ignored huge amounts of public opinion, apparently with impunity. Government and public opinion, far from being harmoniously coordinated as politicians and trade union leaders pretend, exist almost independently of one another, with public opinion having little discernible influence.

When elections are just over the horizon governments do adjust some of their policies in the direction of public opinion. The recent Tory increases in expenditure on health and education are a good example. But this is simply an election manoeuvre. Whenever changes in government policy happen to coincide with public opinion, cabinet ministers make great play of the fact. They pretend they are responding to changes in public opinion. In fact they are responding to changes in ruling class opinion.

The myth of the power of public opinion continues to have wide currency. Even on the left many of these ideas are accepted. Tony Benn has argued for the increased use of referenda as a way of giving public opinion direct influence and thus, in his view, improving democracy. Noting the rather mixed collection of policies that the polls endorse, Benn argues that in opinion polls:

> "The respondents are voting without responsibility, they know perfectly well that whatever they say nothing is going to happen. When you link decisions with opinion polling which is what the referendum does, you bring together the two ingredients that make true self-government."

Unfortunately the brief responsibility



Public opinion: can it stop the bomb?

conferred by a referendum, combined with the inevitable media deluge, usually leads to a vote in favour of the status quo. The British referendum on the Common Market, the Spanish referendum on NATO and the Irish referendum on divorce showed this. In all these instances initial polls predicted a reform vote. Massive media campaigns, with dire warnings about the consequences of change, swung the vote to the right.

The theory we have discussed argues that public opinion influences policy. In practice this is clearly not the case.

But public opinion, the ideas of ordinary people, are of great importance. They relate, albeit indirectly, to class consciousness. To understand how, some Marxist theory is involved.

Marx wrote:

> "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but it the contrary it is their social being that determines their consciousness."

Opinions do not arise abstractly, but in the process of people's productive social activity in the real world. In addition the particular content of people's ideas is strongly influenced by the alienated productive relationships of capitalism. Marx and Engels wrote "the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the dominant ideas." They are not totally dominant however, because the social experience of working under capitalism generates opposition.

The opinion poll gathers in ideas as if they were thought up individually, detaching them from their social origins. It then recombines them as a percentage and attempts to predict outcomes as though this aggregate of individual opinions, grandly labelled 'public opinion,' had magically become an actor in its own right.

For the Marxist, ideas should not be detached from their social origins. Opinions are part of social activity and develop with it. During the early seventies the high level of class struggle carried public opinion along. By the end of the decade struggle was fragmented and demoralised and public opinion reflected this change. In the downturn the situation has become more complex. More basic ideas come to the fore, for instance the fear of nuclear holocaust.

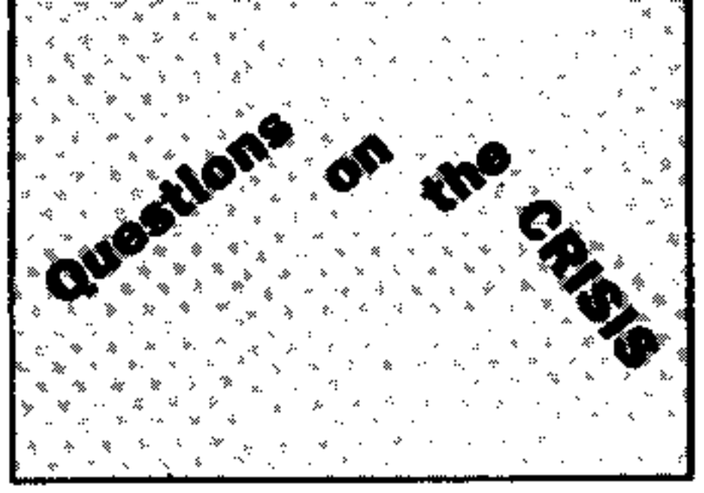
The increasing interest of trade union leaders and labour politicians in public opinion combines and seems to justify a number of related policies: rejection of class struggle, orientation towards parliament and the increased use of secret ballots.

This approach may or may not help Labour get elected, but it certainly will not improve workers' living standards. Although the ideology of public opinion has gained considerable influence the reality of workers' struggle is never far away. In the process of workers' self-activity dramatic and creative changes take place in people's ideas, exposing the weakness of public opinion as a force and as a concept.

During the 1984-85 miners' strike the opinion pollsters were busy asking the public whether they approved of the methods being used by the miners. They gained predictably disapproving and rather static responses. The opinions that really changed during the strike were left unresearched. For instance they didn't ask the miners what they thought of the role of women in strikes. They didn't ask the mining communities about their changing attitudes to the police or the media.

For socialist these were the opinions that really mattered, for they were the opinions that developed during the struggle and could have led it to victory. It is in the aftermath of its defeat that 'public opinionism' has come increasingly to the fore, and it will be in the future upturn of class struggle that it and the rest of the ideology of the **new realism will be thrown aside.■**

Martin Roiser



Sick and tired

Can Capitalism Get out of the Crisis?

THE FACT that Marxists tend to use the same word, "crisis", in two distinct though related ways is a frequent source of confusion.

When we talk about the crisis in South Africa, or the Philippines, we mean a situation of acute difficulty for the ruling class of those countries. Such crises result from a combination of economic pressures and mass social upheaval which threatens to turn into a revolutionary overthrow of the existing order.

When Lenin observed that a ruling class can always get out of a crisis if it can hammer the working class hard enough, it was that sort of sharply polarised, potentially revolutionary crisis he had in mind.

There have been many occasions when the capitalist class has been able to stabilise its rule only by crushing working class organisation and imposing savage cuts in the income of the majority of the population.

The military coups in Chile in 1973, Argentina in 1976, Turkey in 1980 and Poland in 1981 are recent examples. There are even cases, such as Portugal after 1975, where social democratic organisations have presided over much less bloody but still comparable offensives on behalf of capitalism.

But Marxists also use the word "crisis" in the sense of a lengthy period, or "epoch", a protracted sickness in which a weakened and unstable capitalism becomes much more vulnerable to crises in the dramatic sense of the word.

The world economy slumped into that sort of crisis in the mid 1970s, and has still not escaped (indeed the strains in the system, indicating the exhaustion of the long post Second World War boom, can be traced back to the late 1960s, making this now one of the longest periods of crisis in capitalism's history).

The system has not collapsed. The rich and powerful have hung on grimly, and the strongest have seen their profits rise again in recent years. Stock markets are currently booming, and speculators flourish.

Yet the sickness has not been cured, and the economic and political instability increases. Capitalism today is like someone with weak lungs—still capable of looking fit and energetic, but always liable to relapse with chronic bronchitis when the weather turns bad.

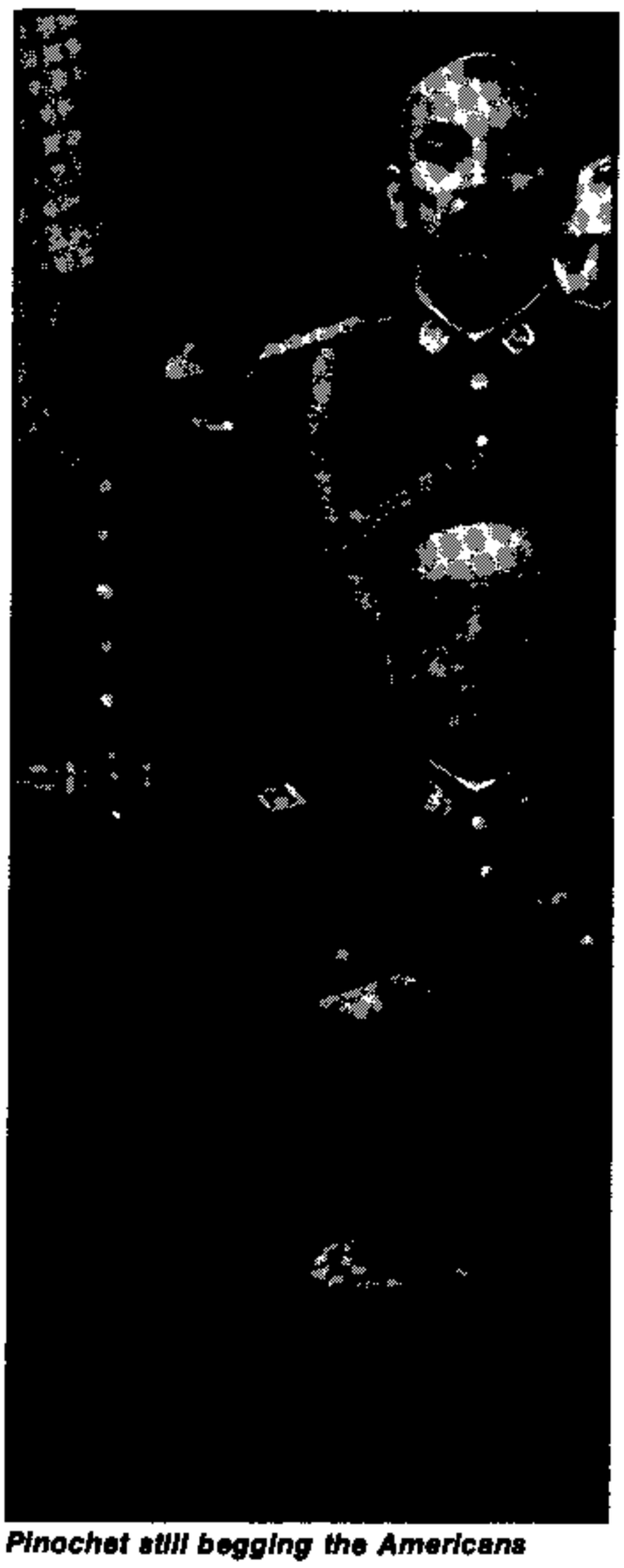
Even that analogy only applies to the healthier bits of the system. In much of Africa, and parts of Latin America and Asia, economies are in decay, with disease and famine rampant.

It is when we consider the global picture that the relevance today of Lenin's remark needs to be qualified. For individual national economies cannot escape the world crisis on their own, whatever their governments do.

The panaceas of reformism are now about as effective as handing out Anadin tablets to cancer victims. Injections of state money can help stave off the worst effects of slump, but governments cannot control the investment of capital, or the staggering flows of money across the currency market.

All of them are compelled sooner or later to play by the rules of the game—which means increasing efficiency, competitiveness, productivity, investment and profits.

Those familiar with Marx's analysis of how capitalism works should not be surprised by the repeated disasters of reformist governments in this period. Marx showed that crises arise from a declining rate of profit and capitalists' belief that returns in the future could be too low to justify the risk of investment.



Pinochet still begging the Americans

It follows that for capitalism to get out of the crisis there is only one lasting remedy—a restoration of the conditions for making profits.

You might conclude that the Tories, and their fellow thinkers elsewhere, are pursuing the only possible strategy for a ruling class today. In the competitive jungle it's a matter of survival of the fittest, and the weak will be eliminated. Unemployment has to rise, unions have to be smashed, wages have to be cut, if British capitalism is to prosper.

But we only have to consider some of the examples quoted earlier to realise that it's not as simple as that. The "smashing" of working class organisation by the Chilean generals was more thorough than the Tories dare to dream of in Britain. In the four years after 1973 wages fell by over half. Yet the Chilean economy did not escape from crisis.

On the contrary, burdened with debt, riddled by speculation, and poleaxed by the collapse of its raw material prices on world markets, it is still in chaos whilst Pinochet begs for American aid.

A comparable situation exists in Argentina, Portugal and Poland. In all of them the ruling class has survived at the expense of workers—but the economy remains chronically sick.

To look at the issue another way—a ruling class may be able to increase the competitiveness of its national capital by holding down wage levels and shooting militant workers.

In Brazil they managed it in the "miracle" years after the coup of 1964. In South Korea and Taiwan they are still managing it, though they've been forced to concede wage increases to avert revolt.

There can be no national solutions like that to a global crisis. If every ruling class succeeds in cutting wages, and throws more workers on the dole, the effect at first will be to intensify the slump. The workers will have less money to spend, yet the capitalists will still be reluctant to invest. Demand in the world as a whole for commodities will decline.

Does that mean there is no way out of the crisis? What if there was a massive increase in arms spending, or another global war? Alternatively, what if the most powerful nation states finally united behind a collective programme for lifting the system out of slump?

But those are hypothetical questions. The most likely prospect is that for the foreseeable future this epoch of crisis, with all its attendant horrors and suffering, will continue. We should look to organised workers, not to organised capital, to put an end to it once and for all.■

Pete Green

Without a paddle

What will the next Labour government (if elected) be like? What ideas will guide it and will they have any effect on its practice? *Roy Hattersley's* new book entitled *Choose Freedom* is an attempt to explain his view of socialism and the future under Labour. Here *Paul Foot* reviews the book.

THE *Sunday Times* organised a Round The World Yacht Race in 1969. An unlikely entrant was one Donald Crowhurst, who left late and ill-equipped.

Before he crossed the Atlantic, he realised that he was not going to make it round the world. He had neither the equipment nor the navigational skill. He was reluctant to return to jeering reporters, disappointed family and friends—so he hit on a compromise. *He said he was going round the world when he wasn't.*

He did in speech what he could not do in fact. For several weeks his brilliant reports of record-breaking sailing through the South Pacific hoodwinked the *Sunday Times* and everyone else.

But as he realised he could never maintain the hoax once he got home, Crowhurst started to go mad. Eventually he walked off the end of his boat and drowned.

There is something of the tragic story of Donald Crowhurst in this latest and much reviewed book* by the deputy leader of the Labour Party.

Not long ago Labour leaders did not even bother to set out their basic socialist philosophy. The very idea was rather vulgar, and likely to put off voters.

There was no question of beckoning people to socialism, or even to a new social order. All that was necessary was to show people that Labour had plans for a better, more prosperous Britain than had the Tories.

Labour would usher in "a new Britain" or "get Britain back to work". Ideological niceties were luxuries for cloisters or for sectarians.

Then along came the SDP and Alliance to swipe 26 percent of the vote. The Alliance was very pragmatic—full of phrases about a prosperous new Britain and getting Britain back to work. It had hosts of top administrators and economists making detailed plans for every area of social policy.

Roy Hattersley and many others like him found it was necessary to remind people of "the ideological foundation" on which Labour stood.

Labour, he insists, is not a pragmatic party which just weaves a lot of policies together at election times. It is founded on ideas, and above all on one very simple idea: equality.

To explain what he means Roy Hattersley goes back to the hero of his youth. He quotes again and again from the books of Professor R H Tawney.

And well he might, for Tawney was a wonderful writer, who explained simple socialist ideas perhaps better than anyone else who ever wrote in the English language.

Tawney's great classic, *Equality* (1931), demolished the protests of capitalist supporters that private enterprise was a guarantor of freedom. "Freedom for the pike is death to the minnows," he said.

Equality of reward was the only real guarantee of freedom, since it ensured that all could equally develop their own characteristics and abilities. Those who wanted the grotesque inequalities of capitalism to continue really wanted the freedom to continue to exploit others, and therefore to limit the freedom of the vast majority.

Roy Hattersley, who writes pretty well himself, rehearses these arguments (usually by quoting Tawney). He draws the line down from Tawney through the other theorists loosely described as right wing Labour who have followed him.

He singles out Hugh Gaitskell and Evan Durbin, friends and contemporaries who went into parliament in 1945; and Anthony Crosland, who wrote *The Future of Socialism* in the year (1956) that Gaitskell became leader of the Labour Party.

All three, like Tawney, were intellectuals of outstanding ability. All urged the creation of a new social order founded on equality.

None of them belonged to the left in the Labour Party, and for most of their lives engaged in furious argument with the left. They were ideological in that they believed in equality, but they never allowed their ideology to outrun what to them was practical.

What was practical was tied to one firm moor-

ing point: the election to parliament of a majority Labour government.

Because their ideas were always firmly fixed on this reality, they were easier to read and more credible than their contemporaries on the left of the Labour Party, who drifted in the wide seas of rhetoric and Christian socialism where there was no mooring point.

COMMON to all Roy Hattersley's heroes was the notion of government control of the economy. They were impatient with shibboleths about nationalisation of all industry since it seemed to them irrelevant to the central issue: control.

Thus Tawney, writing in 1931, took as his central theme the conversion of a political democracy in which the elected parliament of that democracy had control over the economy.

Gaitskell, writing before the 1945 election, put this bluntly:

> "In a democratic country, the public must be the master of industry."

Durbin, who is normally thought of as very right wing indeed, went even further:

> "To the centralised control of a democratic community our livelihood and security must be submitted."

Crosland, writing in 1956, based his whole book on the necessity of elected Labour being in control of the economy.

All this, for all those 25 years, was persuasive. The ideas struck a chord among millions of people for one basic reason. It seemed quite possible that a future Labour government would be able to seize economic control from the capitalists and create a more equal society.

It seemed possible if only because it had not been tried. A road to socialism had been opened up by the franchise: the parliamentary road. Before a majority Labour government was elected (first in 1945) there was no proof of what it could or could not do.

Thus Tawney, Gaitskell and Durbin, who wrote mainly before 1945, and, to a lesser extent (because he wrote after 1945) Crosland all seemed credible figures with something important to say.

The credibility of their ideas depended on the possibility that they might be carried out.

In the 30 years since Crosland's book there have been two long periods of Labour government, which spanned most of the 1960s and 1970s.

In 1966 a Labour government was elected with the highest percentage of the poll ever won by the Labour Party, and with a majority of nearly 100 seats over all other parties in the House of Commons in peacetime, full-employment conditions.

Again in 1974 Labour came back to office with a majority, again in peacetime, and again when there were comparatively (with today) few people out of work.

There is no need for me to recite what happened to these governments. Roy Hattersley does it well enough.

> "On the elimination of poverty and the promotion of equality the evidence is categorical...we have not become a more equal society. In the ten years since 1976 the number of families below the DHSS poverty line has steadily increased."

Quite true. And in the first three years of that ugly process Roy Hattersley was in the cabinet.

This applies to all forms of equality, not just economic equality, as Hattersley again concedes:

> "The PSI study of 1984 showed that racial discrimination in employment was just as great as it had been before the Racial Discrimination Act was passed ten years earlier."

The same goes for the Sex Discrimination Act and the Equal Pay Act and all the efforts of Labour governments to pass equality through parliament.

ROY HATTERSLEY is surprised by this. "If, as socialists believe, equality and liberty are indivisible, it first seems extraordinary that the extension of democracy has not produced a simultaneous increase in both conditions."

Extraordinary indeed. But *why*? The question must be answered. Hattersley has a shot at it from time to time in his book. For instance:

> "Society remains unequal and unfree largely because the privileged have held on to their privileges by exploiting their entrenched position."

But that is just a tautology. The rich remain rich because they have hung onto their riches. Later on he tries again:

> "The status of the City within our society demonstrates the ability of the rich and powerful to subvert even governments."

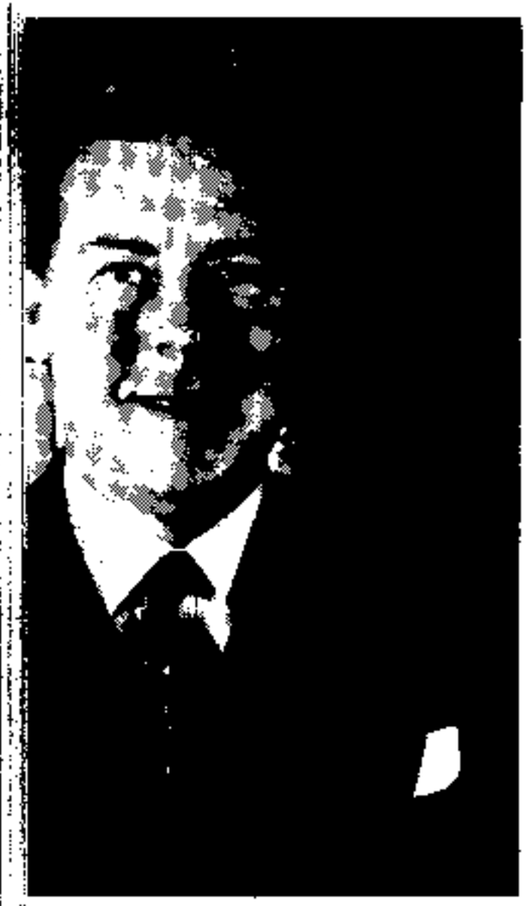
Here he gives a modest example, citing the commitment given by Tate and Lyle to the Labour government in 1976 that if it was allowed to take over Manbre and Garton (another sugar firm) it would not make any workers redundant.

When the sackings followed hard on the commitment, complains Hattersley, who was in charge of these matters in the cabinet of the time, "the government did not possess the power to insist that the promise must be kept."

These are not, as they appear in this book, minor matters to be shrugged off in a sentence or two and left unexplained and undigested. For if it is true that the "rich and powerful" can "subvert" a Labour government and reverse that government's intentions to make a more equal society, if it is true that such a government "does not possess the power" to bring the monopolists to heel, then the central mooring point on which the whole theory is based is kicked away.

Everything Tawney, Crosland or Gaitskell wrote was credible only in so far as it could be put into effect by a Labour government. If a Labour government can't put any of it into effect, the whole argument, *including even the argument for equality*, loses its force.

In order to maintain the argument, therefore, the upholders of equality have to discover why the Labour governments have failed in the past, and seek a remedy for the future.



Hugh Gaitskell

If Hattersley is to convince people of the case for equality, he must also convince people that measures for a more equal society can be carried out by the next Labour government.

His own line of argument demands that he analyse in depth why Labour (at least in 1974-9 and also, arguably, in 1964-70) ended up with a less equal, more unemployed and divided society than when it started.

It demands that he explain how the "subversion" of past governments by the rich is going to be stopped next time; how a Labour government in the tradition which he claims to represent—Tawney, Gaitskell, Crosland, no more than that—will *take control* of the economy and rule supreme over the dark forces which subverted Labour governments in the past.

That he will not and cannot do. If he was logical he would conclude from the past failures of Labour governments that the measures required next time must be stronger, more ruthless, more draconian. But he cannot proceed with that logic for two reasons.

FIRST there is his immediate problem: to win the next general election. In an atmosphere created by the capitalist counter-attack which he so effectively derides, in the stench of defeat and retreat, when labour at every level is paralysed by its enemies' successes and by its own lack of confidence, Labour voters look less and less for drastic or draconian solutions.

The rage is all for "safe" Labour, for "MPs in suits" who are deferential to their leader, their country and their Queen. So to win the next election the solutions must be soft, easy and nice to everyone.

The second reason is more fundamental. It is that Hattersley himself is infected, as all his colleagues are, by the long years of defeat in government and humiliation in opposition.

He does not really believe that any of the old remedies can work again, because he knows they did not work last time.

An incident at the last Labour conference perfectly illustrates this mood. The old left wing warhorse Ian Mikardo made a speech in which he argued that as soon as Labour is elected it must impose rigid exchange controls, as it did in the past.

He argued that if the Labour government lost control of the money in the country, it would lose control altogether.

Roy Hattersley replied for the executive. He pooh-poohed the idea of exchange controls. "We all know they wouldn't work, Mik," he said. "After all, they didn't last time." His solution, therefore, was to *abandon all controls* and leave the money to the monetarists.

In his political solutions he takes a huge step *back* from the very limited aspirations of the tradition from which he comes. He is far more reactionary even than Gaitskell and Crosland, let alone Tawney.

In a key sentence, which is really the conclusion of the entire book, Hattersley writes:

> "In a more realistic age we have to limit our aspirations to curbing the City's power and to directing its enthusiasms in a socially desirable direction."

This is the sentence which must be pitted against all the high-flown Tawneyite stuff about equality and a new social order at the beginning of the book.

"In a more realistic age"—he means by that an age of consistent victories of British capital over British labour. "We have to limit our aspirations to curbing the City's power"—how much lower can aspirations fall?

And finally, magnificently, he pledges himself "to directing the City's enthusiasms in a socially desirable direction".

What is the City's main, indeed its only, enthusiasm?

It is, as Roy Hattersley knows perfectly well, to make money for a handful of people. And how does it do that?

By gambling in other people's robbed labour. The very notion "socially desirable" is hostile to everything for which the City of London stands. Yet Roy Hattersley limits his aspirations for the next five years to "directing its enthusiasms" in the direction to which all its enthusiasms are, by its very nature, utterly opposed.

This policy is flanked by little else: a murmur about slightly higher taxes for the rich; *another* National Investment Bank with far less powers even than the ones which were so humiliated in the past; a slightly tougher mergers and monopolies policy which would put the state of the law on such matters rather to the right of where Roy Hattersley, Consumer Affairs Minister, left it in the late 1970s.

He has cast away the very central plank of the political platform which he says he represents.

When Tawney, Gaitskell, Durbin and Crosland wrote about equality, their words had some meaning because they all believed they would, as Labour ministers, get control of the economy.

Their arguments, *therefore*, had some strength and resonance. Roy Hattersley does not believe he can get control of the economy. He still believes in the egalitarian ideas of his youth. He wants a more equal society.

Like Donald Crowhurst he knows he *must* get round the world. But also, like Crowhurst, he knows he *cannot*. He has not got the equipment. He is at the mercy of the wind and the tides.

So, like Crowhurst, he solves his problem by *saying he will do it when he knows he cannot.* Crowhurst managed to delude a lot of experts for quite a long time. Perhaps that was because no one had ever tried the trick before.

Hattersley is entirely unconvincing. His long passages about equality, coupled with a rhetorical appeal at the end of the book to "recapture the spirit of 1945" are just so much utopian waffle.

He is exposed even before he embarks on what he knows is an impossible journey.

At least Crowhurst had the decency to commit suicide rather than be publicly rumbled. I doubt whether Roy Hattersley will go that far.

Tony Crosland

***Choose Freedom**
Roy Hattersley
Michael Joseph £12.95

SAFE AS HOUSES

HUNDREDS of homeless people cluster around emergency centres every night desperate to find a roof for the night. Many fail and end up lining pavements under bridges in makeshift beds.

Single people have been hardest hit. Over 80,000 became officially homeless last year alone.

Many end up in London. In the last six years, the number claiming supplementary benefit from temporary digs has tripled to 160,000, and over 60,000 are in squats or emergency short-life housing.

The Tories forgot to mention there would be nowhere to stay at the end of Tebbit's bike ride.

Behind the obviously homeless there is a less visible army of 500,000 who are without homes but who do not sleep on the streets. They have reached crisis point. Registered with the local council as homeless, they "make do" for the time being in appalling conditions.

They are joined by another 500,000 who live in severely over-crowded conditions, and these two groups make up the bulk of the hopelessly long council house waiting lists which now total 1,200,000.

Add to them the four million living in substandard accommodation, hundreds of thousands in houses declared unfit for human habitation, and the scale of the crisis is all too clear.

Yet at the same time there are 700,000 empty dwellings in Britain, 100,000 of which have never been used. These are the "second" and "third" homes, the crumbling carcasses no one can afford to repair, and the properties kept deliberately empty to make landlords even fatter profits.

The Thatcher government has deepened a crisis that had been building up since the mid-1970s. Since taking office they have slashed spending on council house building and have led the most sustained and vicious attack on council housing since the state intervened during the First World War.

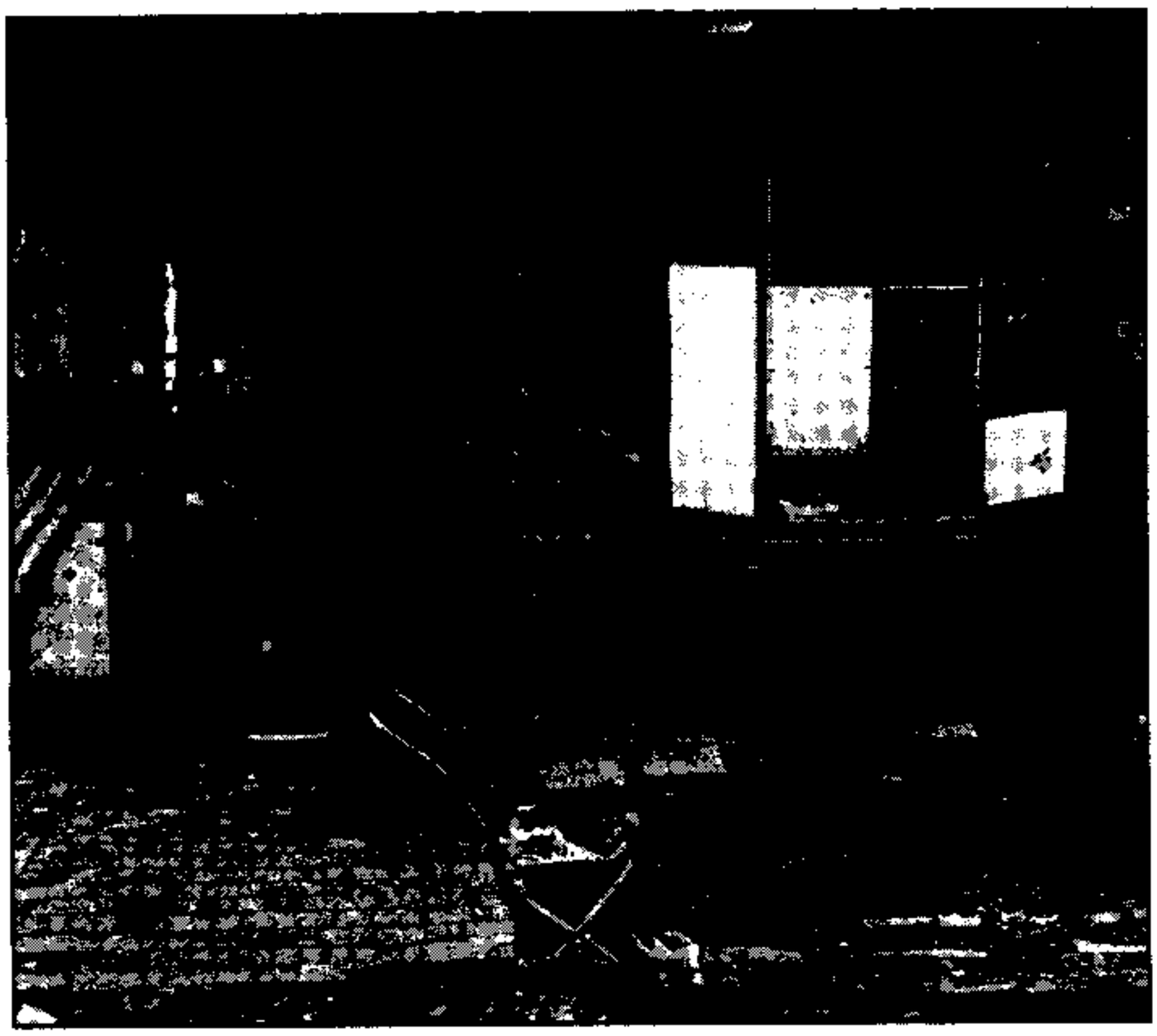
In that era less than 2 percent of housing belonged to local authorities. Private landlords dominated the housing stock, and the majority of working and middle class families lived in rented rooms or houses.

With no rent controls, most workers ended up in over-crowded, over-priced and insanitary conditions.

In the years leading up to 1914 there had been a dramatic slump in the building industry, and as war broke out there were strong calls for more municipal housing and for a central subsidy.

The combination of shortage and enormous rent rises in key industrial areas led to rent strikes in places like Glasgow in 1915, and, suddenly, state intervention.

Rent controls were imposed and the



Homes fit for heroes?

government's wartime promise of "Homes Fit for Heroes" led to a massive programme of local authority slum clearances and house building.

The King's speech to representatives of local authorities in 1919 summed up the mood: "If 'unrest' is to be converted into contentment, the provision of good housing may prove to be one of the most potent agents in that conversion."

What became known as the Addison Act accepted the need for a central subsidy, gave local authorities the statutory obligation to draw up housing plans, and involved well-planned, well-built and designed housing.

In the inter-war years over a million houses were built for local authority renting and millions of slums were demolished.

But there was also a boom in private sector building (2.7 million homes completed for purchase and rent) and a rapid rise in owner occupation. This was helped by government intervention which supported the rise of building societies and gave tax relief on mortgage interest payments.

But there was still a housing shortage, exacerbated by damage during the Second World War.

In the post war climate of economic expansion under state direction, homes were built at a feverish pace both in the private and public sectors. But it never had the same kind of planning, state backing or social welfare status as education, health or social services.

What was really happening was a takeover by building societies, construction firms and property speculators.

Whole city centres and residential areas were raz . to the ground, neighbourhoods were torn apart, and millions were uprooted and re-grouped. For many workers it was a second blitz. For the financial and construction companies it was enormously profitable development under public guidance.

Housing was now dominated by private capital. This meant priority for the profitable commercial developments over the less profitable construction of homes, the jerrybuilding of tower blocks and grim estates, and the push to finance house building through borrowing.

Owner occupation duly received further boosts. In the late fifties and early sixties stamp duties on houses were reduced, local authorities were encouraged to sell council houses and provide funds for buyers, building societies were lent enormous sums of money by the government, and owner occupiers were exempted from income tax on their houses.

The measures succeeded. Owner occupation, which had been less than 10 percent in 1914, rose from 29 percent in 1951 to over 50 percent by the late 1960s.

Squatter learns his rights

The Labour Party, following electoral logic to its precise percentage point, decided that as the majority (just) of householders were now owner occupiers, this was clearly the "natural" form of tenure and should be supported.

The option mortgage scheme to assist low income house purchasers was introduced by them in 1967 and the next Labour government provided £500 million to the building societies during the temporary mortgage famine in 1974.

By the mid 1970s council housing was increasingly under fire from both main parties for poor standards of construction and design, for paternalistic and bureaucratic management, and for cost. It was an attack which rang true as the "modern" estates and high rise blocks became nightmares for tenants because of bad design, appalling construction, and lack of funds for repairs. But the politicians' attacks were also a cover for starving public sector housing of funds.

So the Labour government's Green Paper on housing in 1977 could echo these views at the same time as cutting expenditure, and in this way set the stage for the Tory onslaught in the eighties.

The first thrust of the attack has been spending cuts—over 60 percent since 1979—which have reduced council house building from 160,000 annually to 17,200.

The cuts have also been linked to legislation which has transferred effective power and decision making from local authorities to central government.

But the main plank of the policy has been to increase the level of home ownership. Since 1979 two million people have taken the plunge, pushing the proportion of owner occupiers from 57 to 63 percent.

At the heart of this has been the sale of council properties. Already over one million homes have been sold, only 3 percent of them flats.

There has not been some sudden change of fortune or ideology for most of the two million. The whole of the Tory housing policy has been framed to induce or force people into home ownership through lack of any real alternative.

The inducements include sizeable discounts under the right to buy schemes (now up to 70 percent), the availability of massive mortgages (which local authorities are now obliged to provide), and the preservation of a tax and subsidy system biased in favour of home owners, especially the better paid.

While spending on council house building has fallen from £1,160 million in 1979 to £668 million last year, the government's housing mortgage subsidies have tripled to £4,750 million. Nearly half of this tax relief goes to owner occupiers earning more than £15,000 a year.

The government has also made it easier and cheaper to borrow money and this has led to an enormous increase in property speculation, particularly in the south east and London.

Last year prices rose an average of 25 percent, leaving over half London's flats costing over £150,000.

All this has encouraged private landlords to keep their property empty waiting for the right price to sell, thus reducing properties available for renting and increasing the rents of the few that are left.

The government has also "encouraged" councils to sell whole estates to private developers. The best offers have been taken up, and quick killings made.

With local authority building slashed and the stock drastically cut through sales, waiting lists get longer and longer. And even if by some "miracle" (pregnancy, serious illness etc) some reach the top of the queue, the "two offers" are likely to be in run-down estates or in high rise blocks.

It all means that for thousands of families the only apparent route of escape is to buy, mostly on 100 percent mortgages.

But for over 20,000 families last year alone, the old saying "as safe as houses" became bitterly ironic as mortgage companies swooped in to repossess their "homes"—a dramatic rise from the 2,500 repossessions recorded in 1979.

And they are just the tip of the iceberg. By the end of 1986 over 53,000 mortgage payers were over six months in arrears, and nearly 14,000 were over a year behind.

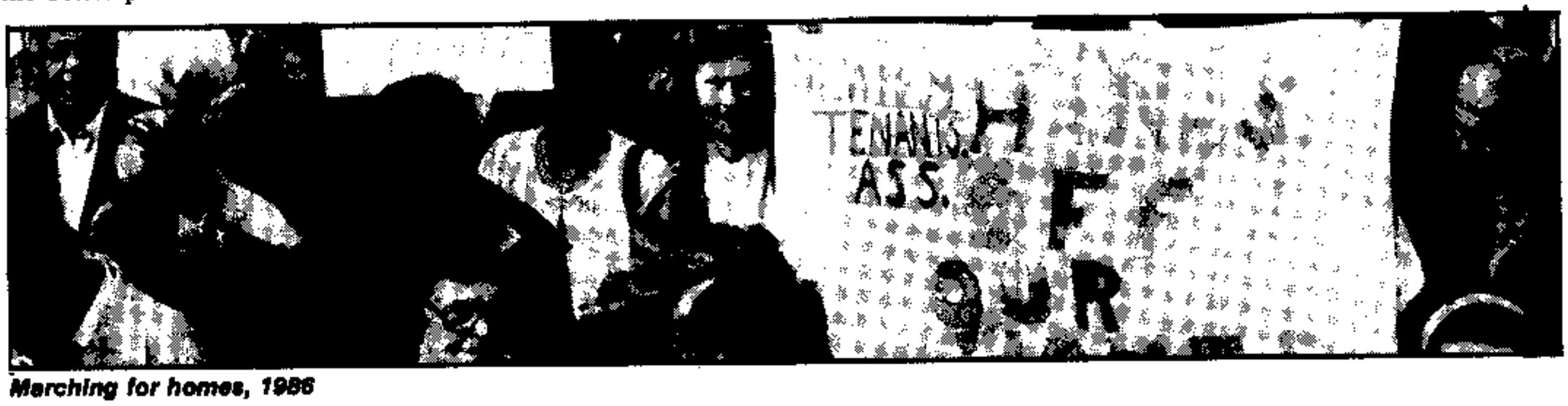
The right to buy campaign has been important for the Tories for three obvious reasons.

First, it has brought in enormous sums of money, almost forgotten next to the better publicised privatisations. The few estimates made put the figure somewhere between £6 and £15 billion—money locked away by legislation to prevent local authorities using it to build replacement council houses.

Secondly, it has pushed the low paid and unemployed further into misery and ghettoisation—a pool of potential sweat shop labourers living in slums who, the Tories think, will be viewed with fear by better off workers.

And thirdly, they see it as reinforcing their "dream" of a property-owning (share-holding) democracy. As the Tory Viscount Cecil outlined to future generations in 1919, owner occupation

> "cultivates prudence and thrift, fosters the sense of security and self-dependence, and sensibly deepens citizens' consciousness of having a



Marching for homes, 1986

1946—up they go...

'stake in the country'."

The "success" of their policies is causing some Tories to question the next step forward. They are worried that ridiculously high house prices in London and the south east are distorting the market and could cause wage pressure affecting the regions.

At the same time it is stopping the free flow of skilled labour to the south which creates the problem of shortage and consequent pay demands.

The more serious free-marketeers have been calling for a reduction in mortgage privileges and de-regulation of rents.

Samuel Brittan, for example, is all for measures to increase the rented sector. He recently argued the merits of this with charming simplicity: Bangladesh has 90 percent owner occupation, Switzerland has only 30 percent. QED.

But de-controlling rent is a dangerous business, as the Tories found out in the fifties, and it would certainly not solve the basic problem of shortage.

Their notorious Rent Act of 1957 opened the way for rapid increases in rents. It led to widespread speculation in the housing market and the removal of tenants by fair means or foul so as to sell with vacant possession. This was most dramatically exposed in the notorious Rachman scandal.

And in 1971 their Housing Finance Bill, which attempted to introduce economic rents in the public sector, led to dramatic rent rises and angry opposition.

Nineteen seventy one also had important lessons for Labour councillors facing Thatcher's attacks. The "unflinching stand" against the Housing Finance Bill crumbled leaving the Clay Cross councillors out on their own. And the Labour Party, having promised to indemnify them once in power, ended up abandoning them.

In the early 1980s the promised "united stand" by Labour councils collapsed even more dramatically, with new realism and law-abiding propaganda undermining the few who tried to fight.

As we have seen, the Labour Party moved rapidly towards supporting home ownership in the late 60s and have now joined the Tories in seeing council housing as the poor relation.

Under Kinnock this has gone even further. Jeff Rooker, the shadow minister for housing, recently tried to amend a Tory parliamentary motion by calling for even more cash incentives for those wanting to buy council property.

And at the recent Labour Party local government conference Kinnock made it absolutely clear that there would be no "blank cheques" for local councils under a Labour government. He said, "I cannot and will not promise a supply of funds on a scale that compares with the levels of cuts in support made in seven years of Tory government."

This was complemented by veiled attacks on the left Labour councillors, the very people trying to do something in the crisis ridden inner city areas; Tory-like demands for greater efficiency; and the clear message to surcharged councillors that they will, again, be abandoned.

It all adds up to the contradictory position facing Labour councillors who, having abandoned or lost the fight against rate capping and other attacks, have been forced to act as agents for Tory cuts.

Every day council housing offices are besieged by people desperate for housing or repairs. In the London Borough of Haringey 500 people rot in bed and breakfasts, often six to a room, and for anything up to a year.

Two thousand are officially homeless. Eleven thousand are on the waiting list, and tens of thousands wait months or years for urgently needed basic repairs.

This year the council expects to complete *three* new homes.

Unable to deliver, Labour councillors keep their socialist spirits up with campaigns—like Haringey's brave stand for gay and lesbian rights.

But even these fail to achieve their aims, and then become a focus for Tory and media attacks—stirring up right wing backlashes which can find an echo among workers still waiting for help with one of their most basic needs—housing.

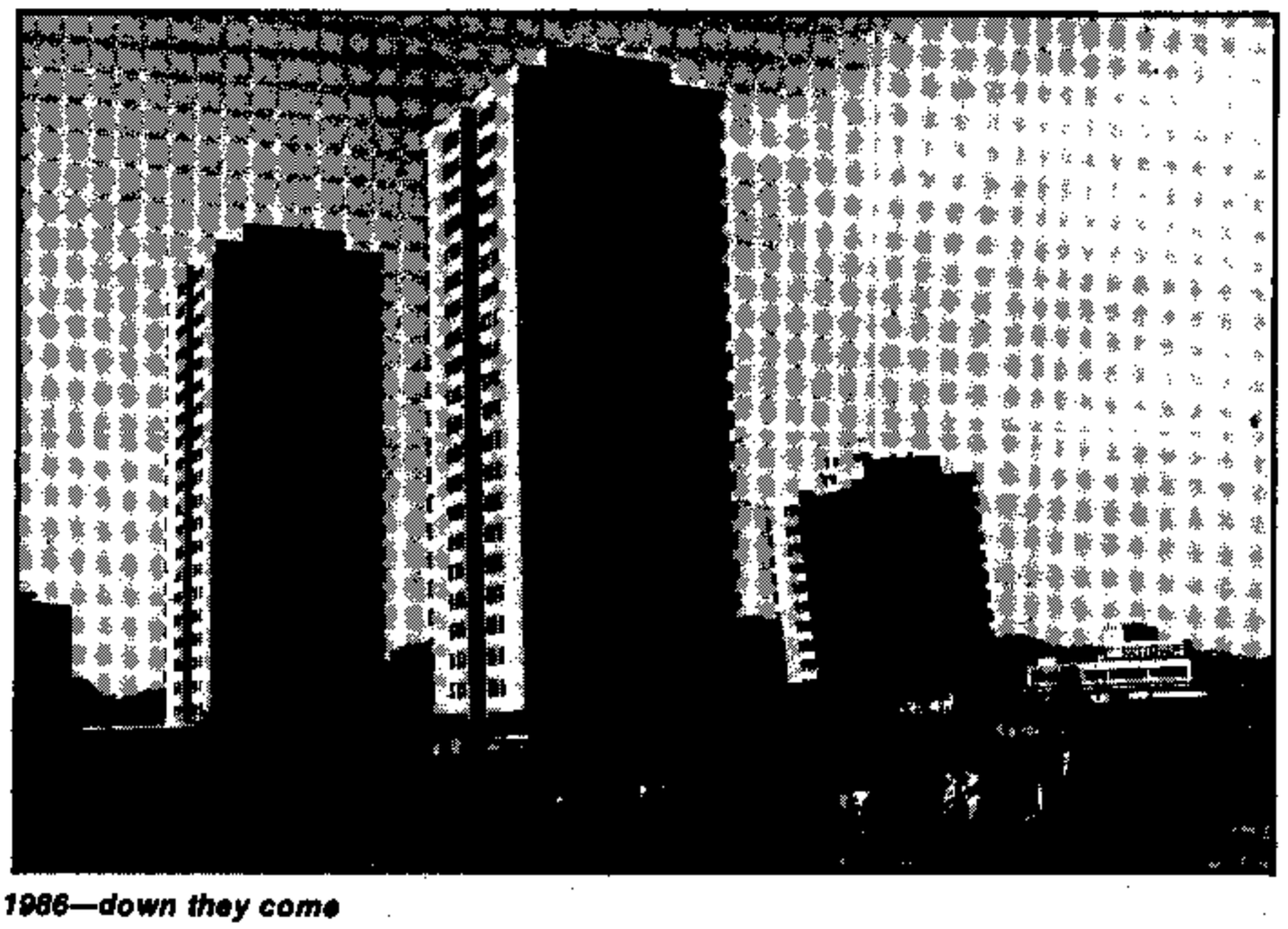
As the situation becomes more and more hopeless, Labour councillors and their supporters increasingly talk about the next Labour government as the solution to all problems.

It is a sad illusion, especially as the economy is going deeper and deeper into crisis.

The only way homelessness can be eradicated is through a massive injection of funds. And that is something the Labour Party is not even prepared to talk about, let alone actually provide.

For them the red rose is firmly planted in the back garden of a privately owned, law-abiding family house. ■

Clare Fermont



1966—down they come

The final crumbs

TWO YEARS ago Labour's annual local government conference must have been a nightmare for the Labour leadership.

Its theme was resisting Tory cuts. The method was defiance of the law. If Labour leaders were unhappy about it, they certainly couldn't say so, as there was so much support for a fight.

Even John Cunningham, Labour's rabid right wing shadow environment secretary, was forced into voicing resistance.

"We must fight the rates act and run it into the ground", he said.

Two years ago, the left were in control. It was their conference. The Labour Party may well have been moving to the right under Kinnock's leadership. But the left was alive and well, and forcing the pace in the local councils.

This year the left was significant for one thing only—its absence.

Ted Knight–just a little help?

Ted Knight, surcharged and disqualified Lambeth councillor, objected on the first night of conference that no platform speaker had mentioned the surcharged councillors. He was told by the platform to shut up and that he would get his chance to speak later.

The fact that the platform felt confident enough to dismiss him was bad enough. But what was worse was that none of the delegates objected to this blatant humiliation of those who had resisted Tory cuts longest.

When he was finally called to speak on the last day of conference, his call for support for the surcharged councillors received applause. But there was no resolution put to conference committing a future Labour government to revoke the surcharges.

More humiliating still was the fact that Roy Hattersley who spoke soon afterwards, received more applause than Knight when he repeated one of the conference's main themes, that there would be "no easy money" for local councils under a future Labour government.

And Tony Byrne, surcharged leader of Liverpool council, was not called at all, despite going onto the platform to argue his case. In fact no Liverpool delegates spoke from the conference floor.

The conference was firmly in the grip of the party leadership. Neil Kinnock, deputy leader Roy Hattersley, John Cunningham, and veteran right winger Jack Straw were the keynote platform speakers.

Their message was clear. Local councils must not try to run the show. As Roy Hattersley said:

> "Local authorities have a vital part to play in creating jobs. But it would be wholly wrong were we to pretend that you can play a bigger part than is reasonably possible".

And what is that part?

In the main it is to help Labour get elected. That's what the plan to create 300,000 new jobs through local government was all about.

Yet if anyone had any illusions that local councils would get the necessary funding to even provide levels of service existing before 1979, they would be sadly disappointed.

"I cannot and I will not promise a supply of funds on a scale that compares with the level of cuts in support made in seven years of Tory government," said Kinnock.

And just in case the left was still harbouring any illusions about Labour leaders softening their stance after an election, Roy Hattersley left no room for doubt.

> "The Labour government will not and cannot tailor its grant formula to meet the needs of half a dozen authorities which have chosen creative accounting."

Creative accounting is the method by which some councils tried to delay making cuts by borrowing money under an agreement by which repayments did not have to be made until three years after the money was handed over.

Jack Straw, a Labour environment spokesman, dashed any hopes of a future Labour government helping these councils out. "We're not writing off anything," he said.

Yet you would have thought by the left's response that they had been promised the earth.

Speaker after speaker went to the rostrum to reinforce the point.

David Blunkett, leader of Sheffield council and one of the main figures behind the resistance two years ago, best expressed the change in mood, when he said:

> "No serious demand is being made for a blank cheque from a Labour government. Nor are they asking for councils or councillors to be bailed out."

Any idea of council workers playing a central part in the fight for jobs and services seemed a million miles away.

David Blunkett–bailing out

Jack Dromey, a top TGWU official, said:

> "Working people have access to power in two ways. It's through their trade union and organised power, or through the ballot box. But they know and we know that victory will only come through the ballot box and through the election of a Labour government".

Not one delegate got up to disagree.

Nobody even questioned whether a Labour government would keep its word.

Those few who weren't totally happy with what was being proposed abysmally failed to put an alternative. Even the fringe meetings were simply a mirror image of the conference itself.

Out of 1,100 delegates, 250 went to hear front bench spokesman John Prescott on local government employment prospects. A further 250 attended the "One World" fringe meeting.

But when it came to the two meetings organised by the left, the campaign group meeting and the Liverpool meeting, only 40 and 20 attended respectively.

What was said at these meetings was even worse.

Tony Dykes, leader of Camden council and platform speaker at the Campaign Group fringe meeting, said:

> "I make no apology for what we've done to improve and expand our services.
>
> "We face the problem of managing the system within the framework of capitalism. That sometimes means hurting the people we want to represent."

In other words, the left wingers in local government accept that they are making cuts in one breath and then go on to claim they have defended jobs and services in the next.

Left wingers in the Labour Party have shifted the goal posts so much they have forgotten what their target was.

In the name of Labour Party "unity" they are attacking the very workers who fought to defend them against Tory cuts.

And they have attacked the few remaining services of the most vulnerable—the old, the sick, the disabled, and the young. Yet they absurdly go on to talk of themselves as socialists, carrying out socialist policies.

The end result is Labour leaders receiving standing ovations for telling those in local government they will not reverse Tory cuts if they win the next election.■

Maureen Watson

PLUTO PRESS

Lost in space

PLUTO PRESS was born at the very beginning of the seventies in a room at the national headquarters of the International Socialists (forerunners of the SWP). It died in all but name in September 1986.

During its lifetime Pluto published some remarkable books—including some which played an important role in the intellectual and organisational development of the SWP. Tony Cliff's four volume political biography of *Lenin* laid the basis of our understanding of party organisation. His book *The Employers' Offensive: productivity deals and how to fight them* (1970) sold over 30,000 copies. It was the instrument around which, in the early seventies, the International Socialists transformed themselves from a group made up largely of students into one with a sizeable working class membership and a considerable following.

At the start Pluto was closely linked with the IS and even those books not actually written by IS authors were in line with IS politics. Committed members of IS would buy almost anything *Pluto* published.

There was an enormous expansion of socialist and radical publishing coinciding with and following on from the great working class struggles of the early 70s.

The upturn in class struggle brought an upturn in interest in the political ideas of the left which found expression in an enormous array of small publishers and radical bookshops.

Whole movements were in the throes of being born and were celebrating with a flurry of position papers, polemics, histories and magazines.

Out of these same movements publishers were born.

By the end of the seventies these publishers themselves constituted a considerable movement.

Pluto got in early on this movement and were well placed to make the most of it. Having started out publishing books which reflected the politics of the IS, Pluto set itself the task of representing the left in general. This coincided with the departure of certain key figures in Pluto Press from IS.

Distancing themselves from IS and later disowning the SWP almost altogether Pluto tried consciously—and fatally—to become *the* publisher of the left.

Over the next few years no one can deny that this is more or less what they achieved. Until quite recently they were, along with Virago, quoted as the success story of left publishing.

But there was always a contradiction. The large general publisher has an advantage in being able to "spread the risk". If a particular type of book does not sell they can transfer their publishing to another field.

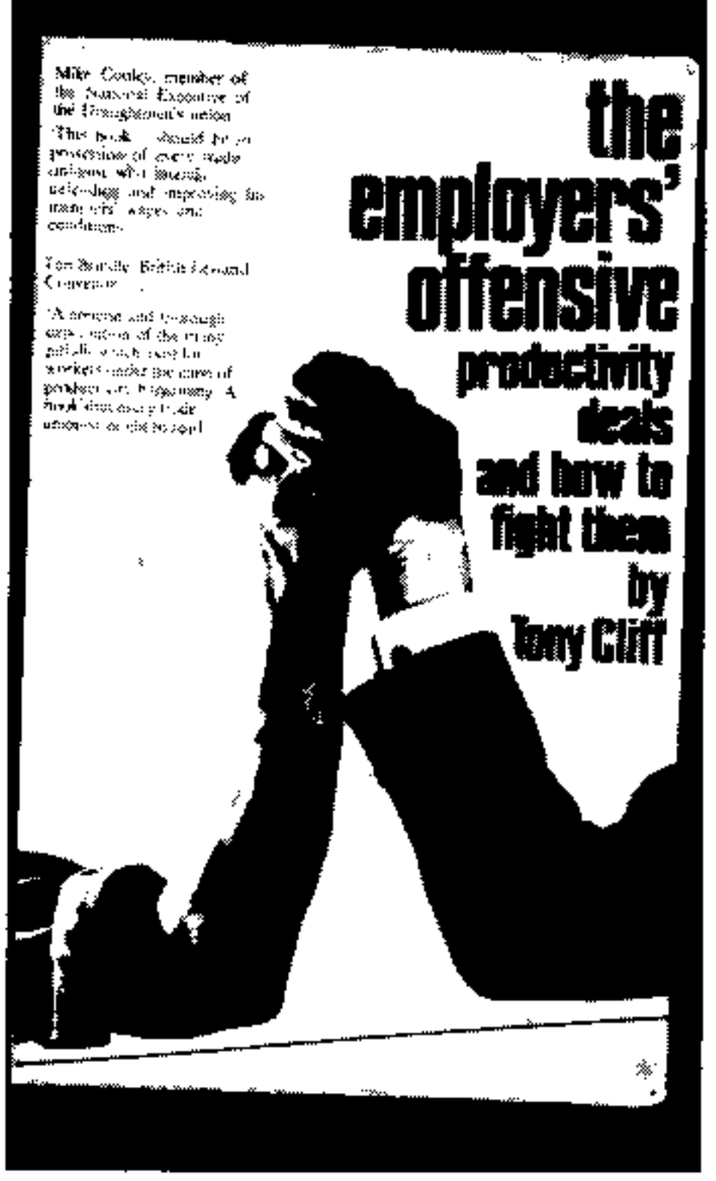
The specialist political publishers have the advantage of knowing their audience, they can modify their publishing programmes to fit its needs and changes of direction.

Pluto Press by trying to be *the* publisher of the left had the problems of both the specialist and the general publisher.

As defeats multiplied the left increasingly lost its way and tended to fragment into mutually hostile single-issue campaigns.

Pluto Press was left chasing a wider and increasingly disparate, and illusory audience.

In line with the "new realism" of the Kinnockite right a "left realist" tendency has emerged which attributes the decline of the fragments to mismanagement, inefficiency and outmoded methods.



This left realist, made to measure, road to socialism clearly holds an attraction for a publisher desperate for a market.

Whilst founder of Pluto Richard Kuper claims not to subscribe to the left realist view, some of Pluto's later books—notably the truly dreadful *Princess Di* and to a lesser extent the **Pluto Crime** series—clearly made concessions to its thinking.

A sad drift from their early days when, with far scarcer resources, they had established themselves a reputation for thoughtful and responsive publishing.

To the Marxist left Pluto was a publisher which had lost its way, following one fashionable cause after another; Bennism, Animal Rights, Greenham; but never consolidating a really strong list in any one subject or group of authors (their notorious parsimony in dealings with authors cannot have helped).

Class politics was neglected, even attacked in books they published by Andre Gorz and others.

During the last few years Pluto's "natural" market—the labour left and the so-called "independent socialists" has dwindled and moved to the right. Pluto inevitably followed them.

When Pluto did finally manage to publish a book about the miners' strike, some months after it was over, it was written by Geoffrey Goodman, former industrial editor of the *Daily Mirror*.

In a survey carried out by the *Radical Bookseller*, bookshops consistently reported as long as three years ago that the sales of what they call "political" (as opposed to "feminist fiction", "gay" "black" etc) titles has been dropping.

The scattering of the left into reformist politics, movementism or into oblivion has been reflected in their book-buying; Pluto was the casualty.■

Fergus Nicol

REVIEW ARTICLE

The weak state?

The End of the Third World
Nigel Harris
IB Taurus hardback £14.95
(to be published in paperback by Penguin in March at £3.95)

THIS NEW work by Nigel Harris is as provocative as its title suggests. *The End of the Third World* continues, though with a more sharply defined focus, the central theme of his previous book, *Of Bread and Guns*, which was a systematic onslaught on the nationalism which has for so long crippled the theory and practice of most of the left.

From the triumph of Stalinism in Russia onwards, even most of those who call themselves Marxist have confused the cause of national liberation with the class struggle of workers, and identified "economic development" with the building of socialism.

In the West, especially at the height of the Vietnam war, third worldist ideas expressed a widespread impatience with the slow, difficult task of relating to the industrial working class at home. For many the decisive focus of contradiction in the system ceased to be the exploitation of one class by another and became the oppression and pillage of less developed countries by the imperialist states of the "centre".

In the new states of Asia and Africa, freed from the formal yoke of colonialism in the 1950s and 1960s, third worldism became part of the ideological baggage of the new ruling classes, accompanied by the rhetoric of socialism.

But as Harris sharply observes:

> "The aspirations of the new ruling orders also meant that, once in power, the issue of overcoming mass poverty became subordinate to the growth of national power. Class issues disappeared in national ones... The concepts of socialism and popular liberation...became entirely absorbed by those of state power, the liberation of governments." (p182).

In terms of the tradition represented by this review that is not a new argument. In a remarkable body of work stretching back to the 1960s Nigel Harris has repeatedly engaged in sharp, theoretical debate with all those who want to substitute one or other nationalist model of socialism for the fundamental Marxist idea of the common interests of a world working class.

What is new is Nigel's forthright assertion that the era of third worldism, of the various ideologies of "national reformism" is at an end.

That bold conclusion, however, is reached only after a thorough and painstaking investigation of changes in the world order and their impact on parts at least of "the third world".

The idea that sustained economic development by the "backward" part of the globe with two thirds of the world's population had become impossible, within the framework of the world market, united otherwise very diverse schools of thought in the 1950s and 1960s.

For the reformists and nationalists the solution lay in one variant or another of economic isolationism, protecting the domestic economy against foreign imports, with the state becoming the main agency of capital accumulation.

For those whom Harris describes as revolutionary internationalists (he singles out the writings of Mike Kidron, a leading theoretician of the SWP in the 1960s), the third world was doomed to stagnation, and largely marginal to the interests of the main centres of capital. Only a revolution by workers in those centres could "change the context for the economic development of the periphery".

Women workers in Brazil

The problem with both perspectives was that they ignored the development that was already taking place, the rise of the Newly Industrialising Countries, especially the "Gang of Four" in Asia (South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore), and Brazil and Mexico in Latin America.

It is their growth in particular which has undermined whatever objective basis existed for claiming that there is a single Third World.

The argument should not be misunderstood. The claim is not that poverty is declining, or that famine is about to disappear, nor even that there is more than the most marginal shift in the balance of economic power in the globe as a whole. As Harris observes in passing (for they are not the main concern of this book):

> "The poorest countries experienced very little change—the seventies returned them it seemed to the forties. They remained trapped in producing and exporting a single raw material at low levels of productivity, lacking reserves to guard against famine."

The book's central argument is that the development that has taken place has occurred within, not outside, the framework of the world market.

The Stalinist model of state capitalism, which was so influential for new ruling classes seeking to imitate the rapid industrialisation of Russia in the 1930s and 1940s, has suddenly lost its aura of success.

Just as the Japanese model has become fashionable in the United States, so the export successes of South Korea and Taiwan have become the example for other "developing" states. The ideology of third worldism is disintegrating.

As Nigel carefully outlines with abundant data and historical analysis, the rise of the Newly Industrialising Countries (NICs) conforms neither to the prejudices of the reformist left nor to those of the market-oriented right.

Growth challenged the fiction of "economic independence" acclaimed by the nationalist promoters of import-substitution and protectionism.

The goal of self-sufficiency was always an absurdity for all but the largest of third world states such as China and Brazil. None could prosper without access to the advanced technologies and capital goods available only through participation on the world market.

Growth therefore requires exports, not just of raw materials but of manufactured goods. That in turn forces a search for specialised niches within the world trading system—whether these be provided by multinational subcontractors as in the case of Singapore and Mexico, or state sponsored heavy industry as in the case of shipbuilding in South Korea.

But with the rather peculiar exception of Hong Kong, growth invariably required massive intervention by the state. States alone could both mobilise sufficient surplus value from the mass of workers and

Seoul students clash with police -destabilising the ruling order.

peasants, and ensure that surplus was devoted to accumulation and the necessary infrastructure. States alone had the power to shift the balance of competitive advantage within the world trading system.

Some readers may find the preoccupation with the arguments between development economists and the "neoclassicals" in the opening chapters of the book strange and difficult to follow.

They should bear in mind that the book is addressing an audience located in many of the countries referred to. For that audience those ideas and debates have been enormously influential.

The reader in Britain concerned with the wider implications of it all should be patient, or be prepared to skip. In the last three chapters the argument broadens out to engage with some of the most important ideas in our own tradition.

Chapter 6 on "States and Economic Development" provides an admirably concise summary of the historical role of the state in promoting capitalist accumulation from Britain in the 17th century through to South Korea in the 1970s.

According to Harris the state's role was initially decisive in nurturing capital. But once private capital has grown, and the economy has become increasingly integrated into the world market, paradoxically, "the more the power of the government to shape the economy declines" (p169).

This does not mean that the state necessarily declines in size, although there has been a global trend towards privatisation. Rather there is a "redefinition of its role" in which the state is forced to "follow the trend of the market" as a precondition of economic success.

Chapter 7, rather oddly titled "Sociologies", steps further back to focus on the social roots of the diverse ideologies summed up under the label of "third worldism".

This chapter harks back to some of his earlier work and contains some especially sharp analysis of the gap between rhetoric and reality in the speeches and writings of Mao and Mahatma Gandhi.

The final chapter, "The end of National Reformism", is much more than a summary of the preceding arguments. Here Harris argues that, whilst the rise of the NICs was a product of the global expansion of the system in the long boom, it has been reinforced by the pressures of global slump.

The system continues to change, with new forms of the international division of labour, and a further dispersal of manufacturing activity beyond the old "core" of the system.

Those changes have produced new and potentially powerful industrial working-classes in all the NICs. Governments continue to maintain elaborate repressive apparatuses to suppress any signs of dissent, and the growing pressures for rising wages. But even the seemingly impregnable regime in South Korea was shaken by strikes and riots in whole towns and provinces in 1980.

As Harris comments (and it's a pity that he couldn't find more space to develop the point):

> "Without a relaxation of the repressive conditions governing labour and society at large, it will prove increasingly difficult to make the transition to a modern economy. The growth of capital will be punctuated by explosions of the frustrated fury of the workers, simultaneously called upon to play an increasingly responsible role but denied the means to do so. The self-same problem afflicts many countries, including the Eastern European countries and South Africa" (p198).

But not all of the generalisations in these final chapters are as well founded as that one. Nor do some of Harris's bolder speculations strictly flow from the logic of his earlier arguments. For example, he suggests that the state now has to "enforce conditions on labour which will persuade capital to invest in the country (or stay there if it is already operating there)".

He then jumps straight to the conclusion that: "The machinery of the welfare state and the political concessions embodied in nationalised industries become redundant; social democracy loses its raison d'etre." But this conclusion does not necessarily follow.

Harris ignores the way in which social democracy and the welfare state in the industrialised West perform precisely those functions of incorporation and control of the workers, the lack of which makes the class struggle in such countries as South Korea and Brazil so unstable for the ruling order.

Again, right at the end, Harris suggests that "as capital and states become slightly dissociated, the pressures to war are slightly weakened." I think I know why he believes that, and I'd like to share his optimism, but in the face of the evidence of the global arms race the assertion requires more justification than he provides.

There are also a number of issues and questions which Harris touches on but does not, in my view, satisfactorily resolve.

To what extent can other developing economies, especially the two largest, China and India, successfully follow the path of South Korea? Could a massive flood of exports from additional NICs be absorbed by the world market without generating chronic dislocations and political pressures in both the United States and Europe?

Can Mexico and Brazil, and many other vulnerable economies, shake off the crippling burden of their accumulated debts?

It is partly true that financial crisis has served as "the lever of the world economy which prized open the Latin American economies and forced liberalisation". But there is more to it than that and Harris's discussion of the issue is cursory, to say the least.

Harris has alerted us to some of the dramatic changes which have taken place in recent years. He has yet again tried to jolt the habitual assumptions of his likely readerships both here and in the developing countries themselves. Perhaps he will take up some of the questions he hasn't settled in the pages of this review.

The debate touches on fundamentals, and all comrades should give this book's conclusions serious attention.

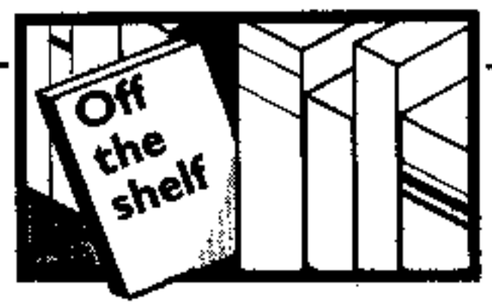
The political relevance of *The End of the Third World* is not confined to the countries the book concentrates on.

Capitalism has created a single world system, tearing down the barriers erected by nation states and uprooting the old modes of production, fulfilling its progressive historical role. For the left to oppose such a process in the name of defending the state, and an illusory national independence, is both reactionary and utopian.

As Nigel Harris also insists, however:

> "The world of states will not wither away of its own accord... Great battles will be required against states to win the new world; but the possibilities of doing so are now much enhanced by the changes that are under way."■

Pete Green



Cannon's conversion

Police clash with steel strikers, Chicago 1937

History of American Trotskyism
J P Cannon
Pathfinder £5.75

THERE IS a problem with most studies of the history of Trotskyism. Either they bear no relation to anything which has ever happened, or else they describe a series of trivial events which have happened but which nobody cares about.

James P Cannon's *History of American Trotskyism* suffers from neither faults.

Cannon gave the series of lectures which make up the book in 1942. By then he had been an organiser for the IWW, a leader of the Socialist Party left wing in the Midwest, a founder and then central committee member of the early Communist Party, and much more besides.

From its beginnings American communism was plagued by factionalism. Nineteen nineteen saw the founding of not one but two communist parties. It took two years and a series of splits and fusions before the forces of American communism were united in one organisation.

Even this was riddled with sectionalism.

This demoralising situation was made worse by the degeneration of the Comintern. The young and inexperienced American leadership were no longer dealing with the Comintern of Lenin and Trotsky, but rather a Comintern under the leadership first of Zinoviev, then Bukharin and finally Stalin.

Support from Moscow gave enormous prestige to a faction. Where this prestige was not enough the Comintern intervened and imposed the leadership of its own choice.

Then in 1928, at the 6th World Congress of the Comintern, a copy of Trotsky's *Criticism of The Draft Programme of the Communist International* accidentally fell into Cannon's hands. From then on Cannon regarded himself as a Trotskyist.

In a matter of weeks rumours began to spreatl about Cannon's Trotskyism. No one could believe it at first, after all Cannon was well in line to become leader of the party.

Along with others Cannon was put on trial for Trotskyism by the Political Committee and expelled.

The trial gave American Trotskyism its first platform. An audience of horrified party functionaries heard Cannon declare his complete solidarity with Trotsky.

The next five years were a brutal test of the political commitment of the members of the Left Opposition, defending themselves *politically* against the slanders of the Stalinists, and *physically* against the constant attempts to smash up their meetings and paper sales.

There was a new complication which worked against the Trotskyists. The Comintern was entering it's ultra-left "Third Period". On the surface, it looked as if the entire policy of the Opposition had been accepted by Stalin.

Leading figures of the Opposition, Radek, Smilga and Preobrazhensky, capitulated, claiming that Stalin had been converted to the position of the Opposition.

It was not until five years later that the tide began to turn. In 1933 Cannon realised that new opportunities were opening up. Firstly, there were signs of an increase in working class militancy.

Secondly, the impotence of Stalinism in the face of the rise of fascism in Germany was the first indication that the triumphalism of the third period was giving way to a period of crisis in the Stalinist parties.

The opportunities which these factors created were tremendous. Far from being on the sidelines, isolated from the mass movement, the Trotskyists found themselves at the centre of a number of crucially important strikes.

The first wave of strikes was tentative, ill directed, and largely unsuccessful.

The second wave, in 1934, witnessed the Toledo Auto-Lite strike, fiercely militant and overwhelmingly successful. It was led by the Conference for Progressive Labor Action, an amorphous group of ex-Socialists, ex-Communists, intellectuals and more than a few bible students. Their single most important leader was an ex-preacher called A J Muste.

Following this came the strike of the longshoremen in San Francisco and the strikes of the Minneapolis Teamsters. For months the eyes of all American workers were upon Minneapolis and the small group of Trotskyists who were leading the struggle.

The victory of Minneapolis helped lay the basis for the massive unionisation resulting in the creation of the CIO. In the short term it paved the way for the fusion of the Trotskyists and the Musteites:

The result of the fusion was the Workers Party of the United States, an organisation of some 1,000 members. A reasonable size, but one which in no way reflected its tremendous prestige. The joint forces of the leaders of Toledo and Minneapolis represented a very real force in a situation of rising class struggle.

It is at this point that the limitations of Cannon's analysis begin to assert themselves.

Cannon gives all the necessary information but fails to draw the appropriate conclusion. With Trotsky's backing, Cannon won the party to the position of entering the Socialist Party.

In short, the Trotskyists were to gather around themselves as many of the best SP elements as they could in the shortest time possible, and pull these people out with them when they left or were thrown out. The whole operation was a very short term affair.

This tactic had been relatively successful in France, but in retrospect, it is clear that what *was* applicable in the highly specific circumstances of France in 1934, was disastrous in the case of America.

They gained 500 members out of the entry into the SP. Cannon is quick to point this out. What is mentioned only in passing is that while the massive unionisation of 1936-7 was taking place, the Trotskyists had no serious orientation towards work in the newly founded CIO.

They were too busy engaged in month after month of negotiations with the leadership of the left in the SP over the terms on which they would be allowed to join.

During the most colossal upsurge in the history of the American working class the Trotskyists mistakenly thought that the key to the situation was to relate to the 25,000-"strong"-predominantly petty bourgeois-Socialist Party.

Furthermore, the conditions upon which they were allowed to join the SP meant that, for the first time since 1928, no newspaper was produced by them. This state of affairs lasted for several months.

The result was that the organisation which benefited most from the formation of the CIO was the Communist Party.

Cannon's *History of American Trotskyism* is an important legacy of the early Trotskyist movement. It would however be a very serious error to approach it as a handbook on how to build a revolutionary party.

It is rather, the history of how a group of serious revolutionaries faced, and attempted to solve, the concrete problems of relating to the working class.■

Tony Milligan

The hooligan poet

Mayakovsky in Moscow, 1930

THE FEBRUARY Revolution in 1917 smashed the Tsarist autocracy. With the collapse of the old order, censorship also collapsed. In the beginning the intelligentsia were hopeful of better things, but they were also timid.

October smashed the bourgeoisie. The intelligentsia were set adrift. Those poets and writers who spoke with refinement about their life and class now screamed about the mob.

Their property had gone, taken by the "illiterate" worker wearing "hobnail" boots, those whose surplus made their lives possible.

Many artists clung to the freedom February had given them, and were hostile to the Bolshevik insurrection. For Mayakovsky October was welcome. He had been at war with bourgeois culture before, but it was on their terms.

He called for socialist art. But the young republic had more important things to cope with—a solution to elementary problems like the war, food, clothing, shelter and even literacy.

Revolution had also touched him in 1905. Mayakovsky was at school, 11 going on 12 years old. First he went to demonstrations with school friends.

Later the students were kept at school by force of arms. He began to think of himself as a revolutionary.

After the defeat of 1905 he got to know a few Bolsheviks who helped him with his homework and gave him Lenin to read. In 1907 he joined the Bolsheviks and went to prison.

Between September 1909 and January 1910 while in prison he fell in love with poetry. Solitary confinement also gave him a love of freedom.

During the years of reaction that followed 1905 the intelligentsia, frightened by the forces unleashed in the revolution, began to turn towards mysticism, eroticism and, with the war, patriotism.

All thoughts of art connecting with the real lives of the people were replaced by art for art's sake and the joys of decadence. It was in this period that Mayakovsky grew to be a poet.

His short experience of socialist ideas, his youth and his hatred for injustice stopped him from falling for claptrap.

Poetry was now his burning passion. He firmly believed that he could produce socialist poetry, and that this could change the world.

Later he aligned himself with a small group of artists under the banner of Futurism.

Futurism grew as an art movement primarily in Italy and Russia. Although these countries were economically backward, young artists and poets could be aware of the great technological advances being made in the world.

ART and the russian revolution

The machine, the city, planes, trains, cars, speed and dynamism. These images were taken by the young artists as a weapon against the old aesthetics. In Italy Futurism became aligned with the far right with its glorification of war, uniforms and strength.

In Russia, history moved differently.

Futurism was part of the socially unconventional, outside the mainstream of Russian culture. Futurists were bohemians, shouting, raging, banging at the doors of orthodoxy. The streets were used for poetry recitals. Mayakovsky wore a yellow blouse to show his scorn for the old art.

Their first manifesto was titled "A Slap in the Face of Public Taste". In it they wrote: "Pushkin, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, etc, etc, must be thrown overboard from the steamer of the present time." They were out to shock. They were also full of passion and hatred for the ruling order. Their work was a mixture of childish pranks and flashes of brilliance.

Mayakovsky came to maturity as a writer before October. Full of rage against the old order of art, his giant ego was his only defence. He thought that if he could shout loud enough the deaf would hear and he could change the world. For him there was no room for compromise with the autocracy.

This is why he dropped into the revolution.

Immediately after the insurrection the Soviet formed a Commissariat of Education and Enlightenment, with Lunacharsky as the Commissar. Essential tasks had to be carried out to preserve continuity in the new republic. Appeals were sent out to all intellectuals and institutions to help with the tasks of education. The response was minimal.

Only the young avant-garde artists fully supported the revolution. Lunacharsky was in dispute with the Futurists and other art groups over their total rejection of all art before the revolution. Nevertheless he had to turn to them for their help.

There were bitter debates about the role of art under socialism. For the Futurists the smashing of the old order meant that its art must also be smashed.

The Bolsheviks understood that to build socialism the first problem was a stable economic base. The backwardness of Russia and the Civil War compounded this problem a thousand-fold. The workers' state was being born to the roar of cannon. Nevertheless, problems of art and culture had to be tackled.

Lenin put it this way:

"Are we to give cake and sugar to a minority when the mass of workers and peasants still lack black bread? ...so that art may come to the people, and the people to art, we must first raise the general level of education and culture." (Clara Zetkin: *Lenin Remembered.*)

The attitude of the Party to art was that as long as any group did not openly work against the revolution then all creative expression should be allowed to develop.

Mayakovsky continued to rage against the old, and those who defended it. He threw his body, heart and soul into the revolution and the building of socialism. He disliked theories.

He signed the decree of the Futurists to artists on May Day 1918:

"Comrades and citizens, we, the leaders of Russian Futurism—the revolutionary art of youth—declare:

1 From this day forward, with the abolition of Tsardom, the domicile of art in the closets and sheds of human genius—palaces, galleries, salons, libraries, theatres—is abrogated.

2 In the name of the great march of equality for all, as far as culture is concerned, let the Free World of creative personality be written on the corners of walls, fences, roofs, the streets of our cities and villages, on the backs of automobiles, carriages, streetcars and on the clothes of all citizens.

3 Let pictures (colours) be thrown, like coloured rainbows, across streets and squares, from house to house, delighting, ennobling the eye (taste) of the passer by.

Artists and writers have the immediate duty to get hold of their pots of paint and, with their masterly brushes, to illuminate, to paint all the sides, foreheads and chests of the cities, railway stations, and the ever galloping herds of railway carriages.

From now on, let the citizen walking down the street enjoy at every moment the depths of thought of his great contemporaries, let him absorb the flowery gaudiness of this day's beautiful joy, let him listen to music—the melody, the roar, the buzz—of excellent composers everywhere.

Let the streets be a feast of art for all.

The initial pasting up of the poems and hanging of pictures will take place in Moscow on the day our journal is published."

The artists committed to the revolution turned towards propaganda. The revolution was fighting for its life. Civil war, the war of intervention, placed a fantastic burden on the new republic.

Mayakovsky started at the Russian Telegraph Agency (ROSTA) writing and drawing propaganda posters. ROSTA posters argued for Red Army recruitment and morale, for hygiene, and against the black market and counter-revolution. Mayakovsky produced something like 3,000 posters and 6,000 slogans during a three year period.

To celebrate the fifth anniversary of the revolution, Mayakovsky wrote *The 150,000,000.* It was to be the poem of the revolution, but did not succeed. It was very long, full of contradictions and childish ravings. It also contained wonderful passages.

Lenin objected to its publication and had a furious argument with Lunacharsky. However it was published and Mayakovsky sent a copy to Lenin, who said after reading it:

"You know, this is a most interesting piece of work. A peculiar brand of communism. It is hooligan communism."

Here is a little bit of the poem:

We will smash the old world
wildly
we will thunder
a new myth over the world.
We will trample the fence
of time beneath our feet.
We will make a musical scale
of the rainbow.

Roses and dreams
debased by poets
will unfold
in a new light
for the delight of our eyes
the eyes of big children.
We will invent new roses
roses of capitals with petals of squares.

The Futurists, although passionate and enthusiastic, were beaten by their own dislike of theory. The initial burst of activity had only led young students into blind alleys.

The disputes began to become very bitter. Also the bureaucrat was more and more in evidence. Mayakovsky knew about bureaucracy. He wrote *Conference Crazy* about meetings addicts:

Enraged
like an avalanche in full flight,
I tear in
Wildly cursing.
Gosh!
Only halves of people in sight!
"Where are they,"
I holler,
"the halves that are missing?"
Murder!
I rush about, roaring.
Horrendous, the pictures driving me nuts.
Then I hear the secretary's
calmest voice: "Sorry,
they're attending two meetings at once.
At ten sessions daily
we have to appear
so willy-nilly,
in half we tear—
down to the waist
we're here
and the rest of us
there."

This poem won Lenin's complete approval, not for its poetic form but for what it was saying. He used it to warn against red tape.

For a while Mayakovsky managed to get his poems printed regularly in *Izvestia*. But the period of experimentation was coming to a close.

In 1923 Mayakovsky gathered together the "left" artists, Futurists, Constructivists, Supremacists, etc, into a short-lived Left Front of Art (LEF). Its audience was small. The Futurists had not let go of their bohemian origins. They still raged and attempted to shock.

The New Economic Policy, NEP, period had slightly revived the battered economy, but the workers had not revived politically.

Great strides had been made in literacy and art. Many young groups of workers supported Mayakovsky's poetry. But its vacillation between abuse, obscurity and claim of being socialist art isolated him. But the revolution was becoming isolated too.

With the turn to socialism in one country, the revolution was lost. Ironically Mayakovsky's declarations about socialist art were turned on their head. The official ideology of "proletarian literature" was used to attack Mayakovsky for being bourgeois, for adhering to the old art. The masses could not understand him, it was claimed.

From 1927 to 1929 Mayakovsky travelled. He attempted tours of poetry readings. With only his ego to sustain him he sailed into the storm. Without the theoretical grasp of the revolution he could not understand the events happening around him. This was socialism attacking him!

In the last year he gathered his strength for the fight.

He wrote two plays, *The Bedbug* and *The Bathouse*. Both were about bureaucracy.

The Bathouse involved a time machine that came from the future of socialism to take people back. On the way the toadies and bureaucrats are jettisoned. The play ends with a bureaucrat asking, "Does that mean there's no place for us in socialism?"

Mayakovsky was attacked in *Pravda* in March 1930, as being part of "the petit bourgeois revolutionary intelligentsia".

On 9 April 1930 Mayakovsky went to give a recital of his poems to the Plekhanov National Economics Institute. The students attacked him verbally, interrupting the poems with shouts and jibes.

He was accused of being against the revolution, of being obscure and anti-proletarian. He tried to answer with his poetry, and finally won a grudging silence. But really it was all over.

He lost the will to argue, he was unwell and his personal life in disarray. His ego no longer defended him.

On 14 April 1930 Mayakovsky put a bullet in his brain.

One hundred and fifty thousand went to his funeral. He was unable to impose his rhythms on the revolution, but his fate was intertwined with it.

He loved the revolution but never grasped it fully. He could not stop being a bohemian. His poetry is, however, part of the Russian Revolutionary epoch and will survive into the next revolutionary upheaval.

Then maybe the workers of the world will grasp his work, assimilate it and use it to build their own rainbow.■

Roger Huddle

The grim reality–El Salvador 1980

Horror and hope

Salvador

SALVADOR is a very good political film indeed. This fact alone is rather surprising. After all it is a product of the Hollywood film industry, which is more noted these days for its defence of American aggression in Vietnam and by implication in Grenada or Libya today.

Yet *Salvador* manages to portray the horrors of US policy in Central America: the CIA's open funding of rightwing murder gangs; the wholesale killing of those fighting for freedom; the horrible net of police and army torturers who will persecute anyone on the least suspicion of "subversion".

The film tells the story of a fairly unpleasant character, the journalist Richard Boyle. He is one of those people who are apparently found wherever war, death and destruction appear.

They make their living out of dangerous assignments. But Boyle is down on his uppers, and returns to El Salvador from San Francisco only for sex, drugs and cheap booze.

Once in San Salvador the film shows the terror of the war. Boyle's young Salvadorean lover and her children are in constant danger.

Piles of corpses on the outskirts of the city are testimony to the work of the death squads. And in scenes based on real life, the Catholic Archbishop is murdered because he is considered too critical of the regime and too sympathetic to the poor: and American nuns doing relief work among the poor are raped and murdered.

The US government is shown to be complicit in many of these acts. The liberal US ambassador agonises over the killing but releases arms to help smash the guerillas as soon as they look like winning. And the international press is shown for the ignorant and blinkered lot that nearly all of them are.

The uprising defeated, Boyle gets out—with difficulty. But the end of the film shows that the inhumanity and brutality of the regime can also be found back in the "land of the free".

Salvador tells its story always with real sympathy for the oppressed of the country. It is also a gripping thriller.

The film has faults. Although it tells a story of political struggle very well, the only overt political ideas it puts across are Boyle's notions of liberal journalism.

These come across in an argument with officials from the US embassy in what is a crude and somewhat embarrassing scene.

Some people—notably a reviewer in the listing magazine *City Limits*—have described the film as sexist.

The two main male characters are full of sexist backward ideas. But the film not only shows their weaknesses as people in this respect—it also shows how Boyle tries to overcome the backward aspects of his character in order to save the woman he loves.

The rape scene also is an essential part of the plot and demonstrates what the dominance of rightwing ideas in countries like El Salvador mean for women.

Unless all references to sex, derogatory remarks about women, are removed from films it is hard to see how *any* film can escape from the *City Limits* definition of sexism.

Try to see the film. It is rare to see one as well made which sometimes, despite itself, contains such a strong message.■

Lindsey German

In the army now

Boy Soldier

FILMS about or connected with Northern Ireland are not exactly unique these days, *The Long Good Friday, Angel* and *Cal* each in their very different ways cover the violence of Northern Irish society.

In each it is the violence of "Terrorism" that emerges as the factor that interferes with, distorts or destroys the normal everyday lives of the main characters.

Personally I loved *The Long Good Friday* but hated the other two.

Boy Soldier also shows how the war in Ireland can wreck someone's life, but in this case it is the British Army that is responsible for that destruction.

The film tells the story of a young out of work Welsh teenager who joins the army because there is nowhere else for him to go, nothing else for him to do.

He does not join out of any ideological commitment, yet fits in snugly with the ideas of those around him. He accepts quite happily that he will obey orders, that such concepts as "minimum force" are a myth, that you have to deal with the "Micks" harshly.

When he kills a Catholic who confronts him with a knife in a riot, he is amazed that he has to face a murder charge. He is the sacrificial lamb the Army offers up to make itself look respectable.

The film does not attempt in any way to analyse the rights and wrongs of Northern Ireland but in its portrayal of the mindless violence, the bullying, the terror and contempt which are meted out to the young soldier it paints a clear picture of the British Army.

In doing so it also challenges the role of the army in Northern Ireland; can such a brutalised body really be a "peace keeping force"?

There are other incidents along the way which challenge the young soldier's view of the world. He falls in love with a Catholic girl, who will have nothing to do with him once she discovers he's a squaddie.

He challenges his commanding officer's view that "Mick" girls are there to be screwed, not to fall in love with.

He has to suffer the indignity of reading aloud to his CO a personal letter from his father, because it is written in Welsh, the boy's first language.

"Can't he write in English?" asks the upper class bully. "You're not a 'nationalist', are you?"

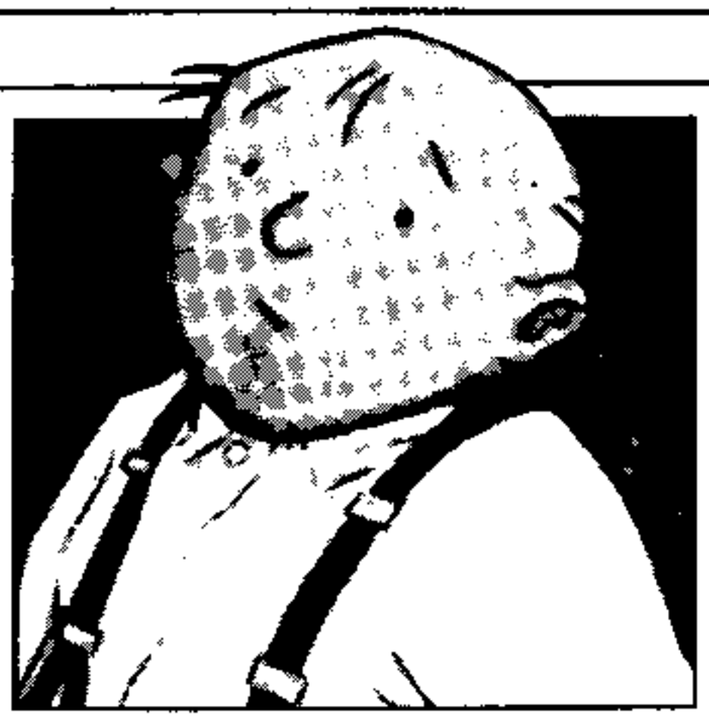
The film centres on the boy's fight to survive, to stop the bastards grinding him down. In the process he questions their values, and although the conclusions he reaches are vague, nevertheless they are powerfully portrayed.

"Kill a Mick, Win a Metro", he writes on his cell wall. He breaks out onto the prison corridor and starts bellowing the words to an anti-Orange song.

The film is unusual in that it is bilingual, the Welsh parts accompanied by subtitles, but this doesn't in any way affect its flow—in fact in some ways it adds to its impact.

Although low budget, the film is well acted, with no stage Irish (or Welsh for that matter) characters, and knocks the socks off much of the nostalgic nonsense that is currently emerging from Hollywood.■

Rick Hay



cartoon about two isolated old people who are the innocent victims of the forces of evil, the film loses much of its bite as it progresses. It becomes more of a modern myth than a political statement, only in this case the goodies don't win out in the end and the film ends up being very depressing.

It is true that hideous political realities are pointed out, but they come across as inevitable. The Bloggs are the only characters to appear in the film, so their attitudes seem to represent all of us who do not have our fingers on the button.

The only challenge to their naivety and undying faith in the government is the hysterical, cynical laughter of their son on the telephone when he hears they have bothered with a shelter.

Perhaps *When the Wind Blows* will alert some people to the horrific consequences of nuclear war and the hypocrisy of government attempts to convince us that we can protect and survive.

It is definitely preferable to Pentagon-funded films about American fighter aces. But for many of us, as we wait for the Bloggses to succumb to inevitable radiation sickness and death, it is little more than a depressing reminder of what we already know.■

Andrew Collins

That's all folks...

When the Wind Blows

WHEN THE Wind Blows is about Mr and Mrs Bloggs, a retired couple living in an isolated cottage in Sussex.

Hearing that the international situation is deteriorating fast, Mr Bloggs takes the government booklet *Protect and Survive* out of the library and begins building the prescribed nuclear shelter.

This consists of two doors placed at exactly 60 degrees to the wall bolstered by a few cushions to exclude the fall out.

Mrs Bloggs is disturbed at the chaos created by her husband. "We never had such a fuss in the last war," she says, giving her husband the second-best cushions and fondly remembering the old air-raid shelters shrouded with roses in the back garden.

The epicentre of the blast is some distance away, but the wind is blowing. The Bloggses innocently drink radioactive rain water, wander around the garden discussing what fall out looks like, and wait with supreme confidence for the emergency services to "spring into action".

The film is a cartoon and for a while the novelty works well. Comfy country images of old England contrast sharply with forbidding shots of missiles in their silos, silent nuclear submarines prowling under the sea, and steel blue bombers with their cargoes of death.

However, precisely because it is a cute

OBITUARY

Douglas Sirk (1900-1987)

THE FILM maker Douglas Sirk died in January. Born Detelf Sierck in Denmark in 1900, he went in 1923 to Germany to work in the theatre. Unlike many of his fellow left wingers, Sirk stayed in Germany after Hitler came to power, and was actually hired to make films for the pro-Nazi "UFA" company.

In 1937, due to the persecution of his Jewish wife, he went to Hollywood and soon established himself as a competent director.

He directed many sorts of films but was best known for his melodramas. These "women's pictures", usually dealing with the strains in the family from the point of view of its female members, were a very important part of Hollywood's output in the 1940s and 1950s.

Despised by intellectuals at the time, they have been increasingly praised since the 1960s for their ability to examine some of the contradictions in US society at a time when open critical thinking was discouraged by witch hunts and blacklists.

So, for example, Sirk's film *All That Heaven Allows* is about the pressures put on a widow who forms a relationship with a much younger man.

She is virtually ostracised by her former respectable friends and bullied by her hyper-conformist adult children, who give her a new gadget, a TV set, to take her mind off sex.

It is only by rebelling against the comfortable world of 1950s America that she can begin to find out what she wants.

It is not a revolutionary text, certainly, but it is one that attacks the dominant ideology of the society that produced it head on.

Sirk's work in melodramas has been particularly praised because he was often able to conform to the conventions of the Hollywood cinema while making it obvious that the real meaning of the film was much more subversive.

So in *Written on the Wind* he was given two stars, Rock Hudson and Lauren Bacall, and a script which said that they had to get together at the end of the film: those were the conventions.

What Sirk did was to shift attention to the much more tragic story of brother and sister, played by his secondary stars, Robert Stack and Dorothy Malone.

He did this largely by means of the decor and colour, particularly the colour of the clothing of his female players.

On the surface the film has a happy ending with Bacall and Hudson forming a perfect pair (in subdued colours), but underneath is a much more colourful and subversive story about how a father has destroyed his two children.

Sirk was not unique in using colour, music, acting and so forth to draw powerful emotional pictures: it is one of the characteristics of melodrama that it plays strongly upon the emotions.

What was unique about Sirk was that, at his best, he could orchestrate them all together to produce scenes of almost unbearable intensity.

One of the greatest examples is the funeral at the end of *Imitation of Life*. See it if you get a chance. Make sure you have a box of tissues handy.■

Colin Sparks

When the red flag flew

1919 on the brink
Chanie Rosenberg
Bookmarks £2.25

THE YEAR 1919 was when the international revolution almost happened. The British Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, the man Lenin regarded as the most able and dangerous of all bourgeois politicians, declared:

> "The whole of Europe is filled with the spirit of revolution...the whole existing order in its political, social and economic aspects is questioned by the masses of the population from one end of Europe to the other."

The most sober and realistic of all commentators, Lenin, declared in July 1919:

> "This July will be our last difficult July. Next July we shall greet the victory of the international Soviet republic."

As for Britain, Lenin told a sceptical Arthur Ransome, "England may seem to you untouched, but the microbe is already there."

Chanie Rosenberg's splendid new book describes how Lenin's microbe grew and who killed it.

Throughout the crisis of 1919 neither police nor army could be trusted. In the early months of the year mutinies in the army were commonplace, as the huge conscript army disintegrated.

The red flag was hoisted by mutinous sailors at Milford Haven. More than 20,000 soldiers mutinied at Calais. The mutineers elected the "Calais Area Soldiers' and Sailors' Association" with delegates to co-ordinate their demands and run the camp.

The police were even less to be trusted than the army. In August 1918, with the war still raging, the Metropolitan Police struck. Around 12,000 out of a total of 19,000 came out. Flying pickets up to 600 strong marched from station to station, stormed the buildings and threw out any police still working.

Soldiers were summoned to guard Downing Street, but instead fraternised with the police. Lloyd George surrendered to the police strikers' demands.

Throughout the crucial months of 1919 Lloyd George knew that neither police nor army could be relied upon. Instead he relied on the trade union leaders.

They were more frightened of the consequences of uncontrolled industrial action than of anything else. And the ruling class recognised this. Churchill said:

> "The curse of trade unionism was that there was not enough of it, and it was not highly enough developed to make its branch secretaries fall into line with the head office."

Tory Party leader Bonar Law announced in private, "Trade union organisation is the only thing between us and anarchy."

At each critical moment in 1919, whether the general strike on the Clyde, in the mines, or on the railways—the rank and file pushed the unions forward and the leaders tried to draw back, or advanced only in order to lead the retreat.

Chanie Rosenberg describes Lloyd George's carrot and stick approach—concessions when necessary, confrontation when possible. From the beginning his confidence in the trade union leaders was not misplaced.

The terrible Jimmy Thomas, leader of the railway union and one of the most unsavoury of all trade union leaders, figures prominently in this book. But many lesser figures are also revealed for their true worth.

Here is William Brace, Labour MP and executive member of the miners' union, speaking in the House of Commons to the Tories sitting opposite:

> "To appeal to the workmen in the name of the State is to touch them in their most vital spot, their native patriotism. If you would allow us to appeal to the workmen to withhold doing anything in the form of industrial action...we should be infinitely more effective..."

It wasn't just rhetoric. They broke the back of the movement in Britain, just as the leaders of social democracy were doing in Germany at the same time. Capitalism in crisis turned in Britain and in Germany to the leaders of the trade unions and the reformist parties. And it was not disappointed.

To find what happened in detail and to find on nearly every page a quotation to make your blood boil, read this book.■
Peter Clarke

Wars within wars

The Meaning of the Second World War
Ernest Mandel
Verso, £6.95

THE MERIT of this book is that, cutting through both official and popular myths, it lays bare the real roots of the war in class terms.

It was not a war against fascism. It was not a war for democracy. It was a war between a number of powers, a number of rival blocs of capital, for the domination of the world.

Mandel writes:

> "Capitalism implies competition. With the emergence of large corporations and cartels—ie, the advent of monopoly capitalism—this competition assumed a new dimension. It became qualitatively more politico-economic and therefore military-economic."

That is the heart of the matter and it is amply demonstrated in this book. Unfortunately Mandel weakens the presentation by sweeping, unsubstantial and sometimes downright wrong statements.

Thus the timing of Hitler's attack on Poland is attributed to narrowly economic calculations, which is nonsense.

More important, after establishing that the Second World War, like the First, was an imperialist war, he calls it "a logical and inevitable outcome of World War One".

Of course it was *not* inevitable, nor does Mandel himself believe his statement. Leaving aside the revolutionary possibilities in Europe in the immediate aftermath of 1917-18, a whole series of working class defeats was necessary to make another general imperialist war possible.

To mention only some of them—the failure of the German revolution in 1923, the defeat of the Chinese revolution of 1925-7, the catastrophe of Hitler's victory in 1933, the strangling of the Spanish revolution by the Popular Front in 1936-8—all these events and more paved the road to World War II. Mandel makes this very point elsewhere in the book.

This is not a mere quibble, because the example is not an isolated one.

Nor is one's confidence in Mandel's judgement enhanced by his attempt to expound the "partial rationality" of the mass extermination of the Jews (pp 92-3).

Anti-semitism was a *necessary* weapon of German fascism. The extermination programme, carried out during the desperate struggle on the Eastern Front, was not. It involved a substantial diversion of scarce resources of personnel, transport, etc *and* the destruction of a large reservoir of usable labour—which was in very short supply by early 1943.

It was not rational from the standpoint of German imperialism. It was the outcome of the sheer bloody barbarism and irrationality of Hitler's regime.

The war, then, was an imperialist war—but it was not simply an imperialist war. The first breach in the precarious and partial world hegemony of the British and French empires came in Asia. In 1931 Japan invaded and conquered Manchuria. The Anglo-French (and US) response was mere protest. In 1937 a full scale Japanese invasion of China followed.

Now, from a Leninist point of view, the two sides were not equivalent—although the two governments were equally vicious and reactionary. China was a semi-colonial country, Japan a purely imperialist one.

Trotsky's position was unequivocal. Revolutionary internationalists must be for the military defence of China in spite of,

and independently of, the treacherous, semi-collaborationist and ultra-reactionary regime of Chiang Kai-shek. Not revolutionary defeatism, but revolutionary defencism must be the line of Chinese revolutionaries.

Then, at the end of 1941, Japan and the USA went to war and the Sino-Japanese war became part of the world war between the two great imperialist coalitions.

Should Chinese revolutionaries have changed their position? Was the situation now analogous to that of Serbia in August 1914 (ie—as Lenin argued—military defence of an isolated Serbia against Austrian imperialism, *but* that consideration was outweighed by the imperialist character of the war as a whole) or was it qualitatively different?

The Chinese Trotskyists split on the issue. Who was right?

Astonishingly Mandel does not discuss the matter. Mandel does not discuss the attitudes of Trotskyists to the European resistance movements either—though he knows as well as anyone that the French Trotskyists were deeply divided about it.

Nor does he discuss divisions among both British and American Trotskyists as to what position to take on the war.

Now, admittedly, these are difficult questions, but for Mandel, a leading figure in an international tendency claiming Trotsky's mantle, not to mention the actual positions of the Trotskyists and the divisions amongst them, is truly scandalous.

On one question, though, Mandel is unequivocal: the duty of revolutionaries is to defend the USSR in spite of Stalin's terror.

That was Trotsky's position till his death (and Tony Cliff's too during the war). Again, however, the awkward questions are avoided: given that position (military defencism, no political support) what about Russian expansion in 1944-5?

Was the expansion of Stalin's power in some sense progressive and so to be supported? The issue revolved around the question of agitating for the withdrawal of *all* occupying forces in Europe. After some hesitation Mandel came to support the call for withdrawal of the armies (including the Red Army).

But then came the Cold War and Mandel, like so many others, changed his tune.

The bourgeois Bonapartist regimes of Eastern Europe (Mandel's description of them as late as 1948) suddenly became workers' states (albeit "deformed").

The reader will not be surprised to learn that Mandel does not discuss this turnabout either.

To summarise: this book has its uses and should be read. But a revolutionary, candid or critical account it is not.■

Duncan Hallas

Crossing the class border

The Politics of Irish Freedom
Gerry Adams
Brandon, £3.95

"THIS BOOK is neither an autobiography nor a statement of Sinn Fein's political programme."

So begins the publisher's introduction to this book. While it is certainly not the first, it can be assumed to be a fairly accurate representation of the second.

The book was written before the recent Ard Fheis (conference) where Sinn Fein changed their policy on parliamentary abstentionism, and this may explain the coyness of the claim.

Indeed much of the early part of the book is a very thinly disguised polemic with the old guard traditionalists who have since left Sinn Fein.

In these sections Adams deals honestly and reasonably well with the failures of the Republican movement up to the hunger strike.

He deals even better with his British and Irish detractors over such questions as violence. Adams points to the hypocrisy of opponents such as Thatcher, who condemn violence on the one hand, and yet use it every day in many different ways to achieve their own ends.

He explains why violence is necessary and yet does so in a compassionate way that completely refutes the image of the blood thirsty psychopath depicted by much of the media and the political establishment.

The background to that violence is of course the Northern Irish state, and Adams's description of that state is backed up by anecdotes from his own past.

So far so good, but there are major problems with the book, emanating from the overall shortcomings of the political theory and practice of Republicanism today.

The major stumbling block (indeed the one from which nearly all the other problems flow) is the "stages theory" which is central to Adams's beliefs.

Adams denies that he has a stages theory and yet sums up his position beautifully when he says of the anti-imperialist movement:

> "Such a movement cannot be built around the slogan of socialism until socialism comes on to the historical agenda, until a distinctly Irish form of socialism is developed to meet our needs and conditions..."

Karl Kautsky or Joseph Stalin would be happy with this definition, but of course it has nothing to do with revolutionary socialism.

From this erroneous position a whole number of others emerge.

If it is possible, indeed necessary, to fight to remove the British without fighting for socialism then it is possible, indeed necessary, to seek out allies on the other side of the class divide.

Adams argues that the:

> "Republican struggle at this stage...should not style itself socialist-republican. This would imply that there is no place in it for non socialists."

Certainly nobody would argue that you have to be a socialist before you can fight back or be part of a struggle.

But hold on!

Where does this "socialism puts people off" strategy lead Adams? Throughout the book he is scathing of both Fianna Fail in the South, and the SDLP in the North.

He describes both as pro-partitionist, and Fianna Fail as the main "Ruling Class" party in the South. Yet he is still happy to try and tap Haughey and his followers to gain common ground, and quotes approvingly one leading Fianna Fail man who describes his party as second cousins to Sinn Fein.

A remarkable statement given Fianna Fail's history of repression against Republicans, let alone its right wing stance on economic and social issues.

As for the SDLP—the party which colludes with the British ruling class to smash republicanism—Adams makes the following shattering statement:

> "In this regard the emergence of Sinn Fein may have *un*necessarily brought out some of the class differences between ourselves and the SDLP... It might be better in this phase of the independence struggle if there were some kind of general unity..." (my emphasis PS)

How quickly a stages theory becomes a cross class alliance. What's more a cross class alliance in which the working class plays little more than a supporting role from the sidelines.

The Southern Irish working class gets barely a mention, the Northern Protestants are a "labour aristocracy" hopelessly reactionary until the border is gone, the Northern Catholic working class don't have jobs.

There is nothing new to all this, and ultimately despite all the "leftward moves" of Sinn Fein at its heart it clings to the old

politics. But what is most annoying is that Adams clings to it all while hiding behind James Connolly.

Connolly believed that the struggle for Irish freedom and the struggle for socialism were completely interlinked and that *only* the working class could lead that struggle.

Adams can quote Connolly as often as he likes but the fact remains that the centrality of Connolly's socialism is completely lost on him.■

Pat Stack

Illusion or confusion?

Qadhafi's Libya
Jonathan Bearman
Zed Press £6.95

THE BOMBING of Libya was one of those incidents which suddenly illuminates the arrogant stupidity of Western imperialism. Only the arrogance and contempt of power can explain bombing a country one third the size of the United States which is 95 percent desert and has the population of Wales. But such actions are not new.

Throughout its history Western imperialism has assumed the right to slap down the "bloody natives". Of course, it helps if you teach the lesson to those who find it difficult to hit back.

This was and is true of Libya, for, as Jon Bearman argues in this valuable book, "it was chosen because it was the weakest and easiest of United States adversaries to attack."

Bearman shows that Qadhafi has not put himself in this position by design. Libya is not the centre of world terrorism—there is no centre, no such thing as "world terrorism". Nor is Qadhafi leading Libya to socialism. He is faithful to his own interpretation of Arab nationalism.

His "crime" has been to be more consistent in pursuing policies, both internally and externally, that all Middle Eastern states have flirted with at one time or another. Such consistency left Qadhafi isolated as the Middle East swung to the right in the 1970s.

Libya has a sorry history. The land was brutally colonised under Italian fascism and the population literally decimated. During the Second World War "liberation" meant the mining of 70 percent of the inhabitable land.

Then the state of Libya was stitched together by the West—"an extreme instance of a dependent client state...formed by imperialist powers for their own strategic advantage". Under King Idris, a British puppet monarch, it remained one of the poorest countries in the world but the home of the biggest American air bases outside of the United States.

What changed Libya was oil. The monarchy remained as gutless as ever and Libya was a "paradise" for the oil companies, taking only a third of the revenue of many other oil states.

But as the oil revenues expanded, and a minimum of social change took place, these indignities were increasingly resented by young army officers like Qadhafi. Inspired by the example of Nasser's nationalist opposition to the West in Egypt, they eventually rose up and overthrew the King in 1969.

Since then internal and external pressures have forced Qadhafi's Arab nationalism to take on a more radical edge. The need to overcome internal divisions and old loyalties led Qadhafi and his supporters to attack and finally replace the different sections of the old ruling class.

Externally Qadhafi strove without success to hold his early allies like Egypt together against the West, and has ended up alone looking to the Soviet Union which he initially condemned.

Bearman has identified four stages in Libya's development, an account of which has already appeared in *International Socialism* (issue no 24). Many readers, like this reviewer, will have turned gratefully to it at the time of the bombing.

This makes it all the more sad that after a powerful and well documented account of these changes Jonathan Bearman suddenly declares that Libya is haltingly becoming "a transitional society".

Just what this means is never adequately analysed. It does not mean that there is workers' power in Libya.

Bearman shows that this has never been part of Qadhafi's intention. The popular committees which are the base of his support are not run by workers and they do not touch the crucial oil industry.

Nor does this "transition" seem to mean any form of socialism, since this too is not part of Qadhafi's conception.

Certainly life in Libya has improved much faster than in many neighbouring countries, but while recognising this Bearman rightly does not suggest that this is enough to make the country non-capitalist.

Where then does the transition lie? It seems to be in the fact that the state has tried to eliminate commodity and wage "forms". We can quarrel with the extent to which these "forms" have been overcome, and Bearman is too lax on this.

The real issue is that capitalism cannot be restricted to certain "forms"—we have to look behind the appearance to what makes things tick.

The failure to appreciate this has led the left to illusion, confusion and disillusion on Russia time and again.

There is an awful lesson here which should make Jonathan Bearman think again before he makes the same mistake over Libya.■

Mike Haynes

Rule of thumb

The Panda's Thumb
Stephen Jay Gould
Pelican £3.95

THE PANDA'S THUMB is not a real thumb at all, since that particular digit is already committed to other functions. Instead the panda does very well at stripping bamboo shoots with a highly modified wrist bone.

This is how evolution works, by cobbling together and making do, rather than to the finicky design of a Grand Watchmaker.

Gould's book is a collection of articles wide-ranging in examples to illustrate a common theme—how evolution works. It's a fascinating subject and Gould is an excellent writer. He shows the breadth of evolutionary theory, clears up common misconceptions and highlights some of the areas of real controversy—all in a very entertaining manner.

One of the major paths humans followed in evolving from our ape-like ancestors was neotony. This is when childish or foetal-like characteristics are retained into adulthood, so that for example we more closely resemble a baby chimpanzee (with its relatively large brain) than we do an adult chimp.

I'm sure no one but Gould would use Mickey Mouse to illustrate this process. Over the years Mickey has become more and more babyish in appearance, and Gould has the graphs to prove it.

However, the articles are not over-simplified. It's one of those books which stimulates you to think, and you get much more out of it if you do, whether the topic is the intelligence of dinosaurs or why the sex ratio is usually 50:50.

The book also contains much on the way that science works. Gould says:

> "I am an advocate of the position that science is not an objective, truth-directed machine, but a quintessentially human activity, affected by passions, hopes and cultural biases. Cultural traditions of thought strongly influence scientific theories, often directing lines of speculation, especially when virtually no data exist to constrain either imagination or prejudice."

One of the areas of evolutionary theory where there is very little data is that of human behaviour, and scientists past and present have let imagination and prejudice have a field day.

Popular books about biology are usually little more than right wing fairy stories about biologically determined "human nature", even spelling out that this makes socialism an impossible dream.

On the other hand books which carefully show that approach to be a load of unsubstantiated codswallop are so often turgid and incomprehensible to the non-scientist. Gould manages to be scientific in the best sense of the term and very readable too.

The Panda's Thumb gives us an idea of what biology has to say about who we are and where we came from, without leading us up the garden path. But there comes a point where biology can have nothing useful to say about human life, and this book is all the richer for acknowledging that too.■

Margaret Willis

Rushdie's romance

The Jaguar Smile: A Nicaraguan Journey
Salman Rushdie,
Picador, £2.95

I APPROACHED this book with some trepidation. The novelist Salman Rushdie went to Nicaragua on his summer holidays last year. He went as a tourist of the revolution, a guest of the state. He got to sit next to Daniel Ortega at a banquet and feel important.

He believes the PLO is good, but the IRA is bad. I expected a piece of special pleading, scenes of propaganda junk. But, oh what a lovely book he's written.

Rushdie, first of all, can write. He's drunk on the rhythms of English prose—it's a book you can read aloud.

He has the poet's eye for detail: he sees Daniel Ortega's children dressed in He-Man Masters of the Universe T-shirts. He is honest to himself about what he sees and feels.

What he does with his magician's skill with words is to present the Sandinistas as they see themselves.

It is a picture of a middle class elite, incurably romantic, suffering at one with the people, brave beyond belief. And surrounding them the Contras, the ever present murderous rapists, agents of sudden death, prowling the edges of decency.

Daniel Ortega

Between the Contras and the Sandinistas stand the Nicaraguan people. Rushdie sees them in less depth. They are more foreign to him, and sometimes in his pages they sound like sturdy humble fisher folk.

The economy is collapsing. They bitch about the government, but faced with the Contras and the CIA they stand solidly with the government.

It's very romantic, and in many ways it's true. But you can't understand what is happening in Nicaragua from this book. For that you still want Mike Gonzalez's *Nicaragua: Revolution Under Siege*. Gonzalez too writes with sensitivity and passion. But he also has a hard, clear political analysis.

The key thing about Nicaragua is the rising. Eight years ago the urban workers rose in an insurrectionary general strike—bricks and machetes against machine guns.

They lost 40,000 dead and they toppled the American puppet Somoza. The workers did not take power. They put the Sandinistas into power. They still follow the Sandinistas, because they honour their own victory.

It is the memory of that workers' insurrection that Carter and then Reagan were hysterical to stamp out. It is what makes Nicaragua special, unlike Cuba, Argentina and Chile.

But faced with the might of the United States, somebody has to pay.

The Sandinistas are not international revolutionaries. They have not tried to export their revolution, have not aided their comrades in El Salvador as they should. Instead they search for meaningless deals to stave off Reagan.

Rushdie has a scene where Daniel Ortega talks about the importance of the International Court at the Hague ruling in favour of Nicaragua. A brave and hardened ex-guerilla, grasping at bourgeois straws. You'd laugh if you didn't cry.

Somebody has to pay. Rushdie is a writer, and he feels instinctively the dead hand of Sandinista censorship. But there are more important repressions, whose force he cannot fully feel.

I work in an abortion clinic. To pacify the bishops in Nicaragua abortion is illegal unless you are rich. I can visualise the 15 year old raped girl being denied an abortion by a Sandinista doctor.

I am a trade unionist. To keep production going for the war, strikes are illegal in Nicaragua. I can visualise the bureaucrat who comes down to break the strike.

These things are missing from Rushdie's book. But if you come to it armed with Gonzalez's analysis, you can learn an awful lot.

And if you like a literary read, *The Jaguar Smile* is a treat.■

Jonathan Neale

Revolution recalled

I READ Andy Zebrowski's painstakingly researched article "Birth of Our Power" (February *SWR*) with great interest, but some puzzlement. October is still a long way off, and it was, after all the *February* Revolution that paved the way.

The initial patriotic mood of the Russian workers in 1914 turned within a few months into deep discontent, which led to mass strikes with both economic and political demands.

The Russian liberals, who for long had been protesting against the autocratic rule of the Tsar, on the contrary, now stressed their patriotic duties and did not even protest against the dissolution of the Duma in 1915.

In the meantime, the war itself had continued to take its unsuccessful course and the food situation was deteriorating disastrously.

In mid-February 1917 the situation became critical; there were now massive strikes all over the country, in particular at the Putilov Armament Works in Petrograd, the Dynamo Pla in Moscow, in the Oilfields of Baku, and many others. Hundreds of thousands of workers downed tools. The women were demonstrating and besieging the almost empty shops. Parts of the Army were in revolt.

Finally, mutiny broke out in some of the units of the Petrograd guard regiments. And whilst the Tsar still dithered, the workers and soldiers of Petrograd set up a Soviet Council. Within a month 77 other towns followed their example.

Being still at school (in Moscow) my friends and I did not know much about politics, but, brought up on the works of the liberally and even to some extent revolutionary minded nineteenth century writers, essayists and poets, we were all against the reigning autocracy and followed the rumours quite eagerly.

Then one day, the 27th or 28th February (the Russian calendar was at that time 13 days behind the European one) we were told the Tsar had abdicated, and were sent home.

But of course, we could not sit at home! Instead we joined the milling crowds in the street. It was a sunny day and all Moscow was on its feet, lifted on a wave of enormous enthusiasm.

Young and old—we were all ecstatic with joy and hope at the overthrow of the Tsarist regime. Kuznetsky Most—the Regent Street of Moscow—was thronged with happy people, all adorned with a red flower: a tumult of talk, laughter, greetings, embraces, kisses, even among strangers. It was an incredible atmosphere of elation right into the night.

In the absence of their national political leaders, the Bolsheviks did not enter the scene until a few days later, and even then somewhat reluctantly.

Back from Siberia, Kamenev and Stalin declared their conditional support for the new Provisional Government.

It was not until Lenin and other Bolsheviks arrived from Switzerland in April, and Trotsky from America somewhat later, that the policy of the Bolsheviks radically changed, setting the course for the October Revolution.■

Margaret Dewar
Sussex

Reallstic optimism

IN RASHID'S article about the McGoldrick case (February *SWR*) he makes great play of the need to stick to basic principles.

There is no argument that all socialists should see the fight against racism as a principle. The point at issue is how best to fight racism.

The ability to fight racism lies with the organised working class. It is in the interest of both white and black workers to fight for more resources and to overthrow capitalism. In the process of fighting together white workers can be won to fighting racism.

This is why it is important to distinguish between white workers who accept racist ideas and organised racists who actively harass black workers and promote racist activity.

Socialists need to isolate organised racists and campaign for them to be driven out of the unions and their jobs. This strengthens the unity between black and white workers and weakens the effects of racism.

In 1977 a predominantly white night shift in Longbridge took strike action against a fascist who constantly paraded up and down making Nazi salutes. Socialist shop stewards had been arguing he should be sacked for some time.

The strike action taken that night followed by the refusal of the shift to work with him led to his being suspended and finally sacked. Most of the white workers who took action were not consistent anti-racists and most probably supported immigration controls.

Despite the "limitations" of these workers, it was possible to persuade them to fight to get rid of a fascist.

Attacking McGoldrick was a bit like attacking one of those inconsistent white workers in Longbridge.

The effect of attacking such people is to drive white workers who can be won to fighting racism into the arms of the organised racists.

Neither black people nor socialists can afford the luxury of not distinguishing between those white workers who can be won to fighting alongside black workers and those who cannot.

Rashid's strategy for fighting racism, by preferring to rely on local Labour councils rather than the working class, is a reflection of the pessimism of much of the left about the potential for workers to change the world.

Whilst remaining realistic about the possibilities of workers' struggles at present, socialists must remain the optimists about the future.■

Sheila McGregor
Tower Hamlets

Militant racialists?

SORRY, but I must quibble with (some of) Bob Light's letter (January *SWR*).

Writing about the London dockers' strike and march in support of Powell in 1968, he says that it "came at the highwater mark of militancy amongst London dockers".

He then adds: "Dockers were militant and racialist—what could be more natural than to be militant racialists?" This argument is dangerous and, in my view, mistaken.

I don't know why Bob selects 1968 as "the highwater mark of militancy". I would have thought that 1972—the year of the strike to free the Pentonville Five—was a far more significant date.

In 1968 the Royal Group dockers had been defeated in a strike over the introduction of more flexible working arrangements.

It was a year of rising inflation and a government imposed wage freeze. Furthermore, containerisation was being introduced, and added a degree of insecurity.

In such circumstances racism could grow, and struck a chord when Powell argued that "the sense of alarm and of resentment lies not with the immigrant population but with those among whom they have come and are coming". The immigrant threat was, of course, an illusion, but the "sense of alarm and resentment" was real.

In 1968 the racist agitation was focussed by the arrival of Asians from Kenya.

In 1972, when the Ugandan Asians arrived, there was far less support for Powell and the NF among dockers. One reason for this—the most important reason—was that the dockers had just secured an historic victory

over their employers *and* the Tory government.

In 1976, with the arrival of the Malawi Asians and the introduction of the first two black dockers, the fascists once again attempted to organise a racist march and strike. They were unsuccessful. As Bob argues, the militants and the stewards' committee were far more resolute and determined than in 1968.

But why? Many of them were the same individuals who had vacillated and abstained in 1968.

It seems to me that it is impossible to understand the shift without understanding the impact of 1972. It was unlike previous disputes in that it was political. The militants experienced the solidarity of other workers and came into contact with new ideas.

The effect was to increase the extent of socialist consciousness, at least amongst the militants. At the same time, 1972 was an important victory, thereby increasing the loyalty of the dockers to their stewards.

When the stewards, in effect, asked the dockers to decide between Powell and their own union organisation, they could be relatively confident about which they would choose.

Finally, we should scotch the idea that there is a relationship between militancy and racism. In fact, the reverse tends to be the case. It is defeats and demoralisation which lead workers to look for scapegoats.

Successful class struggle—particularly in the present period—requires the unity of black and white workers.

Racism is therefore against the material interests of all workers, and we should not be tempted by arguments which imply the reverse.■

Peter Alexander
Hackney

Vulgar Marxists

UNTIL I read Ann Rogers' article on anti-semitism (February *SWR*) I had no idea that being a Marxist was such fun.

"Identifying the Jews as a distinct class within pre-capitalist economies enables us to explain otherwise inexplicable facts."

One of these facts, it seems is "anti-semitism in the ancient world."

According to Ann Rogers, anti-semitism is not racism, at least in pre-capitalist times it isn't. The "function" of anti-semitism in the ancient world was "to cement Roman citizenry to the dominant mode of production."

I'll take these points one by one.

i *Jews as a class*. This is a lovely idea and makes Marxism so simple. If you want to explain why people behave in a certain way—say that they're an economic class.

From that follows the Marxist truth that people behave that way for economic reasons.

Many Jews were traders between the years 200BC and 100BC. Many Jews were not. Some were slaves, some were conscripts in the Roman army and some were revolutionaries. Some were peasants, some were tradesmen, craftsmen artisans.

ii *Their class origins explain anti-semitism*. The classical text I've looked at, complains about Jews' disgusting habits of circumcision, their smelly food, their revolting monotheism, their unpatriotic nature and their rebelliousness.

The atheist readers of *SWR* might have forgotten that the fuss about Jesus is because he constituted a threat to the Roman Empire, along with the Zealots, culminating in the unsuccessful revolution of 66-73 AD.

The point is that Jewish religion was seen as subversive because it was against the ruling class's paganism. It was successful in winning converts even to the extent of winning over the wives of Romans carrying out a massacre on Jews in Damascus.

It was dangerous because, within Palestine, it helped bind together a movement for national liberation from the Roman rule.

iii *Pre-capitalist anti-semitism isn't racism*. The Christian church peddled anti-semitic libels from the time of writing the gospels to the present day.
Christianity was the ideology that fired anti-semitic attacks no matter what economic function may be allotted them.

I don't know how you folks define racism but I'd have thought if someone says that all people of one "tribe", "race", "people" do horrible things to "us" and "our children" (and it's a lie) yet that "tribe" get harassed and killed for it; that's racism.

It may not be part of the *science of racialism* as invented in the nineteenth century but that is a different matter.

iv *The function of anti-semitism*. This is classic vulgar Marxist claptrap. "Effect equals function." The *effect* of racism is to make the ruling class's job easier therefore it magically becomes its "function".

In actual fact, the function of racism is various. It fulfils all sorts of needs that people have at certain times and places in history.

Racism is about culture. It has a dialectic relationship with the base. It is influenced by it and influences it.

At various times and places in history Jews have been identified as a problem. A whole parade of lies have been peddled about them as a "race", and they've been killed.

I will not be tarred with the brush of "Zionist", "crook", "reactionary" or "reformist" for saying that anti-semitism has existed for a long time and will go on occurring in *class societies*.

Your problem is that it doesn't fit into a neat scheme that goes: racism came along with capitalism; overthrow capitalism, we overthrow racism. The Bolsheviks tried to build in territorial safeguards for minorities. Was that a good idea?

In case anyone thinks the argument that racism pre-dates capitalism rests on anti-semitism, ask an Arab Marxist about Western attitudes to the "infidel".■

Michael Rosen
London E8

Not just CAP

NIGEL HARRIS locates the source of world famine in protectionism in the USA, Japan and Europe and ends with a call to arms against the European Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). (Jan/Feb *SWR*.)

Is Nigel really advocating the abolition of protectionism and the establishment of a "free market", or does he see the "breaking of the criminal conspiracy of the CAP" as the first step towards the world revolution which could finally lay the spectre of world famine?

There is no reason to think that the establishment of a "free market", even if such a thing were possible at this stage of capitalist development, would improve the lot of the hungry.

By concentrating on the CAP, Nigel neglects other major causes of famine. War, cash cropping and its associated impoverishment of the peasantry, manipulating of the world market by multinationals are all up there with protectionism amongst major factors causing famine, pushing natural disasters well down the list.

It is important, also, not to get the impression that because countries like Cuba, Mozambique and Mauritius can produce sugar more cheaply than Europe, that European agriculture is on the whole inefficient.

One European agricultural worker produces enough food to feed 65 fellow workers. The overall efficiency of Western agricultural production is, in fact, an important underlying cause of famine.

Because so many food commodities can be produced far more cheaply by industrial farming methods it is now much more difficult for peasants or small farmers to compete and sell what surplus they can produce.

The result is their bankruptcy, accelerating the trend towards industrial and large scale agriculture.

This process contains the seeds of its own destruction since the mass impoverishment of a significant fraction of the world population must shrink the market for food.

Protectionism can be seen as a response to this trend, as competition for markets becomes more and more intense.

A thorough analysis of the causes of famine would uncover the final stages of a process in which the peasantry is being destroyed, to be transformed into an urban lumpen proletariat and an urban and rural working class.

At the same time we see the development of starvation on a mass scale in the West. Twelve percent of the USA population now receives less than the minimum subsistence level, and the ruling class makes workers pay for the crisis.

It is this crisis that has accelerated the numbers of people starving, both in the Third World and in the West.

It is to the working class that we have to turn for a solution, and the building of revolutionary parties in all industrialised countries is an urgent task.

In more general terms, famine is best explained in terms of the world economic crisis and it is disappointing that this has not been done.■

Malcolm Povey
Leeds

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.

BACK CHAT

Troubled waters

FOR AS long as I can remember, support for the "cultural boycott" of South Africa has been an article of faith for the entire left—ourselves included.

Of course we've argued against the individual moralism that lies behind the campaign—that refusing to buy Barclay James Harvest or Elton John records is as futile and fruitless a gesture as refusing to buy Outspan oranges.

Most importantly of all, we've argued that consumer boycotts are a diversion from more important forms of collective solidarity action.

But on the issue itself there's never been any question about where we stand. In any society there's a necessary connection between art and politics, even if the links are sometimes difficult to trace. In South

Hugh Masekela

Africa those connections are blindingly obvious.

Any performer who agreed to appear in front of segregated audiences colluded with apartheid. And any art produced in South Africa which told the truth about apartheid would be banned.

Except recently a couple of awkward examples have suggested that maybe it's not that simple. The first was the play *The Bijers Sunbird*, put on at a Hammersmith theatre by a white South African cast, and dutifully picketed by the local Anti-Apartheid group.

According to the reviews I saw, the play (dealing with prison conditions in South Africa) wasn't especially good, but it took a quite explicit stance—apartheid is a vicious and evil system, and the only question is how to destroy it. No racist could have taken comfort from it. So why picket it?

The answer seemed to come down to unthinking loyalty—AA has a boycott policy, so we carry it out. The nearest the pickets came to an argument was that whites have no right to talk about what life in South Africa is like for blacks—and if that's true then 95 percent of AA's activists should pack it in now.

Clearly the picket was a mistake—not a major one, but the right took some pleasure in watching the left score an own goal.

Now a much bigger can of worms has been opened. Paul Simon's hugely successful album *Graceland* (recorded in South Africa with black musicians) earned him much disapproval in ideologically sound circles.

He has since organised a world tour, featuring not only the musicians he recorded with but also Hugh Masekela and Miriam Makeba, veteran exiled artists and anti-apartheid campaigners. And AA wants to picket it when it comes to London.

I don't know what Paul Simon's motives are for doing all this. Maybe it's the money—though *Bridge Over Troubled Water* alone should have made him enough to retire on. Maybe he thinks his career needs a boost; more likely he's genuinely excited by township music—I don't think it really matters. What matters is the effect that the music has.

The reality is that *Graceland* has introduced contemporary black South African music to an audience that's never even heard of the specialist shops, and the tour will extend that audience even further.

To the extent that it will have a political impact, it will be unambiguously anti-racist and anti-apartheid. And it offers a marvellous opportunity to combine a genuinely popular music with a political movement badly in need of revival.

To denounce such a tour is absurd, for it might just be possible to persuade guilty white liberals that Paul Simon is a closet apartheid supporter—but Hugh Masekela and Miriam Makeba?

Masekela has been playing anti-apartheid benefits since the mid-50s, and Miriam Makeba has been a backbone of campaigns in the States for over 25 years.

Where does this leave the boycott campaign, apart from floundering? I don't want to argue for a minute that we should drop our hostility to the rats who are happy to play in Sun City, or to the regime's attempts to promote "safe" South African art. The problem is that the position I outlined at the start of this article simply doesn't fit any more.

It is now possible for genuinely radical black art to appear in South Africa, and even for those artists to be allowed to tour abroad. And the major reason for this has been the rise of the power and confidence of the black working class over the past 15 years.

Just as the apartheid state has been forced to recognise that strength by allowing black unions to organise, so too it has been forced to allow a greater cultural freedom to the expressions of black anger, hope and aspirations. All of this is of course still subject to the most vicious repression. Nevertheless, it survives, just as the trade unions still survive.

Paul Simon

This means that the questions we have to ask about future cases of this sort (and there are bound to be more) have to be clear and concrete. Does this aid or challenge racism? Does this condone or attack apartheid?

And if the answers to those questions are positive ones (and it won't always be simple) then our response should be clear. Any art which expresses the fightback now going on, that brings home to people the realities of apartheid and the depth of resistance to it deserves as wide an audience as possible.

To isolate the apartheid regime by trying to deny it any support or aid from abroad is an excellent thing. The isolation of the black working class, whether culturally or in any other sphere, from support and inspiration from workers elsewhere is bloody stupid, and we should not be afraid to say so loudly.

It would be a tragedy if the thousands of people who turn up to the Albert Hall in April to hear Masekela and Makeba and the best in township music find themselves confronted with Anti-Apartheid pickets.

Arguing that such musicians are collaborating with racism can only make Anti-Apartheid a laughing stock in the eyes of many of its potential supporters.■

Charlie Hore