

socialist

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# REVIEW



What has happened and why?  
p30

Recent industrial struggles are  
analysed in  
News analysis

A is for

**ALIENATION**

the first in  
our new  
Back Page  
series

'The Socialist ABC'

**ON STRIKE**

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*Socialist Review* is nearing the end of its first year. We seem to have survived.

But what do you, the readers, think of the *Review*? Where have we gone wrong? What other topics would you like to see us cover? In our birthday issue we would like to publish some of

your letters telling you what you think of us.

Meanwhile, an apology to Anna Paczucka and to our readers. Through misunderstanding during the production of our last issue, Anna's name was left off her article on *The Cult of Kollontai*. It was a mistake and our fault

entirely, and we apologise.

Finally, the action of the lorry-drivers (which of course, we fully support) has cut down the supply of print and so this issue is not printed on paper of the usual quality. Small price to pay for this magnificent strike.

# NEWS

analysis

## Britain

# The great fear

From time to time the British ruling class is seized by a wave of anger and terror like the *grande peur* (great fear) which swept through the French nobility in 1789. This condition induced by displays of power and militancy by the organised working class.

Such a great fear is now shaking the British establishment like a rat. Faced with the road haulage strike and the possibility of widespread action among public sector workers, hysteria is sweeping large sections of our rulers.

The following statement by the *Economist* is not untypical: 'Mr Callaghan's Labour government this week faced up to a potentially more damaging confrontation with the unions than Mr Heath's fatal brush with the miners in 1974' (13 January 1979).

Not everyone was going off their rocker. The *Financial Times* took a more robust view of things in a leader which is worth quoting at length for the comparisons it makes between the present situation and the 1974-5 pay explosion:

'The 1974 coal strike, and the prolonged three-day working which followed, made only a

minor dent in the national output figures by the end of the year. Indeed, the emergency produced some remarkable achievements in productivity.

'That experience is also relevant to the City's real basis for calm: the firm belief that if present monetary policies are maintained and, as the Chancellor has proposed, tightened, then the inflationary consequences of excessive wage claims will be limited. That belief is also supported by the great improvement in the balance of payments, thanks to North Sea oil and gas, in the past five years.

'The past wage explosion took place against the background of a deep trade deficit and after a monetary explosion; and international collapse of sterling — followed though after a considerable delay. This year the North Sea will provide further import savings . . . With the US economy weakening and world growth as a whole more likely to slow down than speed up, there is little reason to fear a sudden explosion in import costs' (13 January 1979).

The *Financial Times*'s reasoning could be spelled out

as follows. The 1974-5 pay explosion was a response to inflation going through the roof world-wide, partly as a result of the increase of raw material prices, especially the price of oil, and partly because various governments, including the British, had resorted to printing money in order to solve their economic difficulties.

Trade-union militancy in the wake of the fall of the Heath government pushed wage increases up to 30 per cent in the spring of 1975. The Labour government attempted to protect the international competitiveness of British goods from this rise in labour costs by allowing the pound to fall in 1975-6, thus cheapening exports.

But a falling pound means dearer imports and, therefore, a rise in inflation: wage restraint was imposed to prevent workers from offsetting these price increases through bigger pay settlements. The result, in 1975-77, was a dramatic fall in real wages and a sharp increase in company profits.

The success of these policies, combined with the effect of North Sea oil on the balance of payments and the chronic

weakness of the dollar, helped push sterling up on the international exchanges. A stable pound has meant cheaper imports and, therefore, the fall of the inflation rate to single figures.

But the present policy of keeping the pound stable means that the effect of increases in labour costs on the international competitiveness of British goods cannot be off-set by devaluing the currency.

Higher wages will mean either dearer exports or lower profits for exporters. Companies will respond by rationalising production or laying off workers: either way, unemployment is likely to rise.

So, provided that Callaghan and Healey stick to their 'monetarist' policies of preventing the money supply from rising too fast and keeping sterling stable, workers will be subject to the discipline of what the *Financial Times* called 'that fundamental incomes policy which matters - the fact that high wages in sound money can only be paid if they are earned through higher output or reduced manpower'.

So the ruling class is far from disarmed economically. Even if the rise in private sector averages 15 per cent - which is now a possibility - the big stick of unemployment can be used to keep workers in line.

Perhaps the source of the bourgeoisie's rage is more political: the realisation that, five years on, despite what seemed to them considerable concessions to the trade union bureaucracy - the social contract, the Employment Protection Act, the Trade Union and Labour Relations Act, the Sex Discrimination Act, participation, and so on - working class organisation is intact and capable of dealing them real body-blows.

One effect of the strike has been to make the issue of legislation against trade unionists once again a live one. The highly effective picketing tactics of the drivers have infuriated the employers especially the resort to 'secondary picketing' aimed at firms not directly affected by the dispute.

When the Labour government repealed the Tory Industrial Relations Act in 1974 the peaceful picketing of anywhere except someone's home was legalised. It may come as a surprise to the victims

of police thuggery on journalists' and bakers' pickets and on the pickets outside Garner's that this law is now regarded as too lax. The CBI is calling for legislation banning secondary picketing.

Margaret Thatcher also stepped into the fray, threatening wide-ranging legislation against the unions under a Tory government. Her main proposal was to withdraw social security benefits from the families of strikers whose action has not been approved in a secret ballot.

Presumably she was inspired by the German steel strike. A 75 per cent vote in favour of industrial action was necessary before the strike could be called. However, only 25 per cent of those voting needed to support the settlement for it to be approved. In fact, a majority of those voting rejected the sell-out!

Thatcher's other proposals were just plain silly, and wouldn't be taken at all seriously if there were not a good chance that she will be prime minister in six months' time.

One example will do. Thatcher threatened to remove the right to strike in key industries like gas and electricity in exchange for indexing the wages of the workers affected to inflation.

Apart from the fact that this would guarantee a big confrontation with the government every time a strike took place, in one of these sectors the last time wages were index linked, by Heath in 1973-4, they helped push pay settlements through the roof.



**"I just wish I had the money to panic-buy - my man's on strike."**

*The Scotsman*

Thatcher's union-bashing spree was probably more than a bit of clever (or not-so-clever) electoral opportunism. It also reflected the on-going debate in the Tory party over its strategy towards the trade unions.

The official policy, whose architect is the Tory employment spokesman, James Prior, is a conciliatory one designed to

establish a relationship of collaboration between a Conservative government and the trade-union bureaucracy.

Now that pay sanctions have been kicked out by the House of Commons, there is little difference between the two parties' formal policies on wage-restraint. Both rely on monetary controls plus 'responsible' bargaining around a broad target. Compare these two statements:

'It is the duty of the government every year to state what is the amount of earnings that is likely to yield the best national result for the prosperity of the people as a whole' (James Callaghan, *Sunday Mirror* 31 December 1978);

'The government must come to some conclusions about the likely scope for pay increases if excess public expenditure or large-scale unemployment is to be avoided' (*The Right Approach to the Economy*: Tory policy document adopted in 1977).

But the apparent consensus conceals deep divisions between Prior and the majority of the shadow cabinet, on the one hand, and the Tory far right, whose chief spokesman is Sir Keith Joseph, on the other. Thatcher's sympathies lie with the latter group.

In theory, the right wing are less 'confrontationist' than Prior and co. Ardent advocates of the 'free market' in everything, they are opposed in principle to any form of wage restraint, preferring to rely instead on monetary controls and hence unemployment to discipline workers.

At the same time, the far right are far more openly hostile to the trade unions. The last major row within the shadow cabinet took place in the autumn of 1977, when Joseph used the pretext of the mass pickets at Grunwick to demand anti-union legislation.

A campaign was launched against Prior: Norman Lebbitt, one of the 'gang of four', a group of back-benchers close to Thatcher, compared Prior's conciliatory policies towards the trade union bureaucracy with the appeasement of Hitler in the 1930s.

In the end Prior won. Joseph was gagged and the idea of legislating against, for example, the closed shop was dropped. But the divisions continue beneath the surface, and were stirred up by Heath's defence of

the five per cent limit after Thatcher had come out in favour of free collective bargaining.

These divisions probably reflect in part differences in social base. Big business, in Britain as elsewhere, is highly integrated with the state and committed of necessity to collaboration with the trade union bureaucracy.

Small businesses find it much more difficult to pay the price of class collaboration in form of wage increases, protective legislation and so on. It is evident that a significant component of Thatcher's support is lower middle-class: hence the ideological significance of George Ward at Grunwick the small capitalist taking on the hated and feared trade-union Goliath.

But the argument cannot be reduced to these socio-economic differences. The basic question is one of political strategy: how to deal with the problem I pointed to at the beginning - the continued existence of powerful workplace organisation? Big capital backed legislation against the unions in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

If Labour's alternative strategy of incorporating the trade union leadership and full-time shop stewards via the social contract fails, then confrontation may once again seem attractive.

One of the Tory right's strengths is that it possesses a potent if unreal ideology. Freedom = the market. The chief threat to freedom is collectivism and the state. The solution is to cut taxes, stop subsidising inefficient firms and end trade-union 'privilege'.

This may be lousy economics or social theory, but as an ideological mix designed to mobilise lower-middle-class and backward working-class frustrations against the organised labour movement it may have a chance of working. Time alone will tell.

In the meantime, spare a thought for the British ruling class. Their old enemy is alive and well and cutting swathes through British industry again - this time in the form of the drivers. One strategy, Labour's, is in shreds. The other, Thatcher's, is at best risky and dangerous. No wonder some of them are getting a bit hysterical. *Alex Callinicos*

## Engineers

When the 1,000 engineers at Rolls-Royce in Barnoldswick came out on strike they thought they were following union policy. The employers were trying to enforce a circular issued by the Engineering Employers' Federation which said that any increases in shift pay resulting from last year's national agreement had to be offset against the local increase (ie. the five per cent).

The unions angrily issued a circular opposing this 'unilateral guidance' from the EEF. The Barnoldswick strike followed, and the R-R combine committee agreed on a national overtime ban in support.

All of a sudden the Barnoldswick strikers were told to go back to work. Apparently their claim was 'impossible'; instead the AUEW executive, together with the district secretary, had negotiated a slight improvement in R-R's ten per cent productivity deal as compensation. The strike was therefore to no avail, nor was the overtime ban of any use.

The sudden speed with which the AUEW's leadership acted

suggests that they were rather more concerned about the R-R combine and its support than the case itself (Barnoldswick had been on strike for two months).

The overtime ban was not supported in Bristol, where the stewards seem to be spending more time acting militant than doing anything. But elsewhere, apart from the small Ansty plant, it has been well supported notably at the largest works, in Derby, which is not normally known for militancy.

In the meantime the EEF seems to have backed down on its position that the national agreement had to count against local pay increases.

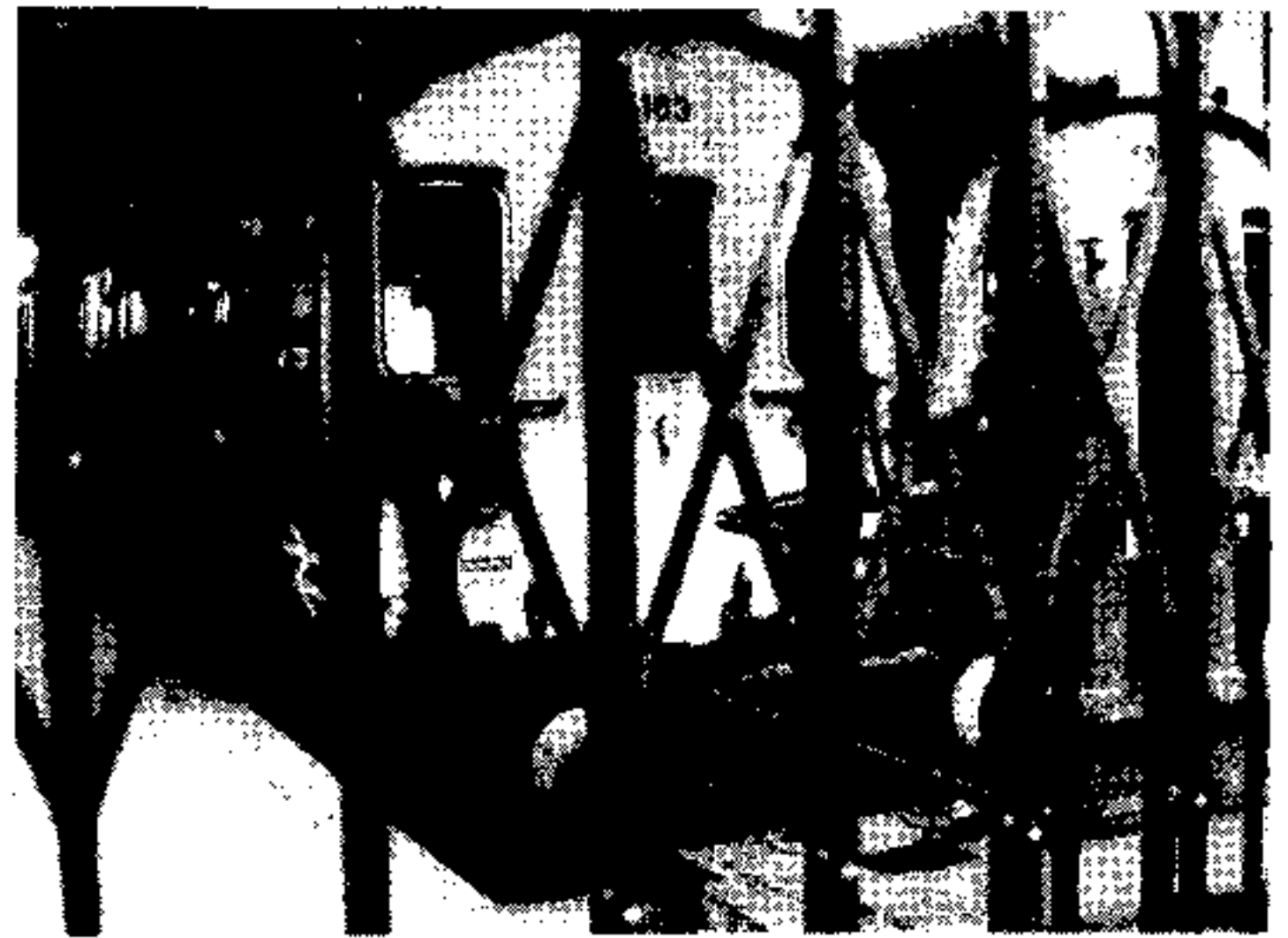
In fact the employers association is now saying that it's up to the companies concerned whether they offset the national rises or not.

This turn round, which owes little to the AUEW national leadership, suggests the employers may have come a little unstuck in trying to force through their own little pay policy.

*David Field.*



## Railways



The railways are a good example of an industry under-going radical modernisation on the back of its own work-force.

The introduction of diesel and electric traction plus Dr Beeching's cuts in the 1960s created a railway system more fitted to post-war British capitalism—concentrating on moving heavy bulk raw materials—coal, oil, steel etc—between industrial centres and moving people in the largest numbers between home and work and between city centres. Gone are the rural railway network and half the BR work-force.

Whatever's said about BR it is the cheapest railway system in western Europe—cheap, that is, for the state and industry; for passengers it is the most expensive, except, of course, for the tax-empted first class.

This long counter-revolution has been taking place without any great resistance from the railway trade unions, which are split in such a way as to make it impossible for a united work-force to win wages and conditions like those of the miners.

The division between the NUR and ASLEF is normally presented as one between unskilled and skilled workers. The truth is that ASLEF, owing to its more democratic structure and its single-section membership, is more responsive to the rank and file than the NUR.

But the real difference between the unions is that ASLEF can stop the railways dead, while, because of the technical operation of a modern railway, the NUR would need to seek the unconditional support of the other union to be sure of having any impact.

For example, the NUR organise signalmen, a very powerful group of workers. But the number of signalmen has dropped drastically as power-box operation is introduced. A power box covers huge lengths of track through an electric servo mechanism so that a few men in a box control many miles of main-line operation. If the NUR withdrew their members management could step in and do the work.

Or take the maintenance of locomotives. In the days of steam the operation would come to a halt if the man shovelling coal or the gangs maintaining the water-supply struck.

Today a HST Power set, like most diesels, can be fuelled by a single person while electric traction needs not even this attention.

This undermining of railwaymen's power explains much of the reaction to the crisis by the NUR leader, Sid Weighell. He came out strongly in support of the five per cent limit, arguing that, if the limit were broken there would be 'a very real danger of social breakdown worse than that which led to fascism and Nazism'.

Weighell also attacked the other trade union leaders who no longer support the social contract: they are not as well insulated from their rank and file as Weighell is from his.

The NUR is a peculiar union that has been outside the mainstream of trade-union history. Formed by paternalist middle-class elements, it went unrecognised by the major rail companies until a rank-and-file revolt shortly before the outbreak of the first world war

forced the companies into line and laid the basis for an industrial union on the railways. Unfortunately, the skilled drivers could not be persuaded to join 'one union for railways'.

NUR leaders claim that the union is highly democratic. However, Weighell is elected for life and the other full-time officials are appointed. The democratic core of the NUR is the peculiar relationship between the national executive council and the conference.

The NEC is full-time, but its members can only serve for two three-year sessions and must then return to the shop floor.

This arrangement would be excellent if *all* full-timers were under the same obligation. As it is, militants returning to the job from the NEC would face a rough time from both management and the officials.

Despite some progressive policies, like banning NF publications within the union, the officials and not the NEC control the NUR.

Railworkers are not only paid very low wages. They are isolated. Only at the depot can any sense of collective unity be felt. The divisions into guards, signalmen, trackmen, the shift pattern, the distances travelled. All these factors make rank-

and-file organisation difficult.

The picture is not quite as depressing as it seems. Due to unemployment elsewhere many active trade unionists are now in the rail industry, especially in the important workshops and depots as NUR, AUEW and EETPU members.

An organisation is being built there—the Railway Shopmen's National Committee—which not only led a very successful one-day strike but clearly sees what needs to be done. Such an organisation can lead not only the railway shopmen but all sections of railworkers against the weaklings, fools and traitors who 'lead' us. *Roger Cox*

even more spectacular victory. Starting with a mass meeting of 1,000 men on a Tuesday, they literally stopped anything moving in or out of the city by road.

Hull was under siege. By Friday the employers gave in. The police couldn't cope and had to approach the pickets to get permission for some essential supplies to be moved.

### Fruits of Victory

The 1974 '£40 for 40' victory transformed the situation. The basic rate was established by district bargaining in Tyneside, Teesside, Darlington, Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield, Lincolnshire, Kent, East Anglia, South Wales apart from Hull and Scotland and the West Midlands (where Alan Law had to negotiate three times to catch up with the leading areas).

The employers' strategy of using the Wages Council as a device for holding back district rates was smashed. In 1971 local rates were only £2.62 a week above the Wages Council rate. In 1975 they were £12.45 ahead.

### Employers' Offensive . .

In 1975 the unions walked out of the Wages Council. It was only a matter of time before it was abolished and the employers—the Road Haulage Association (RHA) were left without any national rates to hold the line.

In 1975 and 1976 the RHA could rely on wage controls to get them off the hook. The

## Lorry drivers

# Power & the glory

The lorry drivers have now emerged as one of the most powerful groups of organised workers, taking their place alongside those in the mines, docks, power stations and on the railways who have the strength to defy governments and turn politics upside-down.

It is only a short time ago, after all, that Callaghan's government was preening itself as a supremely successful and 'tough' administration—playing hard at Leyland, a strong line against the public sector, denouncing the bakery workers.

Whatever happens now—a 'relativities deal', an election or even a policy enforced by law—this government has received the treatment previously reserved for Tories. And like the Tories in 1972, the Labour response has ranged from bewildered to punch drunk.

The shock of the drivers' militancy took government, employers even the Transport and General Workers Union bureaucracy by surprise. Not only did a strike supposedly confined to Scotland dramatically spread to the North East, Lancashire, Yorkshire and South Wales.

But the drivers' strategy—picketing all road haulage—and tactics—flying pickets, mobile pickets took off from the point where their last great dispute, in October 1974, ended.

The change in lorry drivers' rank and file and union

organisation has been one of the most important developments inside the working class in the last ten years—comparable to the way the miners came out and fought in 1970-72 and 1974 and the tremendous growth of trade unionism among hospital and council workers.

Until the end of the 1960s road haulage drivers were generally divided and weak. There was a legal wage-fixing body in the industry—the Road Haulage Wages Council—and its very low rates acted as a real brake on wages at national level. Its effect on organisation was also very bad—the rates were often described as the 'union rates' by non-union drivers.

But in the Birmingham area, the situation was better. The T&G strategy was mainly worked out of district officer Alan Law then quite a militant and it involved picking off key companies, winning target pay increases and forcing them through elsewhere. The local employers had to get together and the first district-wide pay agreement was born.

### Scotland Takes Over

Local drivers' power spread to several areas. On Merseyside the drivers paralysed industry in 1970 (they used flying pickets at the same time as the miners began to develop them). Two other areas also developed strong local organisation—Scotland and the Hull district. In 1974 these areas led the

way. Scotland struck for four weeks unofficially, despite the repeated attempts of T&G 'left-winger' Alex Kitson to get them back to work.

The pickets went across the border, linked up with T&G members in the northern region and established the target rate £40 for 40 hours for an HGV class 1 driver—at companies strung out from Glasgow to Edinburgh in the north and from Newcastle to Carlisle in the south (there was no comment from the SNP).

In Hull the drivers won an



drivers accepted the £6 and the five per cent which were negotiated locally.

But the 1977 negotiations were much harder for the employers. Birmingham agreed a 15 per cent rise on the rates; the other areas tried to hold out. But first the Scottish drivers, then Hull, then Yorkshire and Lancashire forced a similar offer out of the local RHAs.

In South Wales the employers held firm. Over two thousand drivers struck. Cardiff docks were blockaded. Steel trains from Llanwern and Port Talbot were stopped by pickets on the lines. The RHA gave way in a week.

### Fight For Control

The abolition of the Wages Council and the results of 1977 claims proved that the RHA's worst fears were justified. Calling on the government's conciliation service, ACAS, to recommend national bargaining, the RHA said that the 'fragmented nature of the industry and the large number of small firms leaves the way open for leapfrogging claims by trade unions.'

Failing to win ACAS support, the RHA embarked on an offensive strategy this time round—trying to prevent local



employers agreeing their own deals and thus forcing up the level of wages nationally.

The formal outcome of this fight for control over bargaining was still unclear as *Socialist Review* went to press: the national RHA was forced to the figure of 15 per cent — a £60 minimum — as an alternative to immediate local settlements.

But Hull drivers have already had an offer of £64 a week. Drivers in the Fife area are in some cases already receiving

£65 the full claim. And in the West Midlands the agreement in principle is to pay 'whatever is achieved elsewhere'.

The national RHA is almost bound either to increase the level at which it will allow settlements or lose control entirely. Whatever it does the employers have been stitched up a treat.

### Encouraging

The drivers' strike is enormously encouraging for several

reasons apart from the deathblow it has struck at Labour's pay policy. It has been the key dispute in demonstrating that workers' wage militancy cannot indefinitely be defused by the sham of social democracy.

More important it has confirmed serious doubts in the ruling class about the long-term merits of all out collaboration with the union bureaucracy.

But above all it shows that despite a recession, despite the cold wind of 1975-1977, despite the defeats which we have suffered in several areas, the strength and power of a crucial sector of the rank and file is unchanged.

The drivers' organisation has in fact improved. The tactics and lessons of the 1974 strikes have been retained and improved. Confidence has grown beyond the 'traditional' militant areas. And the one group of workers which is always asked to support other strikes has shown their own muscle and won support.

1979 is ushered in by the sort of mass struggle that has haunted employers' and politicians' nightmares since the miners broke Heath's government exactly five years ago. *David Field.*

## Turkey

# Return of the military

On the 26 December martial law was announced in Turkey for a period of two months. The apparent cause was the widespread rioting in the Eastern town of Maras which left 100 people dead. The riots, which started when the funeral procession of two left-wing teachers was attacked by the right, took the form of inter-religious violence.

The majority of Turkey's Muslims belong to the Sunni sect, while a minority are Shiite Muslims. Similarly to Ireland and Lebanon, deep-seated social and economic problems often reflect themselves in a religious guise. Sectarian differences in Eastern Turkey are accompanied by ethnic conflicts between Turks and the Kurds, (who are a majority in some areas).

Over the past few years several towns in the east have

been the scene of widespread violence. This, however, is a common factor in Turkish politics, and to understand it we need to take the analysis deeper.

Turkey is ruled today by Ecevit's social democratic People's Republican Party (PRP). The PRP came to power

in January 1978, following the four-year rule of the 'Nationalist Front' coalition which consisted of four right-wing parties, including Demirel's conservative Justice Party and the fascist National Action Party.

The Nationalist Front period

witnessed a deepening economic crisis, rising political violence in the campuses and streets, and an increasingly aggressive, militant working class.

The economic problems were a reflection of the world crisis in the Turkish economy, compounded by the fact that a weak, underdeveloped economy, inextricably linked to western capital, is less able to withstand the disruptions caused by the crisis.

As exports chronically fell far short of imports a massive



foreign debt was built up. Inflation and unemployment continued to rise. Continuous power cuts and acute shortages of imported inputs severely curtailed industrial production.

The standard of life gradually but visibly declined, with over half the population of most major towns living in ramshackle shantytown areas, and thousands trying to scrape a living street-peddling and begging on every corner.

The fascists benefited and grew, not only because the conditions were conducive to this, but more importantly, because being part of the government they were able to extensively penetrate the state machine, particularly the army, police and institutions of education.

Their parliamentary respectability was accompanied by the creation of armed groups of thugs, initially working on campuses gradually moving out. In 1978 alone about 1200 people died in fascist attacks and retaliation by the left.

In this period the young and small but well-organised Turkish working class fought with considerable success to preserve its rights and living standards. In 1976 a successful general strike called to prevent the establishment of special 'State Security Courts' brought 300,000 workers out.

In 1977 80,000 metal workers struck for eight months in an attempt to smash the Employers Federation. 12,000 striking miners in the east occupied and ran the mines for several months. For several years now the Mayday celebrations in Istanbul have seen over half a million workers in the streets.

In January last year Ecevit's PRP was elected with solid working class support. While not traditionally a social-democratic party, throughout the 1970s the PRP has manoeuvred itself into a position of representing the working class.

Though it has no organic links with the trade-union movement (unlike the Labour Party here), it recently gained dominance in the executive of the main trade-union confederation. The PRP came to power with wild promises to the working class ('Ecevit--our hope' shouted demonstrators), and rather more realistic ones to the ruling class.

It has to be borne in mind



that this was Turkey's first experiment with social democracy. Illusions about the PRP abounded (and probably still do, to a much lesser extent) in the working class. As for the ruling class, the abject failure of the Nationalist Front government had left them with basically two alternatives: fascism or social democracy.

The previously untried alternative of social democracy was the more attractive. After all, a party with extensive working-class support might have a better chance of containing and pacifying the class (as, of course, has been the case in Britain).

Ecevit was indeed successful

in one respect. 1978 saw a drastic decline in the number of strikes. On the economic front, however, the crisis is as crippling as ever. The foreign debt is now around \$16 billion, two billion of which is coming up for repayment.

The drastic cutbacks in imports, implemented to save foreign currency, has led to the starvation of industry of vital inputs. The almost total dependence of Turkish industry on the West for raw-materials, machinery and technology has made matters worse.

Industry is now running at round 35 per cent of full-capacity and numerous factories are having to close down.

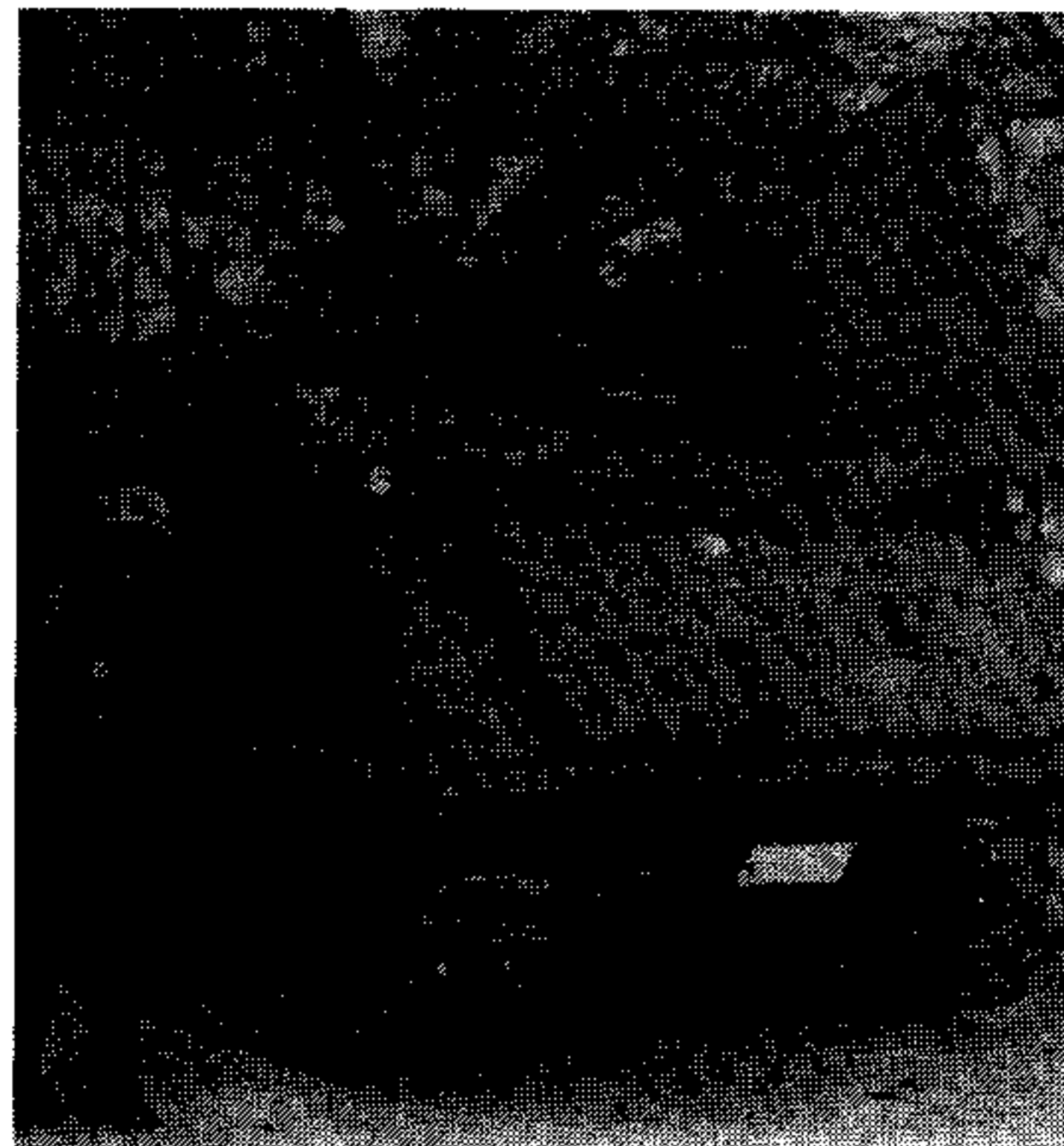
The disappearance of basic commodities from the shops is now a common occurrence, and inflation has reached 60 per cent. Unemployment is over 20 per cent, with around three million people out of work. Ecevit's journey abroad in search of loans have produced few rewards.

The crisis has served the fascists well, they have continued to grow, and ousted from their place in the government they have escalated their campaign of violence. The east of the country is where they have had greatest success. The recent riots are indicative of their success.

For the ruling class, however, the riots were further proof of their inability to govern. Weakened by its dependence on western capital and unable to erect itself upon a firm economic base, the Turkish ruling class has often found its control over society slipping.

The use of force has therefore traditionally been a part of the Turkish state to a much greater extent than it is in the west. 13 of the Republic's 55 years have been spent under martial law. This is the ninth time, in that period, that the military have been called in to do what the ruling class could not through 'democratic' means.

As always, the job of the military will be to smash the left. The fascists will benefit. Until a mass movement develops in Turkey the military solution will remain an easy option for the ruling class. *Ali Saffet*



## Algeria

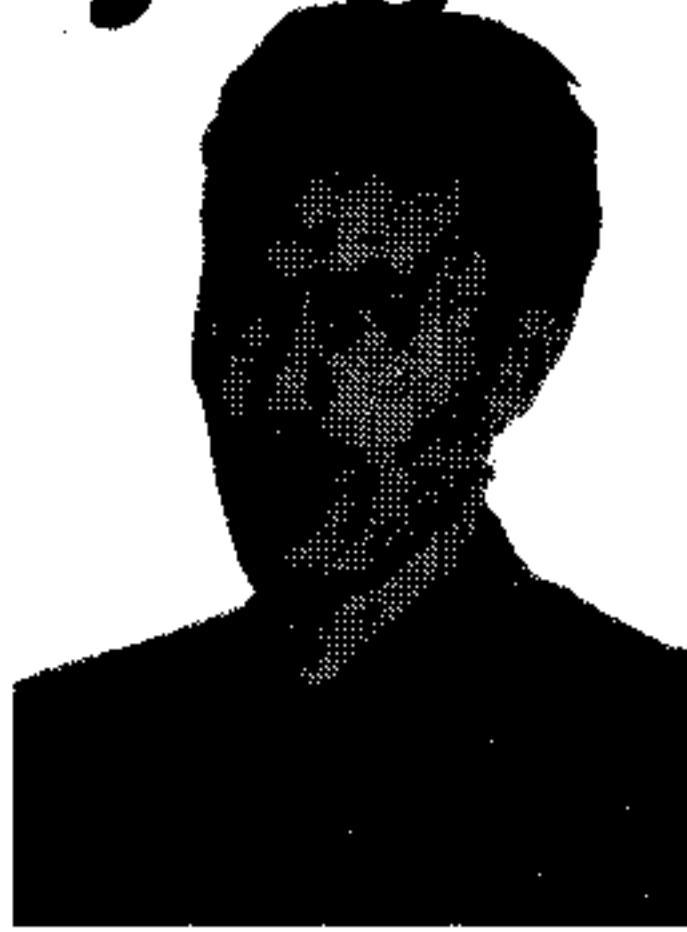
# Power playing

The grim-looking group of men vying for the now vacant post of President of Algeria provide the best testimony to the political career of Houari Boumedienne, who died in December.

Party bureaucrats, army officers and police chiefs constitute the list of 'unknown' or 'murky' figures, who for years lurked in Boumedienne's shadow. His death leaves them scrabbling desperately amongst themselves for further power and influence, and points up the development myth of 'Algerian socialism' as a nonsense which concealed the late president's increasingly dictatorial control over a rigid and oppressive bureaucracy.

Boumedienne came to power in 1965. He had emerged as one of the leaders of the National Liberation Front (FLN) which by 1962 had led a successful struggle to free Algeria from French control.

The independence struggle was a genuine mass movement, though the vast majority of the poor were entirely unaffected, by its conclusion. Some thousands of workers and peasants did press forward their hopes by occupying the lands and businesses of the expelled French colons. Workers' self-



management committees took over some areas of land, and, under the 'autogestion industrielle', numbers of factories and small businesses.

President at this early stage of independence was Ahmad Ben Bella with Boumedienne, in control of the armed forces, which had sat out the war of independence in Tunisia, as his main backer. Ben Bella posed as a 'radical', who talked vaguely about socialist policies which might involve the mass of the people.

At the time he began the process of assuming complete central control of the workers' and peasants' attempts at self-management, and appropriating more and more personal power.

When Boumedienne ousted

Ben Bella, watched approvingly by the imperialist powers, who regarded him as more of a 'pragmatist', it was to carry to their conclusion the policies which had begun under Ben Bella. Most enterprises which had come under some form of workers' control were sold to private ownership.

Bigger businesses were protected from 'self-management', and in agriculture a strong, centralised government apparatus took over the 'socialist farms'. When Boumedienne later organised a massive nationalisation programme any element of worker involvement had been entirely eliminated.

At the 1960s progressed Algeria fell into a crisis which increasing oil production could not resolve. Ten years after independence population had reached 16 million, from 11 million. Yet food production was barely that 1962.

By 1970 Algerians still suffered from one of the lowest lowest levels of calorific food intake in the world lower even than of India. By the mid-1970s half the rural population depended for survival on earnings repatriated by migrant workers. Hundreds of thousands flooded from the land into the cities.

But the working class grew to half a million by 1977. Low wages and rising prices forced anger and frustration inside the state-controlled unions. Unofficial strikes were common.

Boumedienne responded with sustained attacks on the unions, and arrests of militants.

He was unashamedly the defender of the huge bureaucracies, the growing class of Algerian entrepreneurs, of his friends and former comrades in the army.

For some Boumedienne's name has been placed high on the list of 'third world' leaders who were believed to have discovered a new, independent road to socialism.

At various times over the past twenty years Nkrumah's Ghana, Nasser's Egypt, Nyerere's Tanzania, Castro's Cuba and others have been declared to be well along a road to socialism owing nothing to the workers' movement.

Most have been pathetically discredited, with the romance of an 'Arab socialism' or 'African socialism' exposed as the rhetoric of a growing neo-colonial or fully-fledged state capitalist class.

Oil revenues and developing industrialisation might have maintained Boumedienne's f a cade of a little longer. But his death reveals exactly the picture we have seen a dozen times before—a gang of power-hungry bureaucrats, previously united only by their fearful loyalty to the president, and each desperate to win control of the repressive state machine they have helped to build. Algeria's Nasser is dead. Who is to be its President Sadat? *Phil Marfleet*

## Indochin

# Indochinese shambles

For over 30 years the people of Indochina were involved in a series of bloody struggles against imperialist aggressors—Japan, Britain, France, the United States. It is tragically ironic that today, less than four years after the final victory of the liberation forces, there is war again in Indochina.

The news that the Cambodian regime has been overthrown by forces inspired and armed by Vietnam can bring pleasure only to those who never sympathised with the aims of the liberation struggle—one more argument on the side of those who argue that national liberation is not worth fighting for.

For socialists who campaigned for the expulsion of imperialism from Indochina, there can be no easy answers. The claims made by both sides as to the justice of their cause and the atrocities committed by their opponents are as unconvincing as the claim by either Cambodia or Vietnam to have anything to do with socialism.

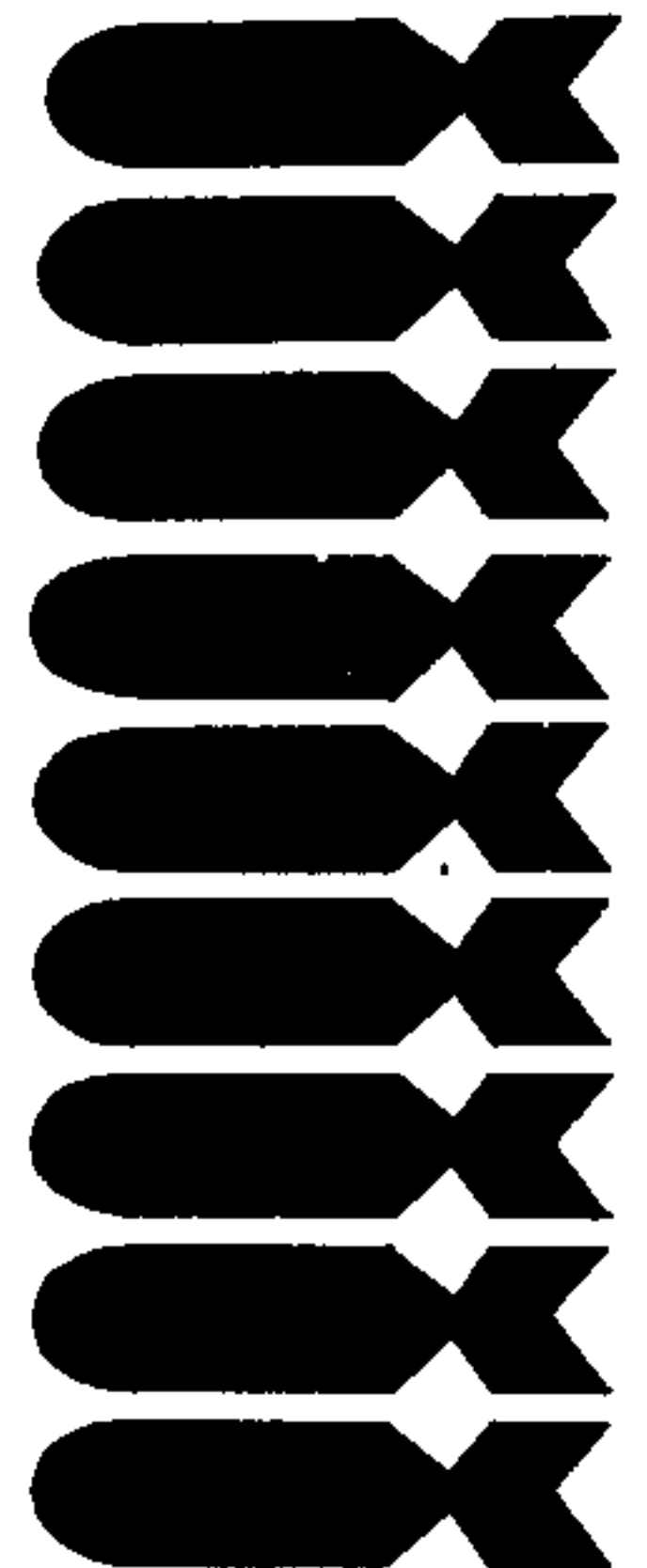
Any attempt to piece together a sober analysis of the situation is inhibited by the sheer lack of information; and this lack itself has political roots. Both Cambodia and Vietnam have practised secret diplomacy; both have disguised their real aims behind a barrage of propaganda, instead of presenting their

aims clearly and openly to their own people and to the working class of the world.

So secretive have the Cambodian leaders been that the very fact of the existence of the Cambodian Communist Party was not made public until its leading members had been in power for over two years.

What information does exist suggests that the dispute between the Vietnamese and Cambodian leaders goes right back to the early years of the war against the Americans, in the 1960s, and that the first border clashes took place in May 1975, immediately after the victory of the liberation forces. Any attempt to deter-

7½ Million tons





mine who fired the first shots is doomed to failure, even if it were of any real significance.

Any understanding of the present situation in Indochina must go back to the long bitter struggle against American imperialism. During the course of their vain struggle to maintain their puppet rulers, the Americans dropped 7½ million tons of bombs on Indochina, 3½ times the total volume of bombs dropped in the second world war.

Those who retail stories of massacres in independent Cambodia do not often recall the fact that in the years 1970 to 1975 one tenth of the total population of Cambodia were killed after the American invasion of their country.

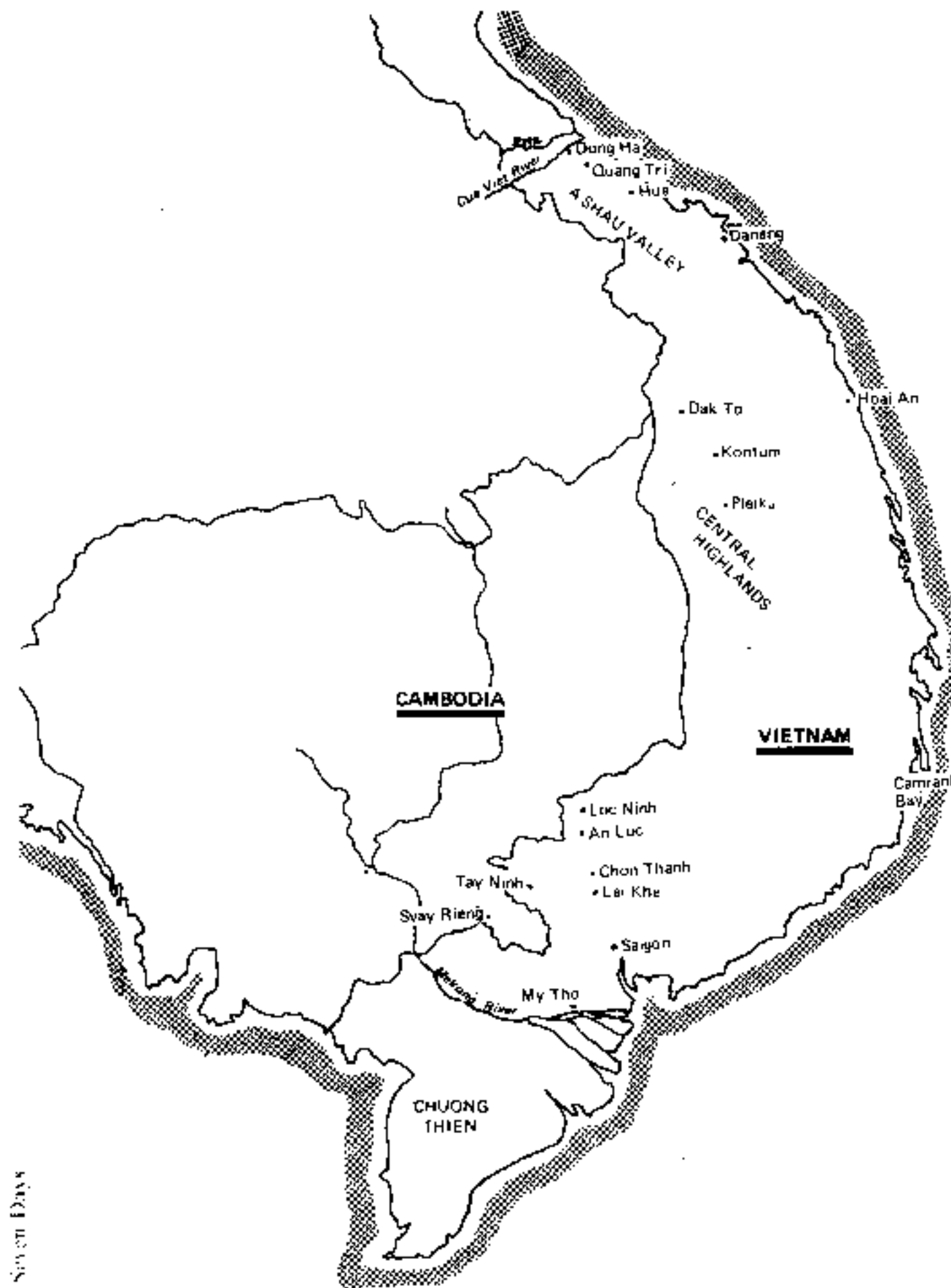
The Americans left behind them an Indochina physically ravaged and impoverished by war, and with its whole social structure distorted by the corruption and parasitism imported by an invading army. Any attempt to apportion the blame for the present situation must begin from this fact.

The legacy of war merely compounds for Vietnam and Cambodia the problems faced by any backward country seeking to develop itself in the conditions of today's crisis-racked world economy. Hence the deepening problems which both regimes have faced. The Vietnamese inherited a society riddled with corruption.

For a genuine workers' democracy the only solution would have been a complete overturning of the structures of society and the replacement of existing administration by organs of working class power. Within the bureaucratic tradition represented by the Vietnamese Communist Party this was an impossibility.

The installation of a state capitalist regime has been accompanied by various campaigns against corruption and 'bureaucratism' and the 're-education' of members of the old ruling clique. Yet bureaucracy persists, as does deep poverty, aggravated by recent floods. The last thing the Vietnamese masses need is a war with Cambodia albeit that such a war may prove useful in stifling discontent.

One significant move by Vietnam towards state capitalism was the expropriation, in March 1978, of some 30,000 private traders. Many of these were of Chinese origin,



and the action led to a worsening of relations with China which accused Vietnam of racism in its treatment of the Chinese community (1.7 million out of a total Vietnamese population of 48 million). The expropriated Chinese have been one of the main groups in the recent flood of refugees out of Vietnam up to 8,000 a month have been leaving, and around 70 per cent of these have been Chinese.

Yet the attack on private capitalism inside Vietnam has in no way meant a breaking with world capitalism on the contrary. Vietnam has been desperately anxious to develop links with a variety of Western powers. Repeated attempts have been made to normalise relations with the United States and to encourage the US to develop Vietnamese oil production. Economic and political links have been made with other Asian countries, including the vicious dictatorship in Thailand.

The *Economist* (18 November 1978) commented that 'Vietnam last year offered the most capitalist incentives for foreign investment ever promulgated by any socialist country'. Only the reluctance of the US to develop links with the country that humiliated it militarily forced Vietnam to

join Comecon last year.

Cambodia's response to the problem of development was different. Information is hard to come by, but the Cambodian leaders, headed by Pol Pot, have themselves given an account of their main strategy.

From May 1975 onwards the whole emphasis was on agriculture; the population of Phnom Penh, swollen by war, was dispersed into the countryside; the official ideology stressed rice production as more important than anything else; education and technology were virtually abandoned. The economy functioned without money; not a sign of embryonic socialism, but rather an indication of an economy geared to pure subsistence. 95 per cent of the population were described as 'middle peasants'.

During the last year there were some signs of a reversal of this policy and the re-establishment of some industrial production in Phnom Penh; but there was no open discussion of policy, which remained in the grip of a small handful of leaders.

Traditional national antagonisms are undoubtedly involved in this war between two 'socialist' states. The Cambodians, a tiny nation (population seven million), with an ancient history and culture, was

only saved from annexation by their bigger Vietnamese and Thai neighbours when the French colonised Indochina in the 19th century.

The expulsion of the Americans and their clients from Indochina in 1975 left Vietnam, steeled by 40 years of war and armed with a huge mass of captured US war material, the biggest military power in south-east Asia, with a subservient 'communist' government in Laos and long-standing aspirations to create an Indochinese federation under her hegemony.

Woven into these national antagonisms was a proxy war between the two 'socialist' giants, the Soviet Union and China. Mao had stabbed the Vietnamese in the back in 1972 by welcoming Nixon while the B-52s were devastating Vietnam with their bombs and refusing the Russians permission to supply the liberation forces via China. Behaviour of this sort helped to draw Moscow and Hanoi together. Vietnam joined Comecon and signed a treaty of friendship with the USSR.

The Vietnamese victory has come at a good time for Brezhnev. Recently Peking has scored a number of major diplomatic triumphs—notably the conclusion of a treaty with Japan which denounces 'hegemonism' (ie the Russians) and the US decision to ditch Taiwan and exchange ambassadors with the Chinese.

Carter's national security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, has long advocated a strategy of 'playing the Chinese card', ie building up China economically and militarily in order to draw Russian attention and troops away from Europe.

Now Moscow and Hanoi have given the Chinese, Pol Pot's only backer, something to think about. The fall of Phnom Penh was front-page news in *Pravda* (even the Vietnamese capture of Saigon in 1975 only made page five).

The prosperous, pro-western states of south-east Asia—Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand—must also be worried. China's pursuit of friends has not really affected them yet: despite Peking's now well-established policy of supporting counter-revolution in the third world, China continues to back the Thai and Malaysian Communist Parties, whose main activity is mounting guerilla campaigns against

their governments. But now the Vietnamese army is on the Thai border—a much greater potential threat.

Vietnam has been assiduously courting her pro-western neighbours. The Vietnamese prime minister, Pham Van Dong, toured south-east Asia last autumn. According to the *Economist* he even discussed 'possible co-operation with Malaysia and Thailand in providing intelligence against the guerillas (many of whose leaders were originally trained in Hanoi)' (13 January 1979).

It will be interesting to see how long it takes the Chinese to ditch their Thai and Malaysian supporters in the competition with Hanoi for regional respectability.

What sense are socialists to make of this picture of 'communists' scrabbling against each other, even fighting each other, in pursuit of narrow national advantage?

In the first place, it would be a mistake to see the Vietnamese regime as a puppet of 'Soviet social-imperialism', as the Chinese would have us believe. The Vietnamese Communist Party spent 40 years waging a bitter, patient, protracted war for national independence. They will not give that up easily—to anyone.

Nor was the Pol Pot regime anything to do with socialism, despite the claims of the handful of their supporters in the west, like the late Malcolm Caldwell and the economist Samir Amin. Their policies were closer to barbarism than to socialism.

But this does not mean that we should therefore welcome

the invasion of Cambodia by Vietnam, as the *Morning Star* did with its head-line: 'Guerillas liberate Cambodia'. Those who present the conflict as a civil war between the Pol Pot regime and the Vietnamese-backed National Salvation Front are surely dishonest when they ignore the role of Vietnamese regular troops in the war.

The struggle in Cambodia has very little to do with the interests of the Cambodian masses. The overthrow of Pol Pot was the result of decisions taken in Hanoi reflecting Vietnamese national interests: the desire to eliminate an unstable and hostile neighbour and also an ally of Peking from Vietnam's flank, and to control the whole of Indochina.

The Cambodian people will find themselves subordinated to the Vietnamese regime and their agriculture used to solve Vietnam's food problems.

Those who support the Vietnamese invasion because it rids the world of a vile and murderous regime are merely reproducing the old colonialist idea that certain more 'advanced' nations have the right to ignore the rights of other 'lesser' nations in the latter's own interests.

The regime installed in Phnom Penh by the Vietnamese may well enjoy some support inside Cambodia, if only because of the bloody policies of Pol Pot. Its leaders include veterans of the liberation struggles, and in the areas it has

**'As far as the Vietnamese are concerned they have a very big population and a lack of lands. They have not enough lands for everybody and we have more lands than we need...so you know the Vietnamese always have the temptation to come into Cambodia and occupy our lands.'**

*Sihanouk 1969*

taken over it has dismantled the structures of collectivised agriculture.

However, if it is seen to rest chiefly on Vietnamese bayonets, the National Salvation Front may well find itself the victim of Cambodian nationalism. There is no guarantee that the invasion has brought peace to Indochina. Socialists should demand that the Vietnamese withdraw their troops from Cambodia in order to allow the Cambodian people to solve their problems themselves.

The entire conflict is the logical culmination of an ideology which identifies socialism with nationalism. All the parties in the dispute—Moscow, Peking, Hanoi and Phnom Penh under Pol Pot—accepted the same basic premise: that socialism could and should be achieved within their own national boundaries.

In the case of the Chinese, the Vietnamese and the Cambodians the stalinist doctrine of 'socialism in one country' was strengthened by powerful nationalist aspirations stirred up by colonialism. Ho Chi Minh, founder of the Vietnamese Communist Party, coined the slogan: 'Nothing is more important than liberty and independence'.

The bankruptcy of nationalist socialism should have been brought home by the war in Indochina. In a world bound closer and closer together economically, where even 'People's' China courts the west for loans and technology, the struggle to defend and extend individual national patches is becoming more and more reactionary and irrelevant. *Ian Birchall and Alex Callinicos*



Seven Days



Cambodian troops

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## Public Sector

# Relativities deal?

Faced with the mass demonstration of 22 January and the signs of real local militancy among hospital, council and water workers the government has been trying desperately hard to sort out some deal which will head off strikes for more than the five per cent now on offer.

Callaghan has really had only two options. One was to buy off the really strong groups of workers—like the water workers—and try to bleed NUPE and the General and Municipal Workers Union's small strike funds dry. The second was an overall deal on public sector workers' pay—the sort of thing the TUC failed to agree last November (*Socialist Review* No 8).

If a package does come out of the government's 'urgent' meetings with the TUC it could well be presented to the new public services committee (David Basnett's brainchild) which contains an inbuilt right-wing majority and is perhaps more likely to vote heavily in favour of a relativities deal, thus isolating NUPE more than a normal TUC vote.

The main element in the deal (if it does come) is likely to be some sort of 'independent relativities machinery', designed to defuse conflict in the public sector by giving the unions an opportunity of staged increases over several years: in other words, long-term agreements after outside arbitration. In the November proposals the government and the TUC were to issue a joint statement with a specific clause stating:

'The government and the TUC believe that in some areas of the public sector, other than those engaged in trading, there is a greater role for comparability in determining pay... the guiding principle should be the achievement of comparable earnings for comparable work... the establishment of levels of pay by such methods does not provide any automatic basis for increases for groups not part of the exercise... the government will be prepared to see settlements implemented subject to agreement on staging.'

This is an important statement. It harks back to the last days of the Tory government in January 1974 when the Pay Board issued a report on relativities, which apart from solving the miners' dispute after Heath's government fell has since been consigned to limbo.

But the Pay Board's relativities report provides just the sort of way out that the government is looking for now.

'Consideration should be given' said the Pay Board 'mainly to claims for significant shifts in external relativities, that is, relationships between large groups of workers of importance to the community as a whole.'

The point the Tories homed in on was that it was impossible to do ad hoc deals all the time—as happened during 1977, for example, with the firemen, police, doctors, armed forces, university lecturers etc. For the state to prevent the process getting out of hand, a central body has to be involved.

Whether such a separate body is on the cards this time depends of course on whether the government thinks it can do the trick—which is to involve the unions in a long comparability process, far removed from their members, let alone from any action by their members.

The aim would be to let the hospital workers, say, have their £60 minimum—but only in November 1980. Rather like the original proposal for giving the post office engineers the 35-hour week in stages.

NUPE general secretary, Alan Fisher, reacted to this by saying there is nobody to compare hospital and council workers with. The government could well offer to get round this little problem within the relativities framework, though to do this would require a proper Board to be set up, rather than just a policy which the Department of Employment (DE) could administer.

The government would obviously prefer DE control, rather than the risks associated with an 'independent body'. In fact the DE is already operating its own limited relativities

machinery, which has allowed the plumbers and the heating engineers in the building industry to get 30 per cent in two stages, August 1978 and August 1979.

All this sounds very neat. But since November the outlook for pay has changed enormously. Fords won, the drivers and others have broken the limit: a new 'norm' of 15 per cent is on the cards. The government was

clearly hoping in November for public sector deals of 'five per cent now, ten per cent later' along the lines of the firemen's 1977 settlement.

A relativities deal now will have to look very different if the government is to save any face. And in the meantime the union leaders are beginning to wonder if Margaret would keep Kim's promises.

David Field

## Bakers



A 14.4 per cent increase sounds all right—but it did not mean much to the 26,000 Bakers, Food and Allied Workers' members who went on strike for six weeks for £10.

The basic rates are still as low as £43.11 to £51.03 a week (plus £3.85 supplement). The closed shop has been broken. Damaging productivity strings were also accepted.

The reasons for the debacle are not hard to find. No official instructions from the executive until the second week of the strike, a confused strategy of letting some groups settle while others stuck out, a failure to stop flour supplies and over reliance on the strength of traditionally militant areas, such as Merseyside and Manchester.

The national leadership's decision to spring a strike instruction on the membership also seems to have led some smaller bakeries not to come out, allowing the press and the police to drive their respective wedges in.

But nevertheless the strike did not lead to total disaster. The narrow vote for a return—40 branches to 36—was amazing, considering at least 6,000 members were already back-at-work, the majority of strikers probably wanted to carry on.

Secondly, certain areas ac-

tually got tougher as the strike went on—bakeries in the North West at 'outlying' towns such as Preston and Lytham were just as determined to carry on as traditionally militant places like Scotts in Liverpool (where salaried and some managerial staff backed the strike).

Finally, the union has not accepted a major new erosion of working conditions. Apart from the employers' rejection of the closed shop what has been agreed is in fact a restatement of conditions on flexibility already agreed. The union has accepted responsibility, for getting these enforced—and cutting down unofficial disputes on manning, shift work and scheduling.

The issue now could be whether the union does try and police the agreement or whether the line put forward by militants in the union—getting rid of 'spineless officials who betrayed their office'—can bring the union back to the line of increasing militancy which it has shown since the end of 1974.

Footnote: Perhaps the least useful letter of support ever received by a union in dispute came from Energy Secretary Tony Benn at the beginning of the strike. 'Many thanks for your letter of 7th November' it read. 'I appreciate you keeping me informed.'

David Field

# iran



The most important event of the last year has undoubtedly been the mass revolt against the Shah of Iran. This tremendous movement has humbled one of the most arrogant and brutal rulers the third world, a crucial ally of western imperialism in the middle east.

## **Fred Halliday interviewed on Iran.**

Fred Halliday's important book, *Iran: Dictatorship and Development* (Penguin £1.50 A Bookmarx Club Choice), appeared in December 1978. It provides an indispensable analysis of the background to the crisis in Iran.

Fred Halliday is a member of the editorial board of *New Left Review* and a fellow of the Transnational Institute. He talked to Alex Callinicos early in January about his book and development in Iran since it was written.

**Y**our book is perhaps the first serious study in a western European language of the contemporary Iranian state from a marxist point of view. Could you summarise its main conclusions?

The book began as an attempt to explain the Iranian state in the 1970s. Until 1978 there had been, on the surface, political tranquility in Iran since the repression of the rather incoherent opposition movement of the early 1960s. Moreover, there had been a political dictatorship under the Shah, using the army, since the coup d'état of 1953 which ousted Mossadeq's nationalist government.

The book was, therefore, an attempt to delineate the characteristics of this repressive state. It was also an attempt, insofar as it was possible, to provide a historical analysis of why this state had come about and why it had so far succeeded, and, secondly, to try and see what its major strengths and weaknesses were.

This obviously involved trying to specify the pattern of economic and social development in Iran, since without producing an economic explanation the precondition for the Shah's political success was this economic success: in the sense that he could buy the silence of the middle class, build up his repressive apparatus and, for a time, satisfy some of the material demands of at least part of the population thanks to oil and the revenues available therefrom. US im-

perialism certainly stood behind the Shah as well but was not the dominant factor in the 1970s.

Most of the bourgeois literature on Iran obviously exaggerated the strength and stability of the economy. Most of the marxist literature tended to deny that very much had occurred since the 1950s and early 1960s, or only admit very reluctantly that changes had taken place. In an exploratory way I tried to chart a course through these two approaches, to produce an analysis which admitted the fact of considerable capitalist development in certain sectors and also highlighted, on the basis of the independent evidence available, the enormous weaknesses of this development.

**T**he bulk of your book must have been written before the events of the last year: how well does the analysis it contains stand up in the light of these events?

The underlying themes of the book, namely the nature of the dictatorship and the character of Iran's economic and social development in the last 20 years, have been confirmed by the developments of the last year, with two important additions.

First of all, although I argued that Iran contained the classic recipe for revolution, namely considerable socio-economic change combined with political immobility, I did not expect the speed at which the crisis would come. I did not anticipate that a relatively minor downturn in the economy in 1976-77 promoting such a new situation. Moreover, the system has proved to be even more fragile than I had originally thought. I don't think that many people had predicted that the opposition would spread as rapidly and as courageously as it has done.

Secondly, in common with most outside observers and most of the Iranian left with which I've had contact, I did not initially expect Islam to be as powerful an ideological force as it has proved to be. Islam was not a central force, ideologically or organisationally, in the Mossadeq period and the evidence, even from people living in Iran, was that the incidences of belief and of public religious observation were declining from the 1950s through to the 1970s.

Moreover, there was a large gap between the visible, active leftwing opposition forces operating underground—the guerillas, the Communists, the students and so on—and the mullahs who are very anti-communist and antimarxist. The coming together of these two elements has produced a novel situation.

On the other hand the constitutive themes of the book have been demonstrated in recent developments. One is the very uneasy relationship between the Shah and the Iranian middle class. In countries like Chile and Argentina which have to some extent comparable systems of political dictatorship

there is a middle class which vocally supports these regime. In Iran the absence of active support for the Shah by even part of the middle class is a striking index of his weakness. One sign of their lack of confidence in the Shah is the enormous capital flight from Iran, which, according to American bankers, is one of the largest in human history, if not the largest.

Secondly, I tried to criticise in the book the strategy of the urban guerilla groups, the Mojahidin of the People and the Fedayin of the People, who are extremely courageous but, I think, politically mistaken. I argued that a mass opposition movement in Iran would not be born out of the echo or armed propaganda effects of small groups carrying out military actions.

The form which the crisis has taken and the form in which the opposition has spread have borne out this analysis. The policy of the guerillas themselves in response to the mass upsurge also confirms this. They have chosen to take part in the demonstrations and to carry out what one could call, not disparagingly, conventional political activity like distributing leaflets and marching on demonstrations as their way of participating in the mass movement.

iran

Thirdly, the monarchy in Iran is, as I tried to point out in as precise a way as possible, a specific form of dictatorship—it is not just another military dictatorship. Now it has its strengths—it appeals to patriotic feelings, focuses on one person, and so on—but it is also a very brittle form of regime, since if the Shah goes the whole political system is placed in question. The monarchy compensates for internal weakness by being sustained, ultimately, by the armed forces and the United States of America: these two supports have become very evident in the crisis of recent weeks.

Finally, I argued something that is now taken as read even by people like the *Financial Times* but which was not accepted as recently as a few months ago, namely that the economic record of the regime was a deplorable one even in its own terms. It was



evident on closer examination that, despite the complacency of most western commentators, very serious economic and social problems were developing for the regime even without the fall in oil revenues. It is this materialist factor which is not the sole cause of, but which has certainly underlain, the form the crisis is now taking.

**I**d like to move on to talk about some issues raised by the present mass upsurge in Iran. The first you touched on a little earlier: the unexpectedly large role played by the Islamic clergy in the mass movement. How much significance do you attach to this development?

There are a number of points one could make about the role of religion in the protest movement. In the first place, it's important to bear in mind that the protest movement began in 1977, not among the mullahs, but among the urban middle class, in particular among the secular intelligentsia the students, writers, journalists, lawyers, etc. who formed professional associations and began to raise a series of human rights demands.

It was only in January 1978 that the mullahs become active, partly because of a specific provocation an attack on Ayatollah Khomeini in a government newspaper. More generally they were emboldened by the pioneering role of other political elements who had shown that activity against the Shah was possible, and that it found an echo among other parts of the population.

The second point is that in Iran the Shi'a Muslim faith has historically been an ideology composed of a contradictory series of elements which can be articulated in different directions depending on the political conjuncture. Although some traces of its early rebel origins remain it's not against the state as such, as some people claim, since it has been the established state religion since 1502. However, a strong element in it over the last 80 or 90 years has been a kind of diffuse nationalism and anti-imperialism.

The mullahs were active in the 1890s in the first Iranian national movement—the protest movement against tobacco concessions to the British. They were also involved in the Constitutional revolution of 1905-11. They were active in a very disorganised and contradictory way during the Mossadeq period (1951-3), in support of Mossadeq and then some of them against him and in support of the Shah.

Thirdly, the mosque in Iran was the one place which had some independence of the state in social and political life over the last 15 years. It is through this material, organisational, independence of the state more than in its loose anti-state ideology that the Islamic establishment has been able to lead the opposition for a time.

In Shi'a Islam the religious taxes are paid

directly to the mullahs and not to the state as they are in all other Muslim countries. The mullahs therefore had a source of income independent of the state which enabled them to endow mosques--there are apparently 80,000 of them in Iran--and many thousands of shrines; to employ not just 180,000 mullahs but also thousands of other religious officials and procession organisers, all of whom could be turned to political purposes when the time came; and to support a large theological and educational establishment, most noticeably the seminary at Qom which has 13,000 students.

In this way the clergy were not only able to sustain an independent existence but, thanks to their independence, poorer sectors of the population particularly the migrants coming to the towns, were able to turn to them. They are the one nation-wide institution saying that the Shah should go.

Indeed, one could say that the Shah is the person who really made the mullahs and Khomeini (who was not particularly prominent until he was expelled from Iran in 1963 for making fiery speeches against the regime) the leaders of the mass protest, by successfully cutting off the mass of the population, especially the urban poor, from organised political groups.

The mass movement in Iran today is therefore ideologically less advanced than it was in Mossadeq's time: in that period it was secular and there was also a mass Communist Party which, for all its faults, had a political organisation and was independent of Islam. It is on the other hand now a much broader social force since due to urbanisation it covers half of the total population.

But there is another factor which is not often brought to bear. Islam in Iran is not a unified force. It's not unified organisationally because, although it's not democratic in a proper sense, Islam doesn't have the sort of organised hierarchy characteristic of Christianity: the mullahs tend to get appointed by the faithful in the area around a mosque.

But even ideologically Iranian Islam is not a unified force. There flourished in the 1960s a modernist, reformist trend within Islam. An example is the writings of Sharriati, who was tortured by SAVAK and



The Ayatollah Khomeini

died in London in 1975. He's probably the most widely read author in Iran. He argues that Islam must come to terms with science, social change etc and while he may justify this with quotations from the Koran there's clearly a wide gulf between the modernising Islam of Sharriati, which is popular among students, civil servants, people who've been educated abroad, and the traditionalist Islam of Khomeini.

This modernist trend in Islam provides not a cogent but at least a plausible ideological answer to the problems the now educated and semi-educated urban population are facing. It is one which does not deny the existence of these problems but which doesn't deny Islam either.

Undoubtedly, some of the policies represented by Khomeini and some of the themes articulated in the demonstrations are reactionary. He does not oppose land reform but Khomeini did oppose the 1967 Family Protection Act which was an inadequate progressive attempt to end unequal practice in marriage and divorce proceedings. He embitteredly opposed the fact that Muslim men could no longer divorce their wives simply by saying so three times.

Khomeini has also expressed a hostile attitude towards the Bahai religious minority, a sect which broke away from Islam in the 19th century and which is the object of what in my opinion is a kind of native Iranian anti-semitism.

Even Khomeini's support for the Palestinians is based, not on opposition to colonial oppression, but on a completely traditional Islamic chauvinist position, namely that the Palestinians are the victims of the Jews, who are the eternal enemies of Islam.

It would be surprising if Khomeini did not have these beliefs. But these are facts and it would be completely incorrect to gild them over. However, even Khomeini's main demands are not these reactionary ones but, as far as they go, perfectly correct political ones: the Shah must be removed, the Constitution must be restored, there must be democratic rights. He avoids a lot of questions, but even though he has banned his followers from collaborating with socialists and marxists, he's been very explicit in stating that all opposition groups, including socialist and communist ones, will be allowed to operate in the so-called Islamic republic.

**T**he second issue I want to raise is the relationship between the Shah and western, especially American, imperialism. In your book you argue that the Shah could not be seen as a mere puppet of the Americans. I notice that one reviewer, Tariq Ali in Socialist Challenge, argued that you had underestimated the Shah's dependence on Washington. Do you think that, in the light of what's happened, there's a basis for changing anything in your book?

I see no reason for changing my views on this subject. I analysed the historic dependence of the Shah on US imperialism and particularly his continued dependence in military matters which was growing because of the complexity of the equipment he was getting and Iran's new front-line role in espionage against the Soviet Union.

At the same time I argued that the Shah did display a degree of independence of the Americans, particularly on the economic front eg. over the price of oil, through OPEC, which is why in 1974 and 1975 sections of the American state denounced him in very round terms.



All this talk about puppets and so on, which is the conventional way of analysing regimes like the Shah's in the third world, especially by the left in these countries, shows the continued hold of nationalist ideas. What these people don't want to admit is the fact that there is an **indigenous ruling class** in countries like Iran, which pursues its own interests and which collaborates with the United State for its own reasons: this alliance may be a very unequal one but it's one that involves two partners.

The much more difficult intellectual, and, for that matter, political problem is to find out what at different stages (since it changes over time) is the relationship between indigenous class forces and imperialism.



**F**ollowing that up: how important a role are the Americans playing in propping up the Shah at the present time? Added to that: there's supposed to be an American task force on its way to the Gulf. How likely is some kind of outside intervention in Iran?

I think that the possibilities of direct intervention, in the sense of American troops going in to sustain a government, are very remote. Even if they used the pretext of getting western citizens out to use troops, this could only be a very short-term operation which would not solve anything.

Iran would become a battlefield and might well invite the presence of western troops only in the event of a global conflict, as it did in the two world wars. But unless the Soviet Union were to intervene in Iran, which is unlikely, we can rule that out at the present time.

# iran

There is no doubt that Iran is a vital country for US imperialism both for strategic and, to a lesser extent, economic reasons. The Americans have left no doubt at all that they consider the Shah's presence as absolutely essential to their strategy and that his departure would be a great loss. They've reinforced the Tehran embassy with a lot of CIA people, they've been sending in instructors and equipment to teach the army riot control and they have been consulting with the Shah and the top military on a day-to-day basis.

However, the Americans, in a way that enrages them, have been able to do very little to affect the situation at least in the short run. They did not foresee what was coming and they had no way of gauging the situation once it developed. The CIA and the State Department had in the past a stupid self-denying ordinance which was to have no contact with Iranian political forces except through SAVAK, the secret police. Only since the beginning of this year have they begun serious discussions with the National Front.

**T**he third issue I want to take up is the role of the Iranian working class. You write that the 'form and timing' of the emergence of an independent workers' movement in Iran is 'one of the most, if not the most intriguing questions in Iran's future.' The last six months have seen in Iran one of the biggest mass strike movements anywhere in the world for some time. What is your assessment of this movement?

There existed quite a strong workers' movement in Iran in the 1940s; at that time it was much smaller than it is today, and it was under the leadership of the orthodox pro-Moscow Communist Party (the Tudeh Party). So far as one knows, the organisations of that period were smashed after the 1953 coup and although there were strikes between 1953 and the early 1970s they were very few and fragmented.

Between 1973 and 1978 there was a gradual increase in the incidence of strikes. They seem to have been predominantly about economic demands—for higher wages in the face of galloping inflation. Moreover, as is inevitable under such a very repressive system of dictatorship, there seem to have been no proper workers' organisations either local or national and no links between the workers involved in these strikes and other political forces.

What we've seen in the protest movement of 1977-78 is, in a sentence, the anger of the

urban poor. But the concept 'urban poor' denotes more than one class. It denotes part of the working class, but not the well-paid workers, who are relatively privileged by the regime; a large number of people who are, for want of better words, lumpen proletarians or 'marginals': semi-employed people; and also perhaps the large number of impoverished secondary school graduates who haven't got into university but who are not properly employed either.

And yet while the causes of their anger are not just political but evidently material (as evidenced by the fact that the most common feature of the violent demonstrations is attacks on banks), the protests in 1977 and up to the imposition of martial law in September 1978 were not at the work-place. There were, so far as I know, virtually no strikes before September 1978 around political demands.

The strike movement which assumed such enormous proportions in the latter part of 1978 began after the imposition of martial law. It's almost as if the protest movement, having been forced off the streets by martial law, took a subterranean form, what people would have normally considered a second-







best route: protest at the work-place.

Yet this movement has been extremely successful. We've seen strikes throughout the civil service (about 800,000 people) which have been temporarily bought off with enormous wage increases: political strikes throughout middle-class areas, journalists, university professors, students and so on; strikes in factories, some of which have been bought off with wage increases.

But the most spectacular strike of all has obviously been the strike in the southern oilfields of Khuzistan, where 35,000 workers in the oil-producing areas and oil refineries have gone out in support of clearly political demands: the Shah must go, ending of martial law, dissolution of SAVAK and so on.

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Thus is probably, as you indicated, the most dramatic political strike in human history. It's not just that they've resisted enormous pressure to go back, and have refused enormous wage increases (and they were relatively, even though the oil workers are only 0.5 per cent of the workforce, well-paid to begin with). It's more the fact that their strike has throttled the state by cutting off the energy supplies and the oil revenues on which it depends.

The indications are that there wasn't any prior political or trade-union organisation in the oilfields. The obvious analogy is with the mining communities in a country like Britain. That is, it is a question of a relatively small community of people who live in one-industry towns and villages and hold together tightly. The level of political sophistication there is very striking. I would

suspect that some of the militants from the 1940s and the 1950s have emerged from the undergrowth and are playing a role although the reports also indicate that the local mullahs are also playing a leading role in the strike movement.

What happens now is a very open question. The main demands of the protest movement are still largely liberal constitutional ones, although the National Front are now very specific in calling for the right to form free trade unions and the dissolution of the state unions. Even though the majority of the people on the streets are working-class and although the working class will have to its credit the overthrow of the Shah, if he goes, through the oil strike, the overall political character of the protest movement is not as yet a proletarian one.

Nevertheless the Iranian working class has shown its power. If a political organisation can arise with substantial links with the workers, they will decisively alter the character of the movement.

**Y**our judgement of existing opposition forces—the National Front, the Tudeh Party, the guerillas—is fairly harsh. Would you like to say something about the different groups?

It's very difficult to form a precise judgement of the opposition in Iran for the obvious reason that, as in Spain, Greece and Portugal, there's been a long period of dictatorship and it will take a while for the organisational strength, real programme, popular following etc of political forces to emerge.

All three of the main political groups are very marked by their own past. The

National Front was never an organisation but a coalition of parliamentary deputies which has shifted over the years. For example, Medhi Bazargan's Iran Liberation Movement—the political group closest to Khomeini—was part of it in the 1960s but has now left, partly in protest against the fact that the National Front now admits a social-democratic grouping.

The Tudeh Party must have some following among an older generation and among some students educated abroad who have returned. But it is very marked by the defeats it suffered in the 1940s and 1950s and by its subservience to the Soviet Union, the main cause of these defeats.

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The guerillas have shown the most heroism. They were the only group who tried to demonstrate the weakness of the state. But they pursued a militarist strategy which did not simply embody the mistakes of similar groups in Latin America. They suffered from the added fact that, while many of the latter groups, for example the Tupamaros in Uruguay and the Monteneros in Argentina, at least had some links to a mass movement, the guerillas in Iran had no such links. While they may have gained some kind of popular reputation, they have yet to prove themselves as serious political organisations.

**W**hat do you think are the chances that the present manoeuvres to produce a new cabinet under Bakhtiar, involving the Shah going abroad, a regency council being set up and so on, will succeed in defusing the mass movement and thus restabilise the situation?

It's quite possible that the Shah will go. But he won't go easily. He will fight in every way he can to remain in power. The concessions he has made so far are of a cosmetic character.

I think that if the Shah does not succeed in splitting his opponents by what we might call a relatively concessionary solution through somebody like Bakhtiar then he will play one last hand: very bloody repression. I don't believe that he will leave without trying that solution and, if he does, the outcome is uncertain, because the amount of terror these people are prepared to unleash is very large—much larger than they have in fact done so far.

**T**he problem with the Shah's last resort—very large-scale repression—is that it seems

*uncertain that he and the top military could carry all the rank and file of the army with them. Already there have been a number of incidents in which soldiers have shot their officers, refused to fire on demonstrators and so on.*

Even if it was politically anaesthetised before these events the army must be becoming politicised. Because of their similar social origins the lower ranks must share some sympathy with the demonstrators, while the officers must be politicised in the sense of being for and against the Shah, for and against different senior officers and so on. We don't know much about this, although there seems to be a faction in the army led by generals Oveissi and Garapaghi which is critical of the Shah for making too many concessions.

Unfortunately the fact that there has been a number of mutinies is not in itself decisive. An armed force of 410,000 can tolerate a high level of dissidence and disaffection, provided its core group, the 90,000 professional servicemen, remain relatively united, and provided those soldiers who leave do so in a fragmented, individual way and don't constitute a counter-force to the army.

I haven't yet seen any evidence that the Iranian army is splitting in such a way as totally to demobilise it or that the deserters are constituting an alternative political force.

Secondly, one of the obvious factors leading to disaffection in the army, as in Russia in the first world war or Ethiopia in the 1970s, is bad pay and bad conditions. Now, while the pay of the lower ranks of the Iranian army is quite low the living conditions are comparatively good for a lot of them.

Thirdly, the Shah is also using in the towns troops of a particularly brutal kind drawn from non-Persian minorities—Arabs, Kurds, Turks—who have no political contact with the population because they don't even have linguistic contact.

Moreover, they are predominantly peasants from the countryside who may not be so revolted by the violence they are administering.

Finally, the lesson of nearly all capitalist dictatorships is that the army, which is the core of the regime, has disintegrated as a repressive force through defeat in foreign war as in the second world war and to take the most recent cases, the Portuguese in Africa, and the Greeks in Cyprus. Of course, there are exceptions, but in general it's the humiliation of military defeat which discredits the army in the eyes of the population and in their own eyes. That is not likely to happen in Iran.

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So I would be very cautious about laying too much hope on the disintegration of the armed forces. Even if they encounter greater difficulties, as they must (people in the demonstration know soldiers and vice versa, soldiers' relatives must have been killed, etc), it may be some time before they disintegrate as a repressive force. If you have a desperate regime, whether it's the Shah or a general in power, then they're likely to use the army even if it is weakened and on the defensive.

**I**n conclusion, in the final section of your book you say that the possibility of a transition from the present dictatorial regime to socialism is a real one, but that it's likely to involve quite a difficult and long drawn-out process. You're against any facile optimism on the part of the opponents of the Shah. What do you think are the chances of the present mass upsurge in Iran developing towards socialist revolution?

The mass movement in Iran is very widespread, both in terms of numbers—two million people on individual demonstrations—and in terms of its class character. It embraces, as we have seen, the urban poor, but also the upper sections of the proletariat who have benefited from the regime; the sections of the petty bourgeoisie who suffered under the regime—the small traders—as well as those sections who did quite well—the lower civil service; the middle class, who benefited obviously very considerably.

The broad character of the movement is a strength, but it's also a limitation because if the Shah goes class questions are going to be taken up and are going to divide the movement.

At this point the Iranian bourgeoisie is going to come forward and find their voice in a way in which they haven't under the

Shah. In the euphoria following the departure of the Shah there is a substantial political danger that the bourgeoisie will be able to corral the liberalisation to their own benefit and impose a capitalist solution.

People within the National Front, even some who now profess some form of socialism, which is a novel departure for the National Front, have in the past been associated with bourgeois policies in Iran and may well be so again. Moreover, in the brief liberalisation in August 1978 prior to martial law a plethora of what were called political parties emerged. They're not political parties in the sense of substantive organisations but rather groups or cliques around particular individuals. Most profess some sort of right-wing capitalist politics associated with forms of nationalism, Pan-Iranianism, anti-communism, and so on.

In this situation it will be essential for any organisations pushing either towards a more left-wing bourgeois solution or towards a break with capitalism in Iran and a socialist regime to demonstrate in some way that it was the urban masses who were responsible for the overthrow of the Shah and not allow the movement to be captured by these bourgeois forces. And the trouble there is of course the absence of any identifiable substantive socialist forces in Iranian politics and the relative absence thereof in the past, with the exception of the Communist Party.

The Tudeh Party is denounced by nearly all other groups, left and right, and the slogan 'Death to the Central Committee' (ie of the Tudeh) can be heard in Tehran, and seen in London undergrounds, side by side with 'Death to the Shah'.

On the other hand, the left has an advantage in that it can offer a viable solution to the problems of the Iranian economy, which will continue to exist even if the Shah goes: the agrarian question, the deplorable condition of industry, Iran's growing dependence on imports, the desperate housing situation and so on. This solution, which would involve tough decisions affecting people's lives, would be based on the expropriation of industry and a new, more collective, organisation of agriculture.

The international context must also be taken into account. External reactionary forces (the USA, the Arab states) are going to throw all their weight behind the emergence of a new stable bourgeois regime in Iran. But what international support will the left get? The Soviet Union has shown in the past that it will subordinate support for the revolution in Iran to its broader strategic interests. I doubt very much whether the USSR would be willing to prejudice detente for what in its view might be rather spurious gains in Iran. Therefore, the Iranian revolutionary forces will have to a considerable extent to rely on themselves, until they gain power.

iran

Socialist Review

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### Politics and life

I was interested to read Colin Sparks' review of *Out of the Ghetto* and *Our Flag Stays Red* in December's *Socialist Review*. Like him I think that there are many useful comments and ideas in both books but he has underestimated Joe Jacobs's *Out of the Ghetto*.

Phil Piratin's book was written in 1948 for a clear political purpose: 'to restore the class-conscious fighting traditions of the labour movement'. Reading between the lines, we can take this to mean that the cosy uncritical attitude adopted by the Communist Party towards the Labour government during 1945-47 was no longer tenable.

The CP needed to emphasise its own history and traditions. Piratin's book was commissioned by the CP executive committee as part of this process.

It's really a recruiting pamphlet, but with a number of informative chapters on the methods employed by the Stepney Communists. It uses all the jargon of the time ('fascist lackeys', 'dollar socialists') and tries to state its political message as forcefully as possible. The book concentrates solely on broad political issues and lacks any feel of the teeming, lively East End community.

Joe Jacobs's book is an autobiography before anything else. Naturally since Jacobs was deeply involved in politics and felt the movement to be important, the book can be read in a similar way to Piratin's. But to see it just in that light, and to regret that 'it is easy to get lost in the welter of details of his personal life' is to miss much of the book's worth.

*Out of the Ghetto* conveys a sense of the East End community: impoverished, close-knit, but alive to new ideas, flourishing intellectually and artistically. Jacobs describes how this milieu pointed him in a socialist direction; he was swept into the Communist Party by a combination of the conditions in his trade (garment cutting) and the arguments of socialists heard on every street-corner and in every club in Stepney.

This personal side reveals much about the problems in being a working-class socialist: the dilemma that commitment to a disciplined, organised party with its own community and social life, often leads the worker to lose touch with the very source of his original political orientation. If someone is going out

to party meetings and activities (literally) every night, with party socials and outings for recreation, how do you stay part of the working-class community about you?

This must be familiar to many on the left today and it undelies much of what Jacobs writes. This is really 'the relationship between party and class' lived out by real people.

This tension is apparent both in Jacobs's party activities and in his relationship with his girlfriend and his family. *Out of the Ghetto* shows how capitalism affects every level of a person's life and deals with political issues at a different level to Piratin's pamphlet.

Jacobs's book, apart from its value as an interesting autobiography, is worth reading for its account of life in the East End before the war and for its insights into the problems of a politically-committed worker.

Piratin's book, despite a number of excellent chapters, seems to me riddled with misrepresentations and evasions. Read together, they do offer a crash course in socialist political method, both its strengths and weaknesses.

Paul Cunningham  
Norwich



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### Sparking no debate

Colin Sparks (*Socialist Review* 8) does not 'review' the material at hand, instead he censors it. To begin with his 'reviews' are placed under the constraining rubric 'Masses Against Mosley'. This is despite Piratin's book covering his period in the East End 1934—Second World War, and the wider period 1931—1939 of my own *Struggle Against Fascism & War*. I have yet to read Joe Jacobs and therefore cannot comment.

Finally he signs off asking for Piratin to be read through red spectacles. I sincerely hope however that readers will at all times avoid looking through the distorted and sectarian spectacles of Colin Sparks.

With only one selective quote referring to Cable Street I am denounced as having produced '... so many evasions, misrepresentations and occasional downright lies ...' as to prove that the political honesty of the Communist Party remains that of the era when it claimed Trotsky was a Gestapo agent.

Sparks fails to expose any of the 'downright lies'—an imputation which I totally reject and, incidentally find disingenuous in a supposedly learned journal. However, the most deplorable charge is to liken either my or 'the collective' honesty of the CP to that of the period of the Moscow trials.

In fact Sparks' approach is reminiscent of the most nauseating stalinist practice of claiming guilt by association. Sparks makes no reference to specific items of content and shows no preparedness to take up the many issues raised.

Instead he telescopes the whole 1930s struggle against fascism and for peace into the physical -v- political argument within the CP as it emerged around Cable Street in October 1936, his aim being it seems to satisfy a lust for sectarian vengeance and attack the CP.

The SWP is clearly incapable of taking a historical view of the struggles of the working class and its political formations in the 1930s. A whole decade of working class struggle has been reduced to a specific sectarian wrangle by Sparks.

I have, to date, received many letters taking me up on such matters as the struggle against fascism in the far east, the CP's line on the second world war, the nature of the Peoples' Convention 1941 and the Finnish-Soviet war 1939.

This often very sharp polemic is welcome and enriching, but there is no discussion to be had with Sparks or the SWP. Apparently you are right and we are liars. And there any real debate ends.

Mike Power  
London

Eds' note:

the title 'Masses Against Mosley' was put on by us, not by Colin Sparks.

POBox82

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### Real, realer, realest

The debate on science and socialism in *Socialist Review 8* posed a number of important issues which should be developed further. I'd like to comment on the one area of the debate in which Albury and Callinicos seem to be in agreement; that is, the notion of truth and reality expressed in their articles.

Both Albury and Callinicos believe that there is an objective reality, external to us, and that science, while never attaining Absolute Truth, can discover truths by formulating theories that are approximations of reality.

Thus, for Albury, 'Science... provides us with partial truths but not the truth. A finite amount of activity, which is all we will ever have, cannot reveal the infinite possibilities, the infinite aspects of reality'.

Similarly, Callinicos states that 'Marxism is a science . . . this doesn't mean that we claim that marxism represents the absolute truth. All theories are approximations to reality, but some are better approximations than others.'

While there are important differences between the two, they aren't fundamental ones, but are based on the degree to which they believe approximations of reality are possible. Put in another way, their dispute is over how relatively autonomous (objective) science is, with Callinicos arguing for a greater relative autonomy than Albury.

The conception of reality as some 'thing-in-itself' which is independent of us seems to be non-controversial and commonsensical. Yet as Gramsci points out, this common sense judgement is actually religious and idealistic in inasmuch as it removes human

social practice from the category of reality.

This would not be a significant issue were it not for the fact that Marx's **methodological** revolution is premised on breaking down the contemplative bourgeois opposition between the human mind and an independent external reality. Marx expressed this view clearly in the *Theses on Feuerbach* where, in the first thesis, he says that 'Man must prove the truth, that is, the reality and power, the this-sidedness of his thinking in practice.'

Gramsci, following in this tradition, discusses the question of an objective, external reality in his critique of Bukharin's book, *Historical Materialism: A System of Sociology*.

'The concept of "objective" in metaphysical materialism appears to mean an objectivity which exists even outside of man, but to assert that reality would exist even if man did not exist is either to state a metaphor or to fall into a form of mysticism. We know reality only in its relations with man, and just as man is an historical process of becoming, so also knowledge and reality are becoming, and objectivity is a becoming, etc.'

Thus, any marxist analysis of science must begin not only with the understanding that science and society interact, but that the very notions of reality, objectivity, and truth must be historicised. If we are to apply and enrich Marx's method **consistently** in all areas, we should first recognise that the 'truth' of marxism is not its 'approximation to reality'. Instead, marxism is true **insofar** as it enables us to both interpret and change the world in the course of human praxis.

Michael Slott  
U.S.A.

POBox82

### The tyranny of frameworks

I found the argument between Dave Albury and Alex Callinicos rather confusing as it seemed to me that they were both mixing up two levels of 'science'.

The key to unravelling the confusion I found at the end of Dave's piece: 'The scientific method, if such a thing exists at all, is not a process for arriving at universal truths, but a way of deepening the knowledge available within a particular framework for looking at the world'.

Surely the 'framework' is clearly connected with the ruling ideology of the society; while the detailed methods of observation, experimentation, etc may be less directly connected.

Being 'scientific' according to Alex involves 'a careful, detailed and scholarly approach to reality'. But surely he would not deny that the framework into which these details are fitted is largely a product of the social and economic relations of the time.

Scientific concepts such as the theory of evolution are themselves part of these frameworks and as such are not 'autonomous' as he suggests. Darwin's concepts were clearly influenced by the prevailing ideology of competition while his observation and collections of data fitted Alex's idea of the scientific method as a 'scholarly approach to reality.'

I agree that changes in the frameworks or paradigms in science do not come from 'passively adapting to the reality outside them'. Rather, there is a constantly changing dialectical relationship between theory and social practice. This relationship is extremely complex and I didn't feel that either writer really clarified it.

To put it in an oversimplified form: I would suggest that capitalist and patriarchal social relations are internalised as conceptual frameworks at a very deep level in everyone, including scientists.

These frameworks go beyond social values to the very way in which we perceive and structure the world. Relations involving the domination of the supposedly superior over the supposedly inferior lead not only to the separate and superior observer/scientists but also to an ordering of separate 'facts' in an abstract, hierarchical, competitive framework.

Socialist societies involving more equal and co-operative social relations need conceptual frameworks that do not separate either the observer from the observed or the 'facts' from each other. What is needed is a 'science of relations'.

The framework for such a science is a dialectical one. Such a framework has been a vital aspect of socialist theory from Marx and Engels onwards. However using a dialectical framework for approaching reality does not exclude the kind of 'science' that Alex talks about. Within a dialectical framework even empirical experimentation may be useful to 'fill in the details'. And knowledge that fitted other frameworks does not need to be discarded but rather used in different ways to answer different questions.

PS I like your magazine very much.

Jocelyn Chaplin  
London

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African Literature and Revolutionary Struggle

# Africa from the inside

Be honest now, have you ever read a novel or a play by an African set in Africa? Most likely not. You'd be lucky to even find a shop which could sell you one.

But for socialists, the literature of Africa is today a source of inspiration which should not be ignored. Within Africa there are writers whose works present important critiques of society and provide clear messages as to what needs to be done.

Such a writer is Ngugi wa Thiong'o, a Kenyan. Ngugi's work - mostly novels and stories - have been written in English. But a year or so ago, he wrote a play in his own language, Kikuyu. It was performed by an amateur company in a small town near Nairobi. The theme of the play is that land is being bought up by rich capitalists, while the poor are left to suffer. That the fruits of independence are being seized by a few rich Kenyans.

This issue is critical in a country still largely agricultural. Soon after the play started, it was banned by the local authority and Ngugi was arrested. Nearly a year later he has been released from detention but without charges made against him.

For a committed writer like Ngugi, it is significant that the Kenyan state arrested him when he wrote in a local language rather than English. Through a play, he was able to communicate with the local peasantry and urban workers in a way not possible by writing novels in English which would only be read by intellectuals.

Though this play is not available in English, Ngugi's other works are. Like many other writers in the 1950s and 1960s Ngugi started setting his novels against the background of British colonialism. Until the 1950s there were few books by Africans. Partly this was because of the total lack of educational facilities and partly because traditional African culture found other forms of expression, such as stories told verbally.

It was the struggle against colonialism and for liberation that centred in the novels that started to appear in the 1950s and 1960s. By 1950 the struggle for liberation was well under way, particularly in Ghana and in Kenya. By 1956 Ghana was independent, the first country to be liberated. Kenya was witnessing the aftermath of armed guerilla liberation struggle, Mau Mau as it was called.

In this period the predominant political movement was nationalism. With the growing political struggle came a cultural resurgence in Africa. Writers in Africa began to take on the task of addressing their own people, and writing novels and stories critical of colonialism, encouraging freedom and struggle.

The most outstanding book of this period is *God's Bits of Wood* by Sembene Ousmane. It is a novel with a clear message: that by collective struggle, workers can triumph over capital and racism.

For those who haven't read the book (it was available in Bookmarx Club), the story is set in French West Africa in 1947-48. It describes an imaginary account of the railway workers strike which took place to achieve the same benefits for black workers as were received by white workers.

The authorities put pressure on the strikers and their families to go back to work. Hardship to the point of starvation brings a new consciousness to the workers and their families - that they share a common destiny and must act together: 'And the men began to understand that if the times were bringing forth a new breed of men, they were also bringing forth a new breed of women.'

In *God's Bits of Wood* the inspiration for struggle is summed up in the words of one of the trade union leaders: 'It isn't those who are taken by force, put in chains and sold as slaves who are the real slaves; it is those who

will accept it, morally and physically.' Words as powerful to the class struggle as to the liberation struggle then taking place.

The nationalist movement led up to the achievement of independence in the colonies of Britain and France by the mid-1960s, — though even here there were exceptions, including the Portuguese colonies where the struggle continued for another ten years.

Liberation was a time of great hope for the future. Not only would the burdens of colonial slavery be lifted, but new opportunities seemed to be opened up in every field.

Many African nationalists had assumed a socialist rhetoric: freedom would bring equality of wealth, a classless society. Some equated this with the old social forms and argued for 'African socialism'.

In practice the nationalist movements quickly fell apart after independence in most countries. The coalitions of workers, peasants and intellectuals split into pieces; new alliances were formed. Rule by the party backed up by the army (or sometimes by the army alone) became common. The rapid creation of national bourgeoisies took place as black faces took over from the former white ones, a process summed up by Franz Fanon in the title of one of his books *Black Skin, White Masks*.

Disillusionment spread throughout much of Africa. Not amongst those who formed the new political and economic bourgeoisie, but amongst the mass of peasants and workers.

The main voice of this disillusion is Ngugi wa Thiong'o. His novel *A Grain of Wheat* spans the colonial and independence periods. It condemns the harshness of colonial oppression but also attacks the new regime in Kenya.

This theme runs through Ngugi's work: that the rewards of the liberation struggle have been seized by a small group while the majority of the people are neglected. As Gikonyo says in *A Grain of Wheat*: 'It is people like you who ought to have been the first to taste the fruits of independence.'



Ngugi wa Thiong'o

But now, whom do we see riding in long cars and changing them daily as if motor cars were clothes? It is those who did not take part in the movement, the same who ran to the shelter of schools and universities and administration.'

Ngugi's most recent novel (1977) *Petals of Blood* returned to this theme of disillusion with the continued appropriation of land by the rich new Kenyan bourgeoisie at the expense of the peasantry. This was followed by the play which led up to his arrest, again dealing with the same theme.

If Ngugi has tended to concentrate on the peasantry, another Kenyan writer sets his novels in the towns especially Nairobi. Meja Mwangi's novel *Kill Me Quick* is about two schools leavers who can't find jobs and end up turning to crime.

They live in Nairobi, a city of contrasting wealth and poverty like many of the African towns. They live by eating out of dustbins and their efforts to find work are always met by the words 'No Vacancy. Hakuna Kazi'. When they do get a job they are exploited ruthlessly on low wages but don't dare to protest. Life in the shanty town and involvement in crime bring a tragic disillusionment:

'He remembered how high-spirited the family had all been when he had first left school to go and work in the city. Their son and brother was going to work and earn money and . . . Years of hopelessness passed through his mind and he saw in them two youths loitering around the dustbins in the backstreets.'

For socialists outside Africa, novels such as these reveal the reality of capitalist development in Africa. They show the particular forms of human suffering imposed by the rich new bourgeoisie and its alliance with multi-national capital in the form of Lonrho, BAT, RTZ, Barclays Bank and so on. For socialists both in and out of Africa, these novels fit within a revolutionary culture which is just starting in Africa over the remnants of nationalism.

Note: you can get African novels, plays and poetry at most black bookshops, as well as many socialist bookshops. Some university bookshops also keep a selection.

Dave Hill

review

# THE INGREDIENT OF

# HUMANITY

by Alex Callinicos

*The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays*  
E.P. Thompson.  
Merlin £3.90

Reading this selection of essays by one of the most outstanding marxist writers in Britain today, I was struck by the continuity in Edward Thompson's thought.

Thompson resigned from the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1956 after the Russian invasion of Hungary. One reason for leaving the party was the persecution he and John Saville suffered at the hands of the leadership for producing an opposition bulletin, *The Reasoner*.

Thompson was rebelling against a 'marxism' which denied conscious human agency any part in making history. In the last issue of *The Reasoner*, he wrote: 'stalinism is socialist theory and practice which has lost the ingredient of humanity'.

In all his writings since that time, Thompson has sought to restore 'the ingredient of humanity' to marxism. So in *The Making of the English Working Class* he is writing in opposition to the stalinist history which sees the working class as the passive product of the workings of capitalism: 'the working class did not rise like the sun at an appointed time. It was present at its own making'.

Thompson focusses upon the formation of class consciousness. To quote from the preface to *The Making of the English Working Class*:

'Class happens when some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs. The class experience is largely

determined by the productive relations into which men are born - or enter involuntarily. Class consciousness is the way in which these experiences are handled in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value-systems, ideas and institutional forms. If the experience appears determined, class consciousness does not. We can see a logic in the responses of similar occupational groups undergoing similar experiences, but we cannot predicate any law'.

It is this theoretical preoccupation with class consciousness which informs Thompson's detailed and sensitive reconstruction of working-class experience during the industrial revolution: he is concerned to show how the English working class took conscious shape out of that experience.

Thompson's humanistic marxism, with its stress on socialism as the self-emancipation of the working class, also runs through this collection of essays. Written with the zest and skill of a great polemicist, they are aimed at different challenges to marxism so conceived.

Thompson's chief target is the 'marxism' popularised by the editors of the *New Left Review*. He helped to found the review in 1960, but, with other leading lights of the 'Old New Left' many of whom, like him, had left the CP in 1956, was kicked off the editorial board when Perry Anderson took over as editor in 1963.

One of the premisses on which *NLR* has operated since that time is that no native British marxist tradition of any significance exists. To make up the deficit Anderson has,

in the pages of the review and through its attached publishing house, New Left Books, resorted to the wholesale importation of 'western marxism'—the work of continental writers like Lukacs, Korsch, Gramsci, Benjamin, Horkheimer, Della Volpe, Marcuse, Lefebvre, Adorno, Sartre, Goldmann, Althusser, Colletti.

This approach could not fail to outrage Thompson. He felt himself part of an authentic British marxist tradition, stretching back as far as William Morris (to whom he devoted a fine study, recently republished) but involving, crucially, the Communist Party.

Thompson was one of a generation of intellectuals who, attracted to the Communist Party during the Popular Front period in the 1930s and 1940s, stuck to it during the Cold War, leaving (if at all) in 1956. This group included in particular a number of brilliant historians who have made an important contribution to marxist theory in this field—the names of Christopher Hill, Eric Hobsbawm and Rodney Hilton (apart, of course, from Thompson himself) spring to mind.

Moreover, as active members of the Communist Party, they sought to unite theory and practice, albeit in a distorted stalinist form. This sets them apart from 'western marxism', of which even Anderson recently admitted: 'the first and most

thinker Tom Nairn. As David Widgery put it, in this essay 'the Anderson-Nairn theses were dismantled, like an elaborate but obviously defective motor-mower'.

The same concerns pervade Thompson's long 'Open Letter to Leszek Kolakowski', first published in 1974. Here Thompson addresses another member of the generation of 1956. Kolakowski was one of the intellectual leaders of the anti-stalinist opposition during the Polish Spring of 1956. However, since his expulsion from Poland in 1968 Kolakowski has expressed his disillusionment with marxism more and more openly.

Thompson used the occasion to reassert the validity of the democratic, libertarian communism for which Kolakowski and he had fought in 1956. He does so in opposition to the elitist marxism of those, like Anderson, who have drunk of 'the Cartesian well' of Sartre and Althusser.

In 'The Poverty of Theory', published here for the first time and much the longest essay in the book, Thompson dives into the Cartesian well itself. He does not like what he finds.

The essay is devoted to a highly critical examination of the ideas of Louis Althusser. Thompson describes Althusser's system as 'an orrery of errors' (an orrery is, according

tradition. He concludes: 'Libertarian communism, and the socialist and labour movement in general, can have no business with (Althusser's) theoretical practice except to expose it and drive it out'.

At first sight it is a bit puzzling that Thompson should devote so much space to yet another critique of Althusser. There have been so many: Thompson adds nothing of substance to what has been written on the subject by André Glucksmann, Jacques Ranciere, Norman Geras, Pierre Vilar, Perry Anderson and myself, although none matched Thompson's wit and polemical vigour.

A partial answer to this question lies in Thompson's references to the 'bourgeois lumpen-intelligentsia', 'those barrels of enclosed marxisms which stand, row upon row, in the corridors of polytechnics and universities'. In other words, Thompson's polemic is aimed less at Althusser than at his children—the myriads of academic marxists who, freed from the inhibitions of having to relate theory to practice by Althusser, produce and consume journals like *Economy and Society* and *Ideology and Consciousness* and follow that star of Barry Hines and Paul Hirst.

Readers of this Review will be aware that we share Thompson's reservations concerning this sort of 'marxism'. It is difficult to disagree when he writes: 'In the much-publicised 'revival of marxism' in Britain in the last two decades, a mountain of thought has not yet given birth to one political mouse'.

But what about Thompson's alternative 'libertarian communism'? The chief reference point is 1956. Again and again we come back to it; 'there are some of us who will man the stations of 1956 once again' (1965); 'can we still drink to the fulfilment of that moment of common aspiration: 1956?' (1974); 'my dues to 1956 have now been paid in full' (1978).

1968, which, as the year which marked the beginning of a new period of crisis for capitalism and the re-entry of the working class onto the stage of history after 30 years of apathy, provided the point of reference for another generation of revolutionaries, is dismissed in passing: 'May, 1968 was over in a matter of days... there has never been a generation of socialist intellectuals in the west with less experience of practical struggle'.

Thompson continues: 'there has been no experience of anti-Fascist struggle [really? What, I wonder, were we doing at Red Lion Square and Lewisham?], war and Resistance'. This passage gives us the key to Thompson's political universe: the second world war.

Elsewhere Thompson writes: 'British-Communists did... something more than is now remembered to assist in the defeat of Fascism between 1942-45'. Thompson joined the CP in 1942. Everything he says suggests that his formative political experience was participation in the tremendous wave of radicalisation which swept Britain and indeed the whole of Europe in the latter part of the second world war.

In a recent article in *New Statesman*

PEOPLE MAKE HISTORY - BUT NOT IN THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THEIR OWN CHOOSING...



from 'Lenin for Beginners'

fundamental of its characteristics has been the structural divorce of this marxism from political practice'.

In a superb essay, first published in 1965 and reprinted here, 'The Peculiarities of the English', Thompson entered the ring to defend the tradition to which he belonged by examining the interpretation of English history developed by Anderson and his co-

to *Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary*, a 'clockwork model of the solar system': the essay comes complete with diagrams showing how Althusser's complicated system of concepts works (or doesn't work).

Thompson argues at great length that Althusser, by denying the contribution of experience to theory, of history to marxism, of self-activity to socialism, removes himself from all that is valuable in the marxist

# THE INGREDIENT OF HUMANITY

Thompson denounces 'the foul historical con' through which the war has become the property of 'an authorisation right which is now, supposedly, the proper inheritor and guardian of the present nation's interests':

'My memories of that war are very different. I recall a resolute and ingenious civilian army, increasingly hostile to the conventional military virtues, which became—far more than any of my younger friends will begin to credit—an anti-fascist and consciously anti-imperialist army. Its members voted Labour in 1945: knowing why, as did the civilian workers at home. Many were infused with socialist ideas and expectations wildly in advance of the tepid rhetoric of today's Labour leaders'.

It would ill become anyone—especially someone born five years after the end of the second world war—to sneer at the hopes of that generation. The radicalisation at the end of the war was real: its signs were many—notably Labour's massive election victory, the widespread mutinies in the British and American armed forces, the Communist-led Resistance movements in France, Italy, Greece and Yugoslavia, the biggest strike-wave in US history.

But those hopes were betrayed. Hitler was destroyed—to the profit of western monopoly capitalism and eastern state capitalism. 1945 proved in Britain to mean the road, not to socialism, but to the grey social-democratic state of today.

What is more, the Communist Party of Great Britain, through its class collaborationist policies, played its part in that great betrayal.

The CP opposed the war until Hitler invaded the USSR in 1941, after which time the Party became the most enthusiastic supporter of the war, opposing strikes and colonial revolts as disruptions of the war effort. Douglas Hyde, at the time a journalist at the *Daily Worker*, later to abandon Communism for Catholicism, describes a demonstration in St Pancras in 1941, when Communists carried pictures of Churchill and Stalin and bands played 'God Save the King' and the 'Internationale'. So caught up in this cosy all-class alliance was the CP that in 1945 it called for the continuation of the Labour-Tory coalition government into peace-time!

To my knowledge, in none of his writings does Thompson discuss the role of the CP in defusing the war-time movement, let alone the wider role of stalinism in stemming the revolutionary tide throughout western Europe. He attributes, in a recent interview, the defeat of this 'lost moment of history' merely to the cold war and 'Morrisonian statist labourism'.

Moreover, he does not examine the peculiar character of this wartime radicalism. It was a radicalism powerfully infused with patriotism. Anti-fascism merged with nationalism: a mood exploited by the CP, which reached the peak of its membership and influence in those years. Even George Orwell, who remained highly sceptical of the patriotic cant of the time, offered, in *The Lion and the Unicorn*, a programme in which nationalism and socialism were intertwined.

It was in the 1940s that the Communist Parties, busy propping up the shaky capitalist order in Europe, brought into the foreground of their strategy the concept of different national roads to socialism based on collaboration, with 'patriotic', 'progressive', sections of the capitalist class. The CPGB's programme of national reform, *The British Road to Socialism*, although only adopted in 1951, was a logical continuation of the policies of the war-time years.

The concept of internationalism, which was such a powerful element in the wave of radicalisation during the first world war, culminating in the foundation of the Third International, proved much weaker in the 1940s (although not dead—it was an element in the post-war mutinies in India, Aden and Egypt). It survived, in the perverted stalinist form of subordination to Moscow, or, at best, the ideal defended by Thompson and Saville in *The Reasoner* of Communist Parties independently pursuing their own roads to socialism. The latter ideal is, of course, an important component of the ideology of eurocommunism.

Thompson's failure to examine critically the nationalist strand in the radicalism of the war years is a major weakness. He tends to treat British marxism as a largely self-sufficient tradition to which continental marxism has very little to offer, certainly as concerns the problem which has provided the focus for Thompson's work as a theorist and a historian: 'the intersection of determination and self-activity...—the experience of determination, and the 'handling' of this in conscious ways'.

The crux of this problem, according to Thompson, lies in the different value-systems which people construct to make sense of their experience. Althusser and Co have nothing useful to say on this question, since they see questions of value as mere bourgeois morality. The same is, Thompson claims, largely true of Marx: in this respect *Capital* is at one with the political economy it criticised: 'political economy has terms for use-value, for exchange-value, for monetary value, and for surplus-value, but not for normative value. It has no terms for other areas of consciousness'.

Thompson's attempt to restore 'a missing

term: 'human experience' to *Capital* involves developing a moral dimension to marxism ignored by its founders. Hence William Morris's importance for Thompson, who sees him as a profoundly original thinker precisely because of his concern for moral questions.

It seems to me that Thompson misrepresents Marx here. Marx did not ignore moral questions: he broke with a socialist tradition saturated with morality, stuffed full of utopian visions. The pre-marxian socialists developed a moral critique of capitalism as a perversion of human nature and sought to construct models of society in which human nature would be fully realised. In this respect, Fourier (despite being a 'Cartesian' Frenchman) was a much more profound and original utopian thinker than Morris.

Marx broke with utopian socialism because it provided no analysis of the nature of capitalism as a form of class society and therefore no guidelines for replacing it with communism. Marx's greatness lies in the fact that he filled this gaping hole in socialist theory.

Thompson would not, of course, deny this—indeed, he is a masterly practitioner of marxist concepts when it comes to writing history. But, in 'The Poverty of Theory' he seems blind to the importance of Marx's discovery of the laws of motion of capitalism, content to dismiss this discovery as an 'anti-political economy' sharing the same assumptions as Ricardo.

Yet unless we concern ourselves with the problem of understanding capitalism as a system the meaning of the experience and the struggles which Thompson records does not emerge clearly. Marx, like Thompson, saw the self-emancipation of the working class as the heart of socialism. But, unlike Thompson, Marx saw that unless rooted in an analysis of capitalism and the tendencies within it which give birth to socialism, socialist politics is little more than moralism.

Moreover, there is a difficulty with moral categories that Thompson ignores—that they take the form of universal rules applicable to everyone and derived from human nature as such. The trouble is that, since Marx showed that there is no such thing as human nature, moral concepts tend to provide a smokescreen behind which lurk the values of bourgeois society: man in capitalist society is taken for the model of human nature in general.

In Thompson's case the danger is that his reinjection of morality into marxism will wash out the issue of class as the central question of marxist politics. There are plenty of 'marxist' academics around who claim that politics is nothing to do with class. Thompson would have nothing but contempt for them—but does not his endless moralising have the same effect?

The cause to which Thompson has eloquently attached himself to recently is the growth of the 'secret state': in his own words, 'under the cover of a labourist rhetoric a dominative and manipulative and, in many cases, secret, state formation has been developing which effectively commands



great areas of our lives and which is beyond democratic control'.

Thompson has written articles in *New Society* and the *New Statesman* denouncing this secret state and Labour's complicity, superb pieces of political pamphleteering, written with a pen dipped in vitriol.

But even this fight is taken up within a pessimistic perspective in which 'EH Carr is completely correct to say that this country has been moving to the right since 1950' and the next 30 years will be dominated by the struggle against the secret state.

These are strong claims. They should be approached with care. They imply that the epic of rising working-class struggle in the late 1960s and early 1970s, culminating in the fall of the Heath government, was a mere episode in the expansion of the secret state.

E H Carr's claim that Britain has been moving right for the last 30 years reflects his general scepticism about revolutionary prospects in the west. He told *New Left Review* recently: 'in the west today, the proletariat . . . is not a revolutionary, (but is) perhaps even a counter-revolutionary, force'.

Carr is entitled to his opinion. But is it one that Thompson, who, like us, sees socialism as the self-emancipation of the working class, can share?

Thompson's preoccupation with the secret state suffers also from a lack of political realism. Read the journals of the ruling class—the *Economist*, the *Financial Times*, (should it ever reappear) the *Times*. What is it that worries them? Duncan Campbell? With all respect, surely not.

The central issue of bourgeois politics in Britain today is, as it has been for at least the last ten years, how to yoke the powerful

organisations workers have built up since 1940 to the priorities of British capital. This goal will be achieved less by the insidious undermining of democratic rights (although this will, no doubt, play a part) than by enlisting the leaders of workers' organisations to the cause of the 'national interest'.

This issue should be our chief concern as well. How to deal with the ruling-class attacks? How to strengthen the forces committed to class struggle rather than class collaboration within the labour movement? How to combat the spread of the right wing within the trade unions?

Yet Thompson has not one word to contribute on **these** questions. Why?

The causes to which Thompson has lent his name today (opposition to the secret state, solidarity with the persecuted East German socialist Rudolf Bahro) are those which fit as comfortably the language of liberalism as that of marxism. They engage more questions of universal human rights than the problems of political strategy to which the great marxists devoted themselves.

This is not to dismiss the struggle for democratic rights as an irrelevance, but to simply say that it is **secondary** compared to the objective of marxist politics: the conquest of power by the working class.

This statement will invite Thompson's wrath, encourage him to dismiss me as one of those 'sectaries' he despises.

And yet: his marxism seems trapped within political horizons little different from those of the English Jacobins and the radical pamphleteers whose heroic battles with the authorities he records in *The Making of the English Working Class*. This is an

honourable tradition, a tradition of anti-authoritarianism and anti-imperialism. But it is a **limited** one, in which moral protest is the dominant note.

Marxism is less generous. The commitment to the self-emancipation of the working class is married within it to the careful study of the laws of motion of capitalism and to the cold calculations of revolutionary strategy and tactics. This is the heritage of Marx and Lenin. It is no less morally powerful for being geared to the struggle for power which is the only road to human emancipation.

I suspect there is also in Thompson's marxism a residue of the left nationalism of the 1940s—a nationalism which rejected fascism and imperialism (even though the latter exploited it) but which blurred the sharp divisions of class into a broader people's front. To an extent he is still a prisoner of stalinist categories—of the consequence, the strategy of different national roads to socialism.

Thompson's writings are a corrective to the fantasies of those are a corrective to the fantasies of those (and there are plenty of them around—see the recent article on 'marxism and the British Labour Movement' in *Socialist Challenge*) who believe that marxist theory only takes the form of translations from the French or the Italian published by New Left Books.

The danger, though, is that Thompson's example will lead others, less gifted than he into a complacent parochialism as arid as *NLR's* spurious cosmopolitanism. The fact that Thompson has largely avoided this trap is a tribute to his greatness, not the soundness of his method. Read these essays carefully.

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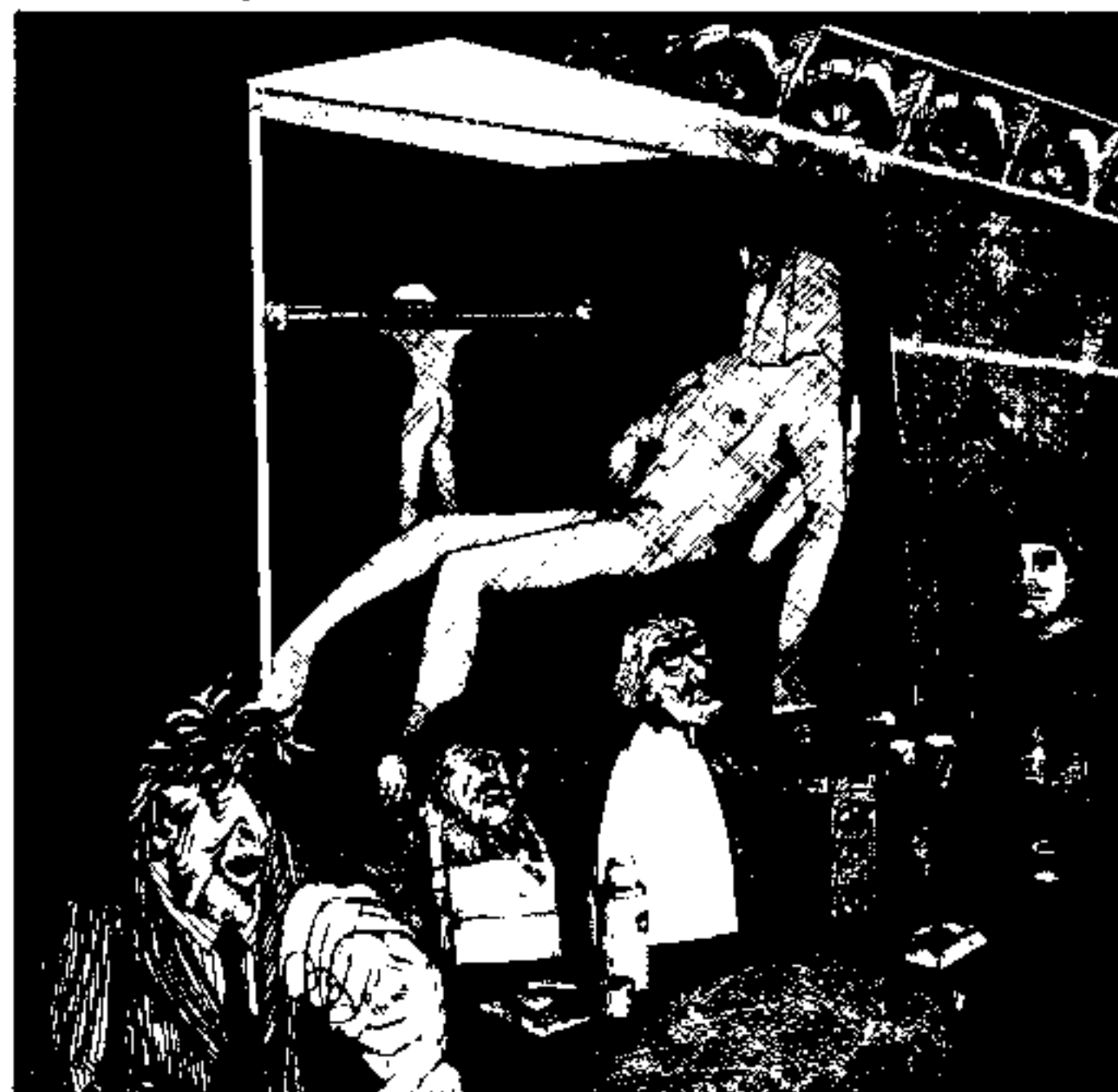
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# Reviews

## Films

### Sweet & sticky feminism

#### One sings, the other doesn't

If you're expecting a feminist film, I'm afraid you're in for a bit of a disappointment. Its theme is one that has become increasingly popular lately the friendship between two women, but it's about as realistic as a Martini advert.

It starts off in some picturesquely sordid French slum, when Pauline is 17

Suzanne is 22. Suzanne is pregnant, already has two kids and desperately needs an abortion. But she had her lover (a photographer who specialises, believe it or not, in sad women) can't afford to pay for one.

Pauline comes to the rescue, finds the money, looks after the kids while Suzanne is in Amsterdam, and poses nude for



Agnes Varda

the photographer. However, when Suzanne returns, her lover in a fit of melancholy hangs himself in his studio, and she is forced to go back to her peasant parents with her children. The film then follows the lives of the two women, the postcards they send each other over the years, and their eventual reunion.

To me one of the most objectionable things about this film is the way in which suffering is romanticised. No amount of feminist clichés (nor the obligatory quote from Simone de Beauvoir) can cover up for its over-dramatic glossiness.

The relative ease with which Suzanne manages to rescue herself from peasant poverty to become a smart secretary in a health centre in the South of France is typical of its triteness.

Pauline, in the meantime has changed her name to Pomme (apple). After a brief unsuccessful marriage and foray out to Iran, she has joined a group of women signers.

Now she dashes round the French countryside singing jolly songs of sisterhood and the joys of pregnancy to bemused peasants: 'Oh how good to be a bubble, how good to be a balloon!' etc., (On second thoughts, maybe it's not Martini so much as Nimble?)

There are some good scenes: the abortion clinic in Amsterdam, the harshness of peasant life, but these only highlight the ridiculousness of much of the rest of it.

It degenerates particularly towards the ends, with yards of lyrical footage of Pomme drifting around in a flowing caftan, sunlight in her hair, and Suzanne cosily ensconced in the arms of some trendy doctor.

Of course it is a **hundred** times better than a film like *Convoy* (which must surely be within spitting distance of the Trotter of the year Award) but its 'feminism' is shaky and realism is not its strong point. Sweet and Sticky.

Like Martini.  
Susie Murray

## Reform Register

**The Socialist Register 1978**  
 Edited by Ralph Miliband and John Saville  
 Merlin £10.00.

*Socialist Register* is poor stuff this year, I'm afraid. Usually the editors manage to assemble a selection of articles which in different ways interest or provoke. Not so this time.

Those of a sectarian turn of mind may enjoy Martin Shaw's critique of the Socialist Workers Party. Anyone interested in this critique will find a reply by Duncan Hallas elsewhere in this review.

What else is there? Tariq Ali, Ralph Milliband and George Ross add to the seemingly endless stream of articles etc. on Eurocommunism: anyone interested in the first two's political opinions will find them re-iterated yet again here.

Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer produce a critique of the revisionist 'marxists' Barry Hindess and Paul Hirst which achieved the apparently impossible feat of making me sympathise with Hindess and Hirst so preciously written, dogmatically argued and muddle-headed is their critics' piece. (Corrigan and Sayer's references are mainly to their own books and articles—most as yet unpublished, thankfully, although we are promised a work entitled *For Mao* (!) this year).

The politics of the *Register*, its admiration for the reform communism of the eastern Europe which challenges stalinism by preaching the virtues of parliamentary democracy and market socialism, is best represented by the first four articles:

One on Rudolph Bahro, one by him, a review of dissent in eastern Europe by Tamara Deutscher and a brief study of Nikolai Bukharin by Ken Coates, who lends his name to the international campaign for Bukharin's rehabilitation by Moscow.

Now, to start with the last piece: it's not that I am against rehabilitating Bukharin, a great marxist economist who died shamefully at Stalin's hands, but why make a special case of him? I can think of worthier candidates than the theoretician of socialism in one country and

intellectual architect of the defeat of the second Chinese revolution, (1925-7), who remained implicated in the stalinist regime to the end.

How about Trotsky, a figure whose anti-stalinist record is unstained? But perhaps Trotsky's name carries too many unpleasant 'sectarian' associations (the editors and contributors of *Socialist Register* are all, of course, against sectarianism).

How about the inmates of Kengir special camp in the Soviet Union who revolted and held the camp for 40 days in 1954, until they were crushed with tanks? Or the workers of Novocherkassk in the Ukraine, hundreds of whom were mown down with dum-dum bullets on 2 June 1962 for going on strike against lower piece rates and higher food prices?

The answer, of course, is that *Socialist Register* has always been more interested in the men at the top—the enlightened, 'democratic' wing of the bureaucracy in the east—than the people with the power to achieve genuine socialist democracy. The 22 pages of Deutscher's discussion of dissent in the eastern bloc include one page on the Free

## New 'Marxism'

**The Alternative in Eastern Europe**

Rudolf Bahro  
 N.E.B. £9.50

Rudolf Bahro commands our attention as someone who has courageously stood up against the bureaucratic heirs of Stalin. As you read this review he sits in an east German prison, serving an eight-year sentence, allegedly as 'West German spy', in reality for writing this book—an attempt to analyse eastern Europe critically from a socialist standpoint.

But it is not only Bahro's courage which has been greeted with enthusiasm in some quarters. So too has the analysis contained in *The Alternative*. Reviewing it in *The Guardian*, EP Thompson welcomed *The Alternative* as a major

Trade Union Association of the Soviet Working People.

Yet this, not Bahro's much trumpeted book *The Alternative*, was surely the event of the year in eastern Europe: the emergence of a group of Soviet workers, small, weak, confused, probably snuffed out at birth, but prepared to fight for workers' rights. We have not seen such a thing in the USSR since the Left Opposition was crushed 50 years ago: an augury perhaps of greater things to come.

There is only one piece in the *Register* that I can enthusiastically recommend. This is Colin Leys's article on the development of capitalism in Kenya, an apparently obscure subject. In fact, Leys uses his and others' research on the Kenyan social formation to throw light on an important issue too little explored by marxist economists (often because they didn't believe it could happen): industrialisation in the third world.

As countries like Brazil, South Korea and India become important industrial exporters, it is a question we need to examine urgently. Leys's article is a very interesting contribution to the debate on this question. But whether it is worth buying *Socialist Register* just for this piece is another matter. *Alex Callincios*

contribution to marxist theory, with conclusions as relevant to the west as to the east.

And in his book *From Stalinism to Eurocommunism* Ernest Mandel sees Bahro's work as 'the most important theoretical work to come out of the countries that have abolished capitalism since Leon Trotsky's *The Revolution Betrayed*'. He goes on to say that 'the marxist theoretical tradition is being reborn in east Germany'.

Yet *The Alternative*, far from heralding the rebirth of the marxist theoretical tradition, represents a serious revision of marxist theory. Bahro, starting from the fact that socialism does not exist in the USSR, develops a theory of revolution without the working class as the revolutionary subject and of the transition to socialism as a

peaceful process.

Bahro's courage demands our solidarity, but his socialism is of the utopian variety which preceded Marx and which denies the existence of the class struggle.

His stated aim is to proceed from an analysis of Russia to a theory of how to bring about authentic socialism in the eastern bloc.

Bahro takes the Russian revolution as his starting point. He argues that, regardless of the ideas and principles to which the Bolsheviks adhered, socialism was not on the agenda in 1917.

All that was possible was industrialisation, carried out along non-capitalist, historically progressive lines. Stalinism, therefore, was inevitable and necessary: Trotsky didn't have a chance because he did not fit the historic tasks of the day.

Yet Lenin and Trotsky knew perfectly well that socialism could not be built in Russia alone. They argued, however, that the working class, despite its relative weakness in size, was the only class capable of fulfilling the tasks of the revolution and abolishing Tsarism.

The ability of the Russian workers to retain state power depended on the spreading of the revolution to the advanced industrial nations—hence the effort put into the building of the Third International and Lenin and Trotsky's concern to 'export' the revolution. The failure of the revolution in the west led to the isolation of the workers' state, its subsequent demise and the restoration of capitalist relations of production in a new guise.

Bahro nowhere discusses the Bolsheviks' ideas. He simply argues that industrialisation is a prerequisite of socialism and that therefore, thanks to Stalin, socialism is now on the agenda in eastern Europe.

Thus the greatest inspiration to revolutionary socialist movements throughout the world is dismissed as a failure and its suffocation by Stalin accepted as historically necessary. Bahro's only criticism of Stalin is that he robbed Leninism of its 'humanist perspective' and made a virtue of necessity.

In the second part of *The Alternative* Bahro discusses the nature of the Soviet Union. He

dismisses the orthodox trotskyst analysis of Russia as a 'degenerated workers' state' (although Mandel claims the opposite), as well as the theory of state capitalism in Russia.

Bahro's alternative to these views is to deny that the Soviet Union is either socialist or capitalist. Rather, it is on the way to socialism.

He describes Russia as follows: 'all in all the Soviet state with the party as its kernel was not the representative of a working class overstretched by its own power, but the representative of a new exploiting class' (all translations are my own, from the German original - SMcG).

Bahro argues that the stalinist superstructure survives even though the material basis for socialism now clearly exist because, 'primarily', 'the criteria for accumulation for socialism (ie the Soviet state - SMcG) aren't determined by the society itself, but by the so-called competition with capitalism'.

Soviet planning is determined both in quantity and quality by western industry. He stresses the role of military expenditure in competition with NATO: 'The competition in the sphere of armaments is the real basis for the "economic" competition'.

Bahro goes on to point to the difficulty of competing with western capitalism without adopting its social forms of organisation. Indeed, he admits, not only did money have to be retained but the law of value has to be reintroduced!

At one point he says that the best description of the industrial managers is as "lieutenants of capital" in order to locate the social relationship between them and the workers and co-operative farmers'.

So: Bahro argues that the law of value operates in Russia; that the state and party function as representatives of an exploiting class; that the dynamic of the Soviet economy is determined by competition with the western capitalist states; that the relations between managers and workers can best be summed up by seeing the former as the 'lieutenants of capital'.

Why on earth does he not conclude that the USSR is capitalist, with the state performing the functions of capital?

The answer seems to lie in a highly formalistic approach to what the abolition of capitalism

entails: ie, because private property in the means of production no longer exists in Russia, therefore capitalism does not exist.

In other words, instead of locating the nature of capitalism in the relation of producers to the production process, Bahro argues that since Marx said that the socialist revolution involves the abolition of private property and that this has occurred in Russia but people are still not free, it follows that Marx was wrong.

Bahro thereby strips marxism of its most essential elements. His failure to understand capitalism as a set of social relations removes the struggle for socialism from the arena of the class struggle. The result is an utopian conception of social change.

Bahro argues that the working class is not the subject of history because workers cannot develop beyond trade union consciousness. The marxist conception of the party is, he claims, that of an intellectual elite which uses the working class for its own ends.

He believes that the process through which the workers' state created in 1917 degenerated into a bureaucratic apparatus alienated from the masses was an inevitable one, rather than one arising from a specific historical context in which the Russian working class, in any case a tiny minority of the population, disintegrated under the impact of civil war, economic collapse and isolation.

However, in conditions where the working class was a majority of the population and the new workers' state was built on workers' councils, within which different parties could compete for their ideas, there is no reason to believe that a stalinist regime would arise.

Having dispensed with the working class, Bahro turns to the problem of emancipation and to achieve it. He offers a Communist League comprising kindred spirits from all social groups and classes, whose task it is to win the hearts and minds of the masses, especially the youth, away from their subordination to existing society.

Through a process of public debate the state will somehow be brought under the control of society and the new communists will do all sorts of wonderful

things like abolish patriarchy and the division between intellectual and manual labour and introduce democratic control over all spheres of life.

Instead of taking his inspiration from the repeated struggles of the workers in eastern Europe against the existing social order, culminating in attempts to establish genuine workers' councils, Bahro takes his lead from a highly superficial view of what happened in Czechoslovakia in 1968 - the sort of view which sees only the the Action Programme of the Communist Party and forgets that the authors of this programme put an enormous amount of effort into trying to 'normalise' bureaucratic rule before, during and after Russian invasion.

By dispensing with the role of working class and the class struggle in the fight for human emancipation Bahro reduces the struggle for socialism to a

## Whose law?

### 'Sus' a Report on the Vagrancy Act, 1824

Clare Demuth

A Runnymede Trust Publication

£1 from 62 Chandos Place, London WC2N 4HG.

Readers of this review are almost certainly aware of the bitterness growing in our black communities due to the continued police practice of using the 'sus' charge. They are probably not so clear about either the history or the present application of this charge.

The charge of being a suspected person is made under section 4 of the Vagrancy Act 1824, an Act originally designed to control and penalise the country's 'wandering poor'. Arrests now occur under section 4 if you are observed acting in a suspicious manner on at least two separate occasions. These need only be minutes apart. Independent witnesses are not necessary for a successful conviction. The only 'evidence' required are the testimonies of two policemen. So much for civil liberties!

But that is not all. 'Sus' is a summary offence which means it has to be tried in a magistrates' court. There is no right to elect for a jury trial. So the only way an accused person

battle of ideas. No wonder his book has been taken up by the eurocommunists.

Characteristically, where a marxist analysis of society would start from the production of a material entity, surplus-value, Bahro begins with a mystical entity, 'surplus-consciousness' (which intellectuals have in excess, while workers use all theirs up).

It is a sad fact that Bahro's extensive work, far from being a weapon in the construction of a socialist opposition to state capitalism in Russia and eastern Europe, will only contribute to further confusion about the revolutionary tradition.

His rejection of the socialist content of the Russian revolution leads him to an alternative theory of socialism. Rosa Luxemburg pointed out that different roads to socialism have different ends. Those who follow Bahro will not find socialist revolution at the end.

Sheila McGregor

can be found 'not guilty' is if the magistrate decides the police are lying. Highly likely!

This report provides us with many interesting case histories of people accused of 'sus' and some useful research. In 1976 3,501 persons in England and Wales were proceeded against for 'sus'. 55 per cent of these



were in London, 12 per cent in Liverpool and 7 per cent in Manchester. Of the 2,112 people arrested in London 42 per cent were black, whereas blacks only make up 12 per cent of those arrested for all offences. Certain city police forces never use the Vagrancy Act. We are not surprised to find it is those cities with no black settlement.

This is too liberal: the charge is a clear form of intimidation designed to keep black youth out of certain areas and streets, particularly the West End. One young black from Brixton convicted of 'sus' was given the following conditions of bail:

- 1 Reside at his home address in Brixton
- 2 Not to enter the Underground
- 3 Not to go north of the river Thames.

The pamphlet's major failing is in not placing the police use of 'Sus' within a wider economic and political context. Black crimes so-called, particularly mugging and pickpocketing, have become convenient scapegoats for the state in a period of growing political, economic and racial conflict. There is massive youth unemployment especially amongst black kids. All this has produced a major 'crisis of legitimacy' for the State.

A recent book by Stuart Hall *Policing the Crisis* (Macmillan, 1978) is of great use in providing the wider framework this pamphlet lacks. He shows that attempts to control and contain the crisis have produced a more authoritarian, law and order society. A society that will increasingly attempt to use any means, including dragging up ancient laws (remember the conspiracy charges), to deny legal rights to trade unionists, blacks, etc.

This pamphlet has done an invaluable job in bringing together evidence and arguments. Its purpose for the Runnymede Trust is to gently push the corridors of power into a repeal of the Act. Socialists must take these arguments into their workplaces, trade unions, colleges, schools and pubs. They must strive to link up with black militants to build an effective mass campaign to kick this reactionary Act off the Statute Book. *Phil Lee.*

There are two kinds of 'sus'—trying car handles and trying to nick from pockets and handbags. On the first type of charge black and white youth stand equally accused. But for intent to pickpocket the accused are nearly always black! Are there no white pickpockets? Of course there are, but they are more liable to be accused, if caught, of theft or attempted theft. Here there are legal safeguards like independent witnesses, juries and such.

So why is this Act operated in such blatantly racist ways? Why is the British state so willing to throw out 'normal' legal safeguards for black youth?

The limited use of the charge by only certain police divisions—Notting Hill actually has a Vagrancy Squad—definitely shows that its racist use is a deliberate policy decision. Demuth argues that the charge is used as a general deterrent against black kids.

## And...

Some of the best new titles of 1979 are to be found in the Bookmarx Club choices, advertised elsewhere in this issue. Yvonne Kapp's exciting biography of *Eleanor Marx* is to be published in paperback by Virago (Volume I at £3.95, Volume II at £4.95). Writers and Readers are publishing the novel *Bisby 17* in hardback only but have provided a special

## Art attacks

**Art, An Enemy of the People**

Harvester, £3.50

**The Marxist Theory of Art**

D. Laing Harvester, £3.50

Given the degree of reverential awe which surrounds any discussion of 'art' even amongst the marxist left, it is impossible not to recommend a book with such a splendid title as *Art, an Enemy of the People*. Roger Taylor has written a short book which sets out to demolish the notion of some superior form of human activity called 'art'.

In the course of doing this, he also launches a frontal assault on some marxist positions. His book deserves to be widely read, even by those who disagree with its conclusions.

Having said that, it should be noted that, despite his expressed opposition to the complexity and convolution of 'scholarship' he has not written



For crying Art  
loud

a book which will be easy to read.

Nor does he convince. In the main, his book rehearses a number of familiar arguments and he sometimes displays such a startling lack of information as to cast doubt on his general argument. For example, in his discussion of marxist theories of art, either he has never heard of William Morris or he chooses deliberately to ignore his work on the grounds that it would prove embarrassing to his major argument.

In general, his approach is even handed, although it does display both a certain eclecticism and a bias towards 'modernist' theories which I find mistaken, but, unlike Taylor, these do not lead him to sins of omission. He would have written a better book if he had been allowed twice the amount of space, but no doubt the notorious economics of publishing conspired to render a slightly superficial treatment essential. *Colin Sparks*

paper back edition for the Bookmarx Club. Fred Halliday's *Iran* (Penguin £1.50) should get the widest possible circulation. Gunter Wallraff's subversive journalism will be widely enjoyed by those choosing *Wallraff: The Undesirable Journalist* (Pluto £2.50)

Penguin have just paperbacked one of the few decent books on agricultural workers and their lives, Howard Newby's *The Deferential Worker* (£4.50). Penguin have

also just released the rather self-indulgent but nonetheless interesting Donald Woods' story of *Biko* (£1.50). Such was the level of Woods' self-promotion when *Biko* was first published that an unsigned copy of the hardback is now considered to be as rare as an unsigned copy of Heath's *Sailing*.

Get your library to order *Rebels and their Causes: Essays in honour of A L Morton* which is published in hardback by Lawrence and Wishart at £7.50. *Alastair Hatchett*

# THE WAGES STRUGGLE: Fighting against the stream

A major debate is taking place on the left today concerning the direction of the class struggle in Britain both during the past few years and over a longer period.

One example is a recent exchange in the Communist Party journal *Marxism Today*. In its September issue the CP historian Eric Hobsbawm argued that 'the forward march of labour and the labour movement, which Marx predicted, appears to have come to a halt about 25 to 30 years ago, as a result of the increasingly sectional and economic character of trade-union militancy.

Ken Gill, general secretary of AUEW-TASS and one of the two CP members of the TUC general council, replied in December's *Marxism Today*: 'The fight back against the social contract has begun. The wage battles which are now growing will, through militancy, challenge contemporary capitalism'.

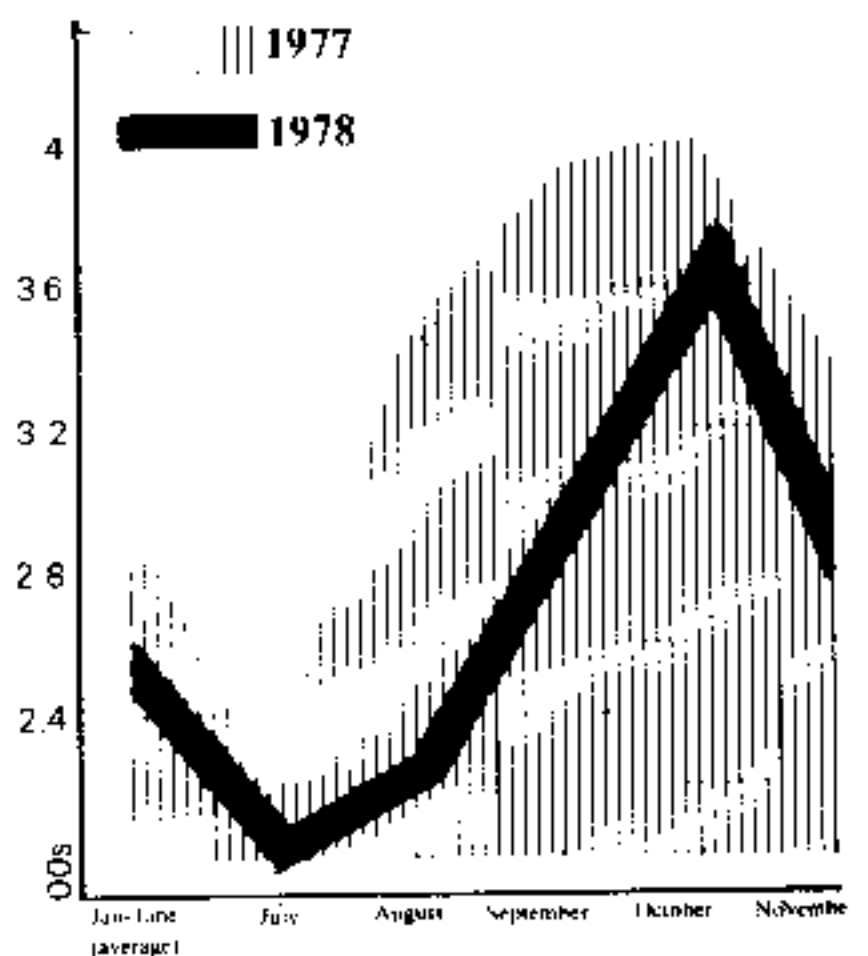
Others suggest sharing Hobsbawm's pessimistic view on the basis of a structural analysis of trade union organisation which stresses the spread of full-time shop stewards and the extension of joint management-shop stewards' consultation. Still others believe that workers are faced with an employers' offensive of such magnitude and ferocity that they must choose between socialism and the systematic destruction of their organisations.

My argument, in brief, is this. That despite the success of the social contract in 1975 and 1976 in transferring wealth away from the working class, the British ruling class and their state have still not solved a central problem for British capitalism: the strength of workplace-based trade union organisation.

This strength means that as the ruling class pursues its present offensive—for third and fourth years of wage restraint, and against jobs, working conditions and trade union organisation—it has been met with a rising wave of resistance.

However, their earlier success in 1975 and 1976 and the absence of a clear political alternative to right-wing Labour has had a major impact on the character of this resistance. From being a generalised class-wide resistance during the late 1960s and early 1970s, the fight-back today is once more largely fragmented and expressed in sectional terms.

**Table 1: No. of stoppages taking place during month referred to:**



(DEP Classification: All industries and services)

## The Scale of Battle

The battle of phase four began in August. The government had failed to reach a new agreement with the TUC and so in July unilaterally published its own guidelines for wages rises: no more than five per cent should be added to basic wages; anything more was to be 'self-financing' through more genuine productivity deals.

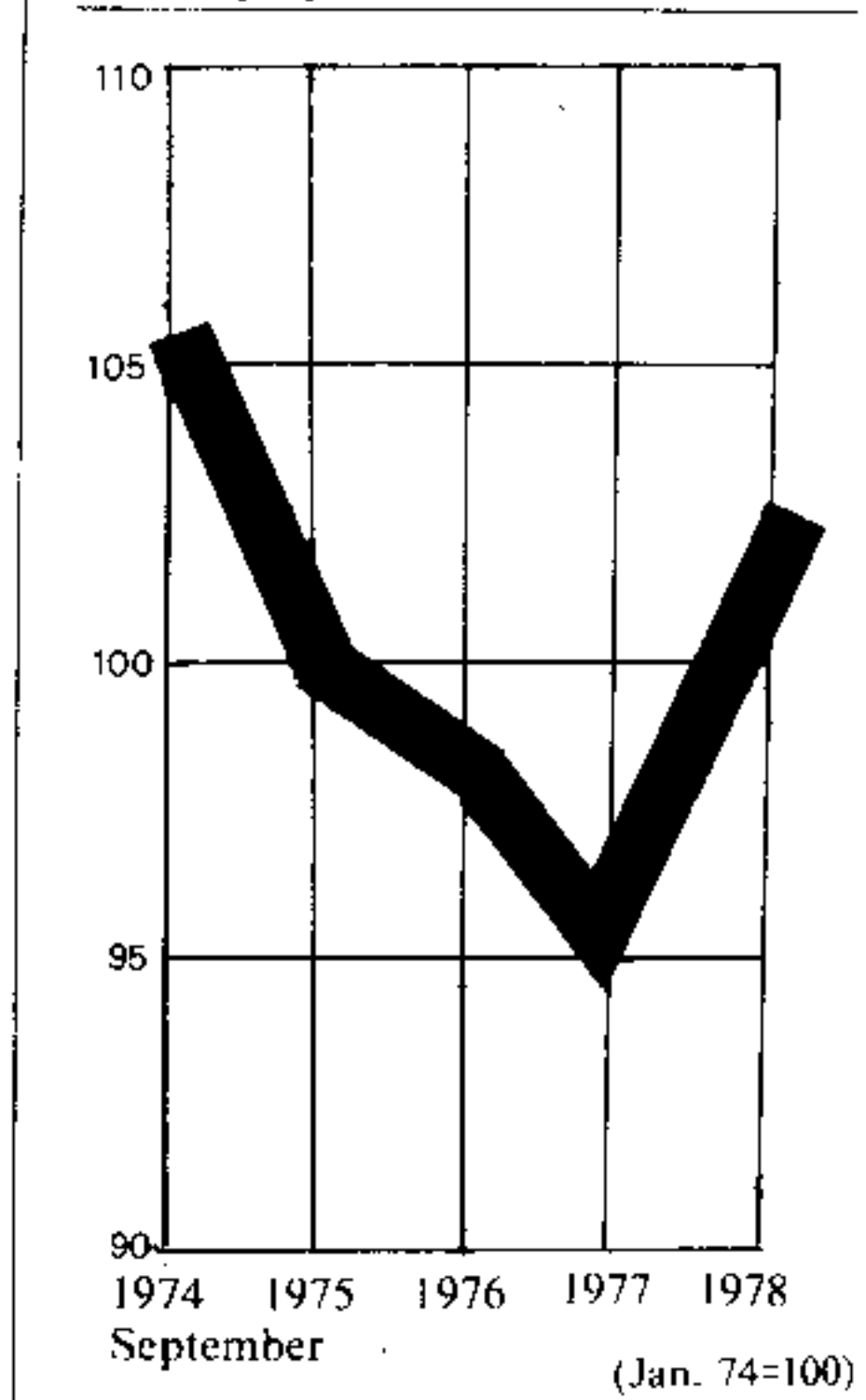
Despite the effect of the holiday season in England and Wales, the level of struggle rose immediately. Both the number of strikes in progress reported to the Department of Employment in August and the numbers of workers they involved rose decisively from their July low-point.

In September the trend was confirmed. That month saw the largest number of workers starting strikes since November 1977, when the firemen had begun their strike against phase three, and the highest monthly total of days lost through stoppages since January, when the firemen had returned to work. The Ford workers took over from where the FBU had left off. And this time round the TUC congress had not even allowed the Government the saving grace of a 12-month clause, as happened in 1977. The TUC was committed to 'free collective bargaining' without visible strings; the invisible ones, its commitment to 'responsible (to the Labour government) bargaining', however, remained intact.

The official Department of Employment figures show clearly in Tables 1 and 2 the way in which the temperature rose in the autumn of 1978: the number of strikes was actually down on the average of the first six months; but the number of strikers involved was much higher. There were slightly fewer, but somewhat larger and longer strikes.

Let's look more closely at these statistics. If you compare 1978 with 1977, not only are both autumn's 'warmer' (on the scale of strikes) than the earlier months of the year, but also 1977 was 'hotter' than 1978. And 1977 was, after all, the year in which despite

**Table 3. Index of real take-home pay**



**Table 4 Number of working days lost each year in recorded stoppages**

1970-74 (average p.a.)	5,569,000
1975 (Phase I)	3,392,000
1976	1,977,000
1977	6,133,000
1978 (first 11 months)	5,912,000
	(of which Fords alone was 2½m)

(DEP Classification: Metals, Engineering, Shipbuilding and Vehicles)

the heat the government kept the public sector to its ten per cent norm, and overall wage rises under 15 per cent.

A look back at 1975 and 1976 throws even more light upon the level and character of the present struggle. The years of phase one and phase two of the social contract bit savagely into real wages. Just how deeply is shown in Table 3, the Labour Research Department's index of real take-home pay for a married male full-time worker with two children.

The two years of phase one and phase two held wage rises down whilst price inflation continued to rise so effectively that on average real take-home pay fell by 10.3 per cent from September 1974 to September 1977. Of course, since the average figure in the Index is based on gross weekly earnings rising from £54.70 in 1974 to £94.00 in 1978 and manual workers' wages are on average £9 less, (and public sector manual workers even less than that) then a majority of manual workers, especially concentrated in the public sector, did considerably worse.

The strike statistics for 1975 and 1976 show just how successful were phase one and two of the social contract in restraining workers from using their industrial muscle to defend their living standards. The numbers of workers going on strike was the lowest in those two years since the first two years (1966 and 1967) of the last Labour government's wage restraint policy.

Table 4 shows not only how the trend of strikes went down dramatically with the introduction of the fixed £6 maximum in 1975, but also how 1977 and 1978 represent a major recovery from the depressed levels of 1975 and 1976.

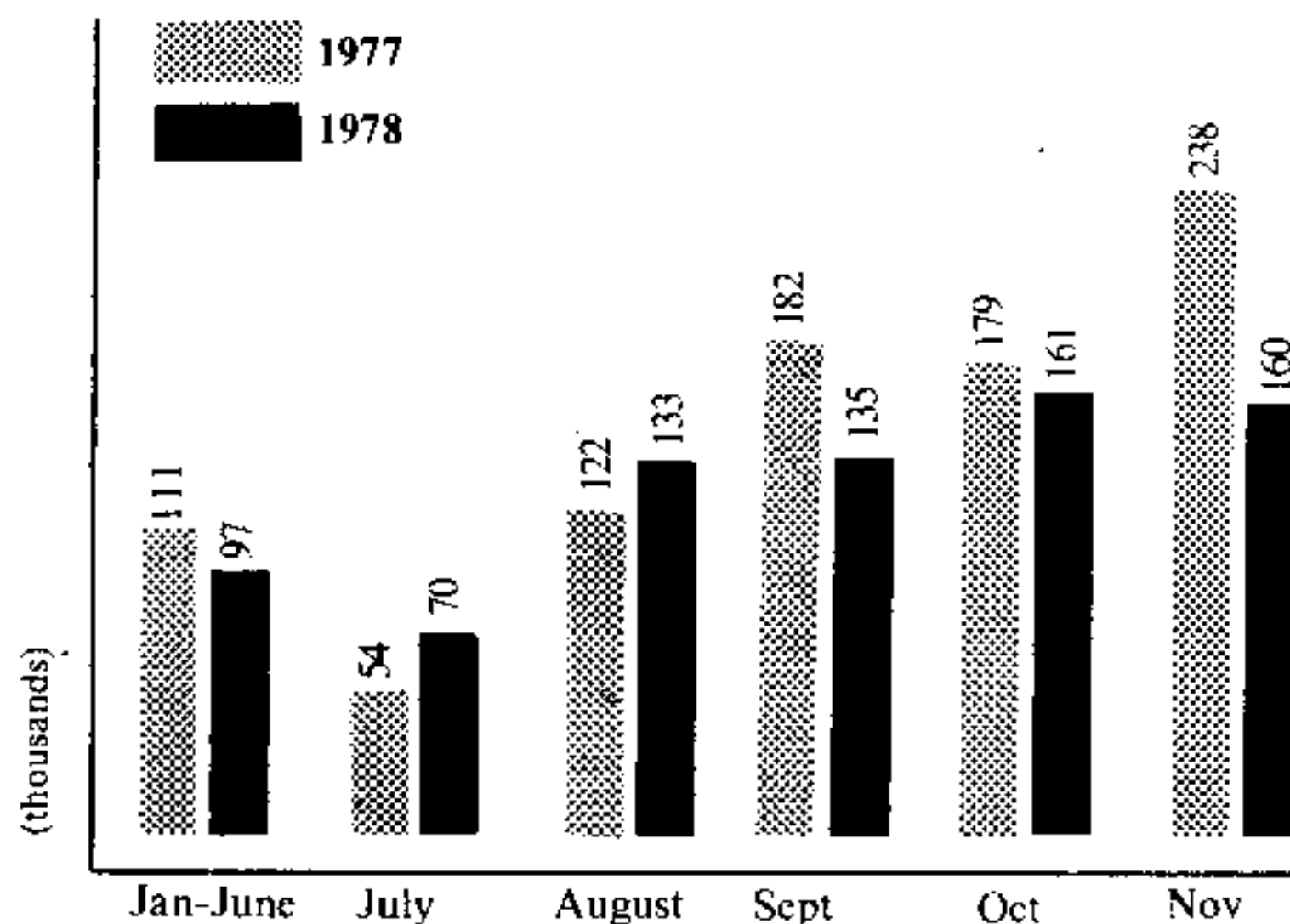
Indeed, not only has the downward trend of 1975 and 1976 been reversed, but the impact of strikes in 1977 and now again in 1978 is matching the post-war high of 1971 and 1972.

Thus we see that the scale of battle these last two years has been very great indeed. And Table 3 shows that it has not been without some success: real average wages rose by 8.4 per cent between September 1977 and September 1978. But even before we take a longer look at the similarities and differences between today and the end of the 1964-70 Wilson government's wage restraint policy, two points stand out about the recent class struggle.

First the vast bulk of the action has centred in just three months, September, October and November. Even though the level of struggle has been considerable, the state and the employers do appear to have forced greater acceptance of a limited period of fierce bargaining which then determines the settlements of those workers who follow in the 'wage rounds'.

Second, if the Fords strike is taken out of the statistics for 1978, then far from our witnessing 'growing' wage battles, as Ken Gill argues, we would be seeing the opposite. Of course, this statistical hypothesis is an impossibility; if Fords didn't strike some other group of workers might have instead, etc etc. But what does appear clearly from such an exercise is the narrowness of the wages offensive in 1978.

**Table 2: No. of workers involved in stoppages during month referred to:**



(DEP Classification: All industries and services)

# THE WAGES STRUGGLE: Fighting against the stream

## A struggle with a difference against the employers' offensive

**Table 5** Number of working days lost each year in recorded stoppages

	Yearly total
1961-65 (average p.a.)	1,996,000
1966 (wage freeze)	871,000
1967	1,422,000
1968	3,363,000 (of which 1,650,000 were lost in May)
1969	3,739,000

(DEP Classification: Metals, Engineering, Shipbuilding and Vehicles)

**Table 6** No. of stoppages taking place during month referred to:

	1968	1969
Jan-June (average)	223	292
July	263	282
August	223	284
September	266	338
October	317	433
November	324	377

(DEP Classification: All industries and services)

**Table 7** No. of workers involved in stoppages during month referred to:

	1968 (thousands)	1969
Jan-June (average)	70*	135
July	81	182
August	68	142
September	82	118
October	91	320
November	94	215

(\* Excluding May 1968 when the AEU called a one-day strike in the engineering industry.)  
(DEP Classification: All industries and services)

What we are witnessing today is a strong reaction to the Government's attempt to pursue the current employers' offensive by enforcing a third and fourth round of wage controls; a reaction that is on the same scale as 1968 and 1969 as is illustrated in Table 5.

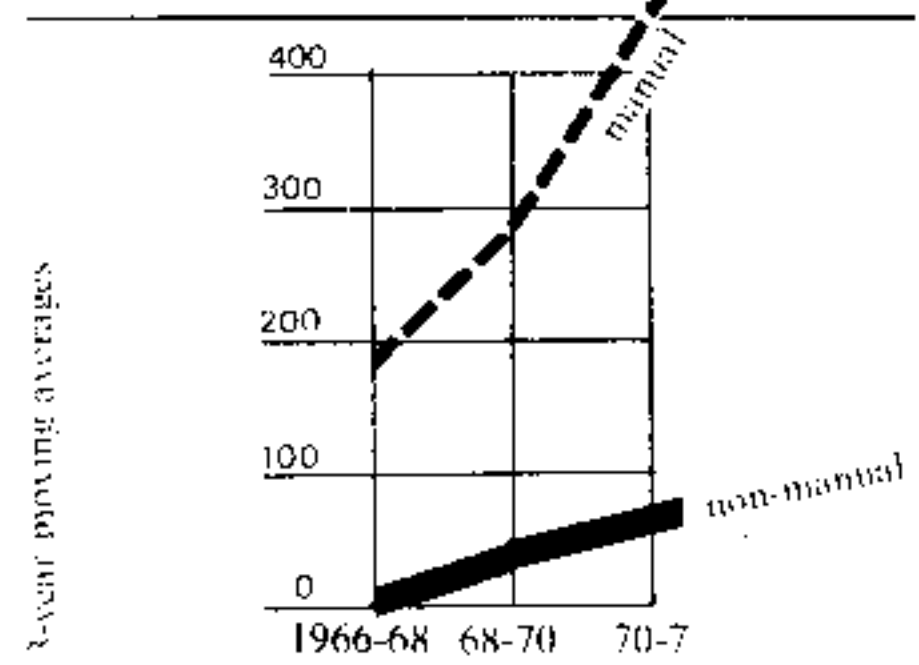
These were also the years of a hitherto unprecedented employers' offensive: 'I'm backing Britain', and Measured Day Work accompanied the pay policy under Wilson. But the similarity with the death agony of the last Labour government's pay squeeze ends there.

In 1968 several sections broke through the Government's guidelines and by early 1969 the Government decided to try and use legislation to control unofficial strikes. Tables 6 and 7 show how the stream of opposition to wage restraint in 1968 swelled into a flood in 1969.

The number of strikes rose in the autumn of 1968; stayed at the same level through the first half of 1969 and then rose even higher that Autumn. The increase in the numbers of strikers in 1969 as against 1968 was even more dramatic. There was a rising confidence amongst workers in their industrial muscle.

By contrast in 1977, phase three held. The 'big battalions' (like dockers, Ford workers, engineers, miners etc) toed the line in public, while privately getting over the odds through productivity deals (both real and phoney). The firemen were left to fight on their own. The TUC general council voted down a call for a serious campaign against the 10 per cent and the firemen failed to break it. What has been called a 'firemen's complex' set in: less confidence amongst workers in their industrial muscle. The fate of the public sector was sealed. They were

**Table 8** Average number of working days lost per 1000 workers



held down to the ten per cent and wage rises as a whole averaged under 15 per cent.

The period of 1968-69 also saw the emergence of a new left-wing leadership in several key unions (notably the AUEW and TGWU) and the advance of trade organisation and militancy into several new areas, from dustmen to teachers to women workers. The development of white-collar militancy in that period is starkly revealed in Table 8.

The Ford women's strike in 1968 actually put equal pay onto the agenda for all women. It was a period characterised by an employers' offensive (wage controls, legal restrictions on rank and file trade unionism, productivity deals) that was met by a

**Table 9** Number of workers in reported stoppages starting that month

Jan-July (average)	76
August (phase 4)	79
September	97
October	67

DEP Classification: All industries and services)

working-class counter-offensive. The fragmentation of militancy in the 1950s and early 1960s was increasingly giving way to generalised struggle. The two one-day strikes against *In Place of Strife* in 1969 were one example; the reappearance of national unofficial strikes (the mines, Fords) and over a longer period the emergence of the new industrial tactics of flying pickets and occupations, another.

The middle and late 1970s, on the other hand, have witnessed the total eclipse of that earlier 'left' leadership. And the rightward shift of the Scanlons and Jones in the 1970s has not been accompanied by the emergence of another new left bureaucracy. Instead we are seeing the right-wing strengthen its grip at the top of most major unions, while at the bottom there are two parallel developments: the increasing bureaucratisation of a layer of senior shop stewards and convenors; and the re-emergence of sectionalism (and the fragmentation of militancy which it fosters) as the key to struggle.

This shift to the right has taken place within the overall acceptance of the Labour government's right to govern in the 'national interest'. Thus even when workers rejected the five per cent, as they did at Ford, they justified their claim by pointing to the company's huge profits: an argument quite comparable with acceptance of the 'national interest' and the application of the pay norm to other workers.

The fact that ten years in office out of the last 15 has turned the Labour government into a 'national' government unquestionably has a profound effect on the politics of the labour movement as a whole.

The lack of generalisation of the workers' struggle experienced this Autumn—despite two national official strikes of manual workers, Fords and the Bakers is absolutely clear. Table 9, for example, shows a fall in the numbers of workers beginning strikes between September and October.

Whilst many militants and even not so militant workers (women at Thorns, Enfield broke into cheers when the news of the Ford strike came on the radio) received a real charge from the fact that a 'big battalion' was now taking on the government for the first time in 4½ years, that support remained passive.

Other workers waited have the confidence to end. They didn't have the confidence to follow suit and take strike action themselves. Even the Ford workers themselves tended to present their claim as a 'special case', rather than as a spearhead against wage controls. The trade union bureaucrats certainly saw things that way.



The struggle was fragmented off from the interests of the rest of the class.

The longest running 'wage' strikes this autumn - SU Carburettors, the hospital supervisors and the social workers--fit the same model. They were primarily **sectional** disputes which motivated their members towards industrial struggle on the basis of the **differences** between themselves and other groups of workers.

Most disputes this autumn, however, have not merely been fragmented and sectional. They have also been **defensive**. For, as already mentioned, 1977/78 has witnessed a new employers' offensive. The majority of disputes have not been about workers extracting more money and improved conditions from their employers; but have been about the employers trying to extract more work for less money under worse conditions and frequently, with fewer workers as well. The Chrysler paintshop dispute at Linwood in August, the Haringey dustmen in September, the Renolds strike in Coventry in September and October were all deliberate management provocations.

This, in essence, is what the suspension of the *Times* newspapers on 30 November is all about. An important section of the ruling class feels confident enough to directly attack the traditional form of trade union organisation in one of the most tightly organised sections of the British working class. We have come quite a long way from the crude union-bashing used by NAFF at Grunwicks. But it is all part of the same offensive.

Similarly the whole series of redundancies and closures this autumn in engineering, shipbuilding and the motor industry reflects the same attack—British Leyland, Dunlop, Triang, Massey Ferguson, Singers, British Shipbuilders, Hoover etc etc.

In 1972 the engineering employers clubbed together to help each other out in resisting some 70 factory occupations in the Manchester area which were aimed not only at raising wages but also at winning the 35 hour week. They did so in response to a major working-class offensive. Today, on the other hand, employers are once again clubbing together, but this time in the print. And they are helping out those firms affected by the NGA's defensive blacking of new technology. Today it is the **employers** who are generalising the struggle, and chanting slogans like 'The employers united will never be defeated'.

Even where disputes have begun with the workers on the offensive, pressing for major wage claims to restore 1974 living standards

(as at Fords, the bakers and the journalists), the tables have subsequently been partially or wholly turned by the employers. At Fords the strike ended with penal clauses against unofficial strikes; the bakers' strike ended with the smashing of the closed shop; and in the second week of the journalists' strike Mr Justice Lawson gave Express Newspapers an injunction stopping the NUJ from blacking the work of the scabs at the Press Association.

This decision, later backed by the Appeal Court means that solidarity blacking has been put under its biggest ruling class attack since the dockers' 'Cherry Blossom' list and the gaoling of the Pentonville five under the Tory Industrial Relations Act in 1972. The state has been active in other ways too. In both the bakers' and the jouranalists' strike the police have been far more active than in previous similar national disputes. The screw is being turned.

The industrial struggle this autumn and winter has thus been highly volatile. A relatively narrow band of workers has been taking offensive but sectionally-motivated strike action against the 5 per cent limit; as far as the private sector and certain of the more independent nationalised corporations are concerned, their action has broken the five per cent and established a higher norm of between ten and fifteen per cent, often with real productivity strings attached, which can be won through industrial action or the threat of it.

Yet the cost of such industrial action (nine weeks' strike at Fords; six weeks' for the bakers) has been high and the employers have been able to turn some of them from **sectional-offensive** strikes into **defensive** ones. Another wider band of workers has been forced on the defensive from the start, by employers offering less than five per cent or, as at British Leyland and British Shipbuilders, nothing at all unless jobs and plant-by-plant bargaining are sold out. And wherever workers have been able to delay settlements to wait and see what happened elsewhere, they have done so.

The overall pattern is one of deep fragmentation of the struggle in response to phase four. There are a few indicators the other way: the support given the ABS by the film technicians' union, ACTT; the better response from NGA members to the NUJ picket lines. But on the whole the level of generalised response is much lower even than in 1977 (compare the mass picketing at Grunwicks in 1977 with the much weaker pickets at Garners or Sandersons in 1978; compare the 20 April day of action against

Phase 3 in 1977 with the 11 October 1978 solidarity demonstration with Fords).

And what is unquestionably true is that the fragmentation of the fight-back in 1977 and 1978 is much more acute than in 1968 and 1969 or during the post-war high in strike activity from 1970-1974.

This is not the place for a full explanation of this shift. It is, however, clear that a major part of such an explanation lies in the change in attitudes of the trade union leaders under Labour as compared to Tory governments. Table 10 shows not only that fewer strikes were made official under the Labour governments' before and after the 1970-74 Heath government, and that these official strikes made up a smaller proportion of the total number of days lost; but also it reveals that the official trade union attitude to strikes was significantly harsher after the 1970-74 government than before it.

The bare statistics bring out the consequences for the level and direction of struggle of the right-ward shift in the leadership of the trade union movement.

Yet even the full-time trade union bureaucracy is affected by the volatility of the present industrial climate. Some sections of the bureaucracy sensed the mood of anger and frustration amongst their rank and file. So rather than see a rank and file rebellion overtake them as in 1968 and 1969 they took the lead. In the Fords dispute the officials backed the strike call within hours of the start of unofficial action. In the local authorities and health service manual workers' wage claims it has primarily been the national officials who have made all the running: adopting the delaying tactic in November 1978 and promising the national day of action on January 22 to be followed by selective strikes for 1979.

Other sections of the bureaucracy sensed the weakness of the rank and file caused by the downturn in struggle of 1975 and 1976 and the holding of the phase 3 line in 1977. They saw this shift as their opportunity to consolidate the power of the full-time officials over the rank and file and to further centralise wage bargaining. In the SU Carburettors dispute the AUEW engineering section executive was ready to go as far as expelling toolroom workers to pull them into line; the credentials of AUEW shop stewards at British Leyland's Bathgate were withdrawn in an effort to force the workers there back to work.

The delay in holding the general election, confidently expected at the time of the September TUC, has increased pressure on the bureaucracy to the point where a special TUC general council meeting on 14 November 1978 actually failed to pass a new definition of the Social Contract. In the tied vote, 14-14, traditional right-wingers like Bill Sirs of the steelworkers were found opposing the new deal, while verbal militants like Clive Jenkins of ASTMS supported it. Similar cross-voting between TUC 'rights' and 'lefts' had taken place on 21 December 1977.

But on that occasion the 21 to 17 rejection of a campaign in support of the firemen and against Phase 3 had been instrumental in isolating the FBU.

**Table 10 Official Strikes**

	% of working days lost in disputes which were made official	% of total no of stoppages which were made official
1965-69 (average pa)	30.9	3.8
1970-74 (average pa)	51.2	5.3
1975-77 (average pa)	19.4	4.2
1978 (first 6 months)	13.8	2.2

(DE Classification: All industries and services)

# THE WAGES Fighting against STRUGGLE! the stream

## The Way Forward

What the working class is facing in the winter of 1978/9 is a generalised employers' offensive which involves factory closures; redundancies; cut-backs in public expenditure; a strategy for the incorporation of senior shop stewards through 'participation'; lock-outs; productivity deals and a five per cent 'norm' which is intended to keep the average national wage rise 10 per cent this year. And opposing this ruling-class offensive: nothing broader than an odd factory combine committee here or there (usually it's every factory for itself); nothing deeper than a spontaneous determination to defend job organisation.

It was never exactly true to argue (as we did in 1968) that there was a 'vacuum on the left' in Britain when the left retreats, right-wing and other ruling class ideas and organisations are readily available to take its place.

Yet if by 'vacuum on the left' we mean the absence of a body of ideas opposed to class collaboration and embodied in some form or other of general working-class organisation (left trade union caucus, CP, left Labour Party etc), then there is certainly such a vacuum today. The broad left existed and opposed the employers' offensive of 1966-69. We disagreed with its strategy for the fight-back (the reliance upon Scanlon, Jones etc). But today there is no similarly structured body of left-reformist ideas linked to any general organisational form; there are only individual, isolated, sectionalised leftists and militants and the organisations which grouped them and gave them a sense of direction in the class struggle of ten years ago (the broad lefts, CP, left Labour Party branches etc) have either evaporated or contain as many class collaborators within their ranks as there are outside.

The lack of a generalised opposition, the existence of this 'vacuum on the left' means that workers have to decide in isolation whether to surrender in face of the employers' offensive or to try and fight on alone.

The employers' offensive itself is nothing new, we mustn't exaggerate it. By comparison with the wholesale removal of piecework from the motor industry between 1967 and 1973, the present employers' productivity proposals look pretty small fry. The lockout at the *Times* certainly doesn't compare with the national three-day week lockout im-

posed by the Tory government to counter the 1974 mines' strike. And the Lawson judgement against solidarity blacking doesn't come close to the 1971 Industrial Relations Act's provisions against all secondary blacking. Participation schemes and/or joint consultation are nothing new either.

What is new today is the absence of any generalised opposition. The years of the 1974-79 Labour government have seen significant fragmentation of both workers' organisation and workers' politics. As a result not only are full-time officials playing a bigger role (helped by more full-time shop stewards) in more centralised bargaining than in 1964-70, but class politics, independent of the pull to the 'national interest', are much weaker. It is this weakness of organisation and consciousness that is at the heart of the working-class crisis in 1979.

Yet what is being demonstrated this autumn and winter is that despite all the problems outlined above, many workers are still ready to fight (and fight hard) if shown any sort of lead at all. The minority who rejected the Ford settlement after nine weeks; the nearly 50 per cent of the bakers who voted to stay out in spite of everything; the Sandersons and Garners' workers battling on for trade union recognition; the *Express* journalists who voted to keep up the blacking on PA. All these and many more besides were and are fighting hard and will be joined by others in 1979.

This is very important indeed for us. If workers were passively tolerating the employers' offensive; if there were no strike against the five per cent; if the system could successfully incorporate and smash rank and file trade unionism in the way it did in the United States 25 years ago . . . our industrial strategy would have to be decisively re-shaped. Without the workers' struggle to back up our arguments as to the potential of rank-and-file organisation, we would be reduced largely to 'the only answer is socialism': a propaganda position which, despite its ultimate truth, neither relates to the minority of class fighters nor forces the SWP to focus on workers' struggles as the key arena in which to work.

The class struggle in 1979 is not, however, a do-or-die battle where the basic choice facing workers is total surrender or socialism. It is still possible for workers to win real (though temporary) gains; in the short term it is possible even to turn the employers' offensive back. The ABS workers did win a 16½ per cent rise. Ford workers will see some increase in real wages. The journalists are virtually certain to gain improvements on the Newspaper Society's first offer. You don't have to be committed against capitalism to be ready to fight for more.

What then is the role that revolutionary socialists must play? We have to understand that any gains workers make under phase four are necessarily short-term. Whether by raising taxation, the rate of inflation or unemployment or by all three methods, a sectional advance by one part of the movement can easily be taken away again.

Only a generalised offensive for the 35-

hour week, for across-the-board wage rises for all, for new technology to benefit the workers, for nationalisation of firms which threaten to sack workers, for an improved health service etc etc can secure lasting gains. Yet we are now in a period when such a generalised response is neither appearing spontaneously nor is it being campaigned for by any existing working-class organisation with a perspective of rank and file self-activity. And in the present period of fragmented and sectional struggle where the ideology of the 'national interest' (and of keeping Labour in power to defend it) is dominant, to continue to fight for such a generalised response is to struggle completely against the stream.

At Chrysler, Linwood, one of the few factories to organise a factory wide collection for the Ford workers this autumn, the response from the Linwood workers was one of the worst anyone could remember. Yet the collections taken in those sections where SWP members were shop stewards were better than the average. Fighting against the stream is difficult, but it can still yield results.

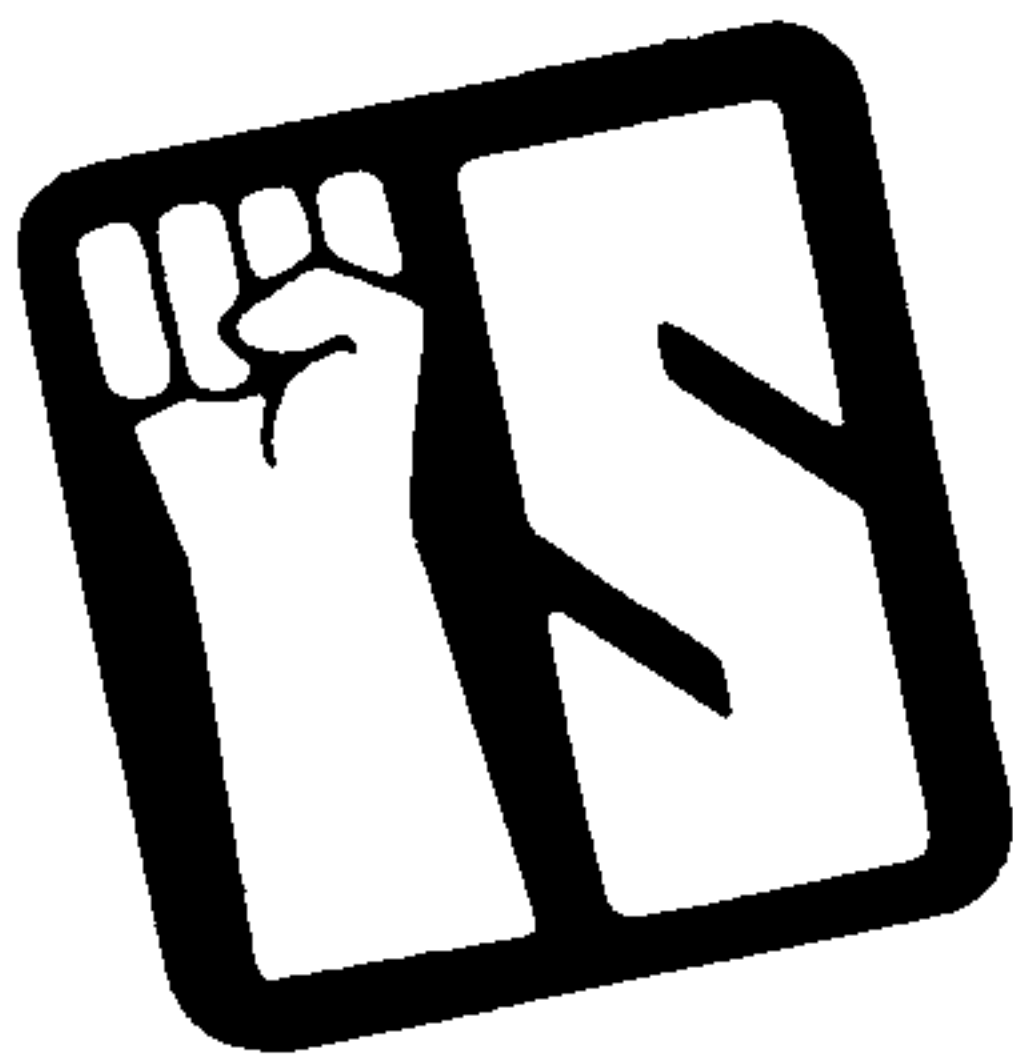
To struggle for a generalised response to see that the striking car worker or social worker or bakery worker or journalist is just as much your brother or sister as the worker next to you in your factory, school or office—is what being a revolutionary socialist is about today. It is carrying working-class politics which stand against the interests of the employers and the State into the workplace. And in this, in providing the continuing organisation to make successful struggles possible, in providing the continuing organisation to to the limits of possibility because we have rejected collaboration, revolutionary socialists are essential. We make a difference, albeit a tiny one, where we are an organised presence.

The 'march of labour' has neither 'halted' nor can it be simply described as going 'forward'. It has *changed*, and this change owes much less to structural developments than to ideological ones, especially the identification of the Labour government with the 'national interest' and the submission to it of the former left trade union leaders. Nor does this change mean that the short- or medium-term perspective for the working class is either total defeat or socialism. The struggle is still taking place. Organisation has not been smashed. Militants are still seeking ways of fighting more effectively *within* the system. What the change does mean is that revolutionaries must relearn the art of relating to the fragments of working-class struggle. We must aim to strengthen them and show in detail how the lessons of generalised struggle learnt just a few years ago do still apply to win even the smallest victory today. It is not good enough to simply raise the generalised slogans of yester-year. We must direct our efforts towards strengthening and building workers' organisations on the one hand; and on the other we must systematically challenge the political source of fragmentation—the ideology of 'national interest'.

# The Making of a

# Myth

Duncan  
Hallas



Martin Shaw has written a lengthy (45-page) article, 'The Making of a Party?' (*Socialist Register* 1978), in which he gives his interpretation of the development of the International Socialists (now the Socialist Workers Party) up to 1976.

It is a very peculiar, indeed, as I shall argue, an extremely perverse interpretation. But first the reader of 'The Making of a Party?' should note that Martin's attitude to verifiable facts is, to say the least, a trifle contemptuous. Many of the 'facts' he so confidently states are simply non-facts.

Thus 'the first attempt to float the Socialist Workers Party' did *not* come 'at the end of 1975' as he says. It was proposed and debated on the IS national committee as early as 1971.

Nor was the name presented 'as a fait accompli never put up for discussion for the membership'. It was presented for discussion, was indeed debated and was finally carried at a national delegate meeting in December 1976 against an alternative proposal that enjoyed the support of such not-unknown IS members as Paul Foot, Tony Cliff and John Deason.

Nor was the Right to Work Campaign sprung by a 'virtually monolithic' central committee on an unsuspecting membership as Martin tells us. On the contrary, the proposal came from a section of the membership, specifically from the south-west London district, whose

representatives, led by Sandra Peers, convinced the delegates at a national council meeting in the autumn of 1975 that the time was ripe for such a campaign.

Such factual corrections, each one perhaps trivial enough in itself, could be multiplied almost at will. A systematic correction of Martin's non-facts would make a lengthy article. It will not be attempted here, since I am concerned primarily with the arguments of 'The Making of a Party?' One general point, however, must be made.

Martin Shaw has made use of two articles written by Ian Birchall on the history of IS, which appeared in *International Socialism* 76 and 77. He acknowledges his debt in a number of venomous footnotes, which seek to cast doubt on Birchall's integrity and judgement.

Now this is a little unkind of Martin. Much of the superficial plausibility, at any rate to the casual reader, of his own account derives from his use of Birchall's material and, in particular, the detailed facts and figures it contains. Take away Birchall and what is left of the first half of our critics' story is a sorry thing, as anyone interested can easily verify by reading the original.

At all events, once Shaw's tale goes beyond Birchall's sober and critical account (that is, beyond 1974) the non-facts—by no means absent even in Shaw's earlier pages—multiply, become even wilder and ever more inexcusable. The later pages of 'The Making of a Party?' bear approximately the same relation to history as a John Wayne movie bears to the realities of life in the American west in the 1880s.

But we must turn to the more important matter of interpretation. What Martin has written is a new version of the ancient myth of Eden, the temptation and the fall.

Once upon a time, in the 1960s, there was a 'coherent, open and thinking marxist alternative' called IS. That was Eden. Then came temptation. '1968—that truly amazing year, in which the membership of IS more than doubled' to 'around 1000', seemed to create the possibility 'of transition from a small group to an embryonic party'.

The old Adam (or should it be the old Cliff?) of IS, and indeed, the entire 'IS "old guard"', bit the apple from the tree of knowledge and things have been going to hell on a bicycle ever since.

For the apple they bit was the apple of 'orthodox—even, as I have suggested, fundamentalist—marxism, centred on the industrial working class'.

And so it came to pass that the 'IS old guard' fell into 'workerism' which 'helped to undermine the level of politics in the

organisation... assisted the degeneration of IS's internal life, and prepared the way for the opportunistic, unrealistic and sectarian politics which IS was to adopt in the new political period which opened in 1974'.

That is the thesis. Stated so baldly it is, not to put too fine a point on the matter, a little implausible. Which, no doubt, is the reason why Martin, who is a skillful writer, takes good care to wrap it up in a blend of fact, non-fact, speculation and plain fantasy, masquerading as a history.

What was Eden like? IS at the end of 1968, with its 'national 1000 members'—and Shaw is right about the 'notional'; a careful check by Mike Waller and myself gave an optimistic maximum of 880 in late 1969 and the turnover of members was huge, far, far greater than at any subsequent period—was very far from being a coherent organisation. It was, as Shaw concedes, predominantly a student body. And, in spite of its nominal 'democratic centralism', it was a federation of extremely disparate groups.

The most hair-raising ultra-left nonsense was widespread amongst them. And 'workerism', in the *real* sense of idealising workers, was widespread. As Ian Birchall has noted:

'In this period of student domination in IS, it was often enough to proclaim that one was a worker to win admiration and flattery. At one IS conference an industrial worker denounced a document being circulated as "so bad, it must have been written by a sociologist." He was cheered to the echo by an audience, a fair percentage of which were sociology students'.

For this situation the 'old guard' leaders were responsible and, in my opinion, they were **absolutely right** to seize the opportunity to recruit the rebellious students, warts and all, in an attempt to break out of small-circle propaganda politics.

But what next? It is not necessary to be an 'orthodox marxist' (although it helps) to understand that for the organisation to have any chance of becoming a serious force it had to break out of the student milieu, to recruit and influence workers, to transform itself into a predominantly workers' organisation. In short, it had, **at all costs**, to orient its activity on the working class and, secondarily, on the unions.

Easy to say, immensely difficult to achieve. It required a ruthless concentration on the main objective combined with great tactical flexibility. Nobody else **seriously** attempted it. IS did make a serious and sustained attempt, with the result that we now have in Britain, for the first time since the Communist Party succumbed to

## The Making of a Myth

stalinism in the late 1920s, a small but real revolutionary party. And that is an immense gain.

Now if Martin Shaw wants to insist that the process was messy and uneven, that various blunders were made, that some important areas of work were neglected longer than they need have been (and others, I would argue, were entered prematurely) then I will concede all that willingly.

But were we right in our main orientation or were we wrong? Should we, like some of Martin's present friends in 'Socialist Unity' have looked for alternatives ('red bases' in the colleges, 'third worldism', entry into the Labour Party and so on) to the long hard struggle to root socialist politics in the working class. Which is it to be, Martin?

And what, after all, does the criticism of the SWP's 'traditionalist marxism' amount to? That our perspectives 'were firmly hitched to the traditional sectors' of the working class, that we 'failed to respond adequately to . . . (the problems—*DH*) posed by the women's movement and sexual politics in general' and that we failed to understand the 'structural changes in capitalism, which the student movement highlighted'.

The first point is rather silly. The problem has never been that the bulk of the membership was concentrated in coal and cotton, steel and shipbuilding to the exclusion of, say, hospital workers, teachers or civil servants and Martin must know that perfectly well.

There is some substance in the second point. Actually, although Martin unaccountably fails to add the charge to his bill of indictment, IS took up (by conference decision) a definitely **wrong** position on the gay question. However, the matter continued to be discussed and, after considerable debate, a subsequent conference reversed the decision. It would have been more candid to have reported both facts. Instead we get: 'On the gay question there could be no such compromise (as on the women's movement—*DH*) with the workerist, economic line of IS!!'

A good many SWP members, possibly a majority, would agree with at least some of Shaw's criticisms of IS's activity and attitudes on the women's question. I do not. But then the organisation has never been the 'monolithic' body bearing 'a close resemblance to stalinism'—what a vile slander—that is portrayed in 'The Making of a Party?'

Discussion on this, as on other matters, continues inside the SWP and, indeed, publicly. Or hasn't Martin noticed the series of articles, some of them critical of the SWP, which has been appearing in *Socialist Review*?

And 'structural changes' and the analysis of capitalism generally? Well, what analysis is offered? None at all in the article under consideration or in any of Martin Shaw's writings with which I am familiar. Our

theoretical and analytical work in this field may well need strengthening but at least it exists.

What have Martin or his friends produced comparable with Nigel Harris's 'The World Crisis and the System' (*IS* 100) or Colin Barker's 'The State as Capital' (*IS* 2:1), to mention only two recent contributions?

We have, of course, no monopoly here, and seek none, but a critic who fails to make a single concrete point can hardly expect to be taken very seriously. Until Martin condescends to enlighten us we shall have to struggle on with what he kindly calls our 'seriously depleted intellectual forces'!

That last phrase gives the clue to Martin Shaw's alienation from the SWP—and he is so profoundly alienated that even when the party adopts something that he favours, it is a cause for complaint rather than approval. In the years immediately after 1967 intellectuals inevitably played quite an exceptional role in IS. Martin Shaw was one of them.

He understood the need for a working-class orientation. He wanted to build a revolutionary party and he understood that any real party must consist, to a large extent, of working men and women who share some of the tastes and attitudes of their fellow workers. Indeed, he has expressed this thought more eloquently than most of us.

However, Martin's understanding was purely intellectual. Emotionally and practically he was unprepared for the situation in which the great majority of the organisation, whether manual or white-collar workers, whether men or women, were not intellectuals in his sense, and in which the **relative** importance and influence of intellectuals markedly diminished. Yet this change, and the transformation of the whole tone of the organisation, were the inevitable outcome of healthy growth.

Another critic, Julian Harber, unwittingly demonstrates this point very clearly: 'The degeneration of IS . . . In large measure it can be put down to the informal decision taken by the IS leadership somewhere around 1970, that all important theoretical questions had now been decided and the task now was simply to build an organisation based upon them' (*Revolutionary Socialism* 2 p.26).

The 'decision' is another myth but in a sense, Harber is right. The **emphasis** did shift away from discussion of 'grand theory' towards intervention and the recruitment of workers. It had to, if progress was to be made. After all, the theory is not an end in itself. It is meant to be a guide to practice.

An organisation that seeks to become a revolutionary party has to terminate certain discussion, at some point, with **decisions** and stick to them until events seriously call them into question. How else can it call upon people to make the considerable self-sacrifice which membership entails?

The party cannot be forever engaged in debating fundamentals, which is what, I fear, Martin Shaw means by 'the practice of

constant debate', which he advocates. That is not conducive to constructive work and it is not an atmosphere in which most people want to function.

Of course, disagreements, conflicts about issues, are quite inevitable and a necessary part of the development of the party. The SWP has not been, nor will it ever be, free from them but the issues normally arise from the practice. There will be exceptions, but they will be rare, as indeed they were before 1968.

There is, I believe, an Arabic proverb: 'Take what you want; take it and pay for it'. Martin Shaw and his friends wanted to take but were unwilling to pay. They wanted the party, but not the influence of the workers on it. How else can you explain his belief that the (very partial) proletarianisation of IS 'helped to undermine the level of politics of IS' (He has, I am sorry to say, a real contempt for the membership of the SWP.)

Of course, he does not see it that way. The trouble is 'a highly undemocratic internal regime'. A little calm reflection on his own experience ought to convince Martin Shaw that there is precious little merit in this notion.

The terrible regime never interfered at all with his circulation of critical material or with the discussion of it inside IS. It also published his articles in public journals both before and even after his departure from our ranks. It rescued him once from expulsion for indiscipline by his own district (to which he gave considerable provocation) and would have rescued him again had he shown the slightest interest in accepting the minimal obligations of membership.

There was, it is true, very little positive interest amongst IS members for his post-1974 ideas. That does not, of course, prove that his ideas were necessarily wrong. But it might have suggested the need for a little patience, even the reflection that his fellow members could hardly all be incorrigible idiots and therefore should be treated with at least a little respect.

That is water under the bridge now. Martin currently advocates 'a new united organisation', to be created from various elements of the revolutionary left outside the SWP. 'The Making of a Party?' is clearly meant as a contribution to that end.

The inherent difficulties of such an operation are enormous and, as Shaw has recognised, the maximum possible result would be a lot smaller than the present SWP.

But let us suppose, for argument's sake, that the difficulties could be overcome and that the 'united organisation' could not only be born but could grow to count its members in thousands, as the SWP does, rather than in hundreds.

It would then, without question, bear a strong resemblance to the SWP in many of its features. For these features, which Martin so dislikes, are not the product of original (theoretical) sin. They are the inevitable product of the struggle to root a revolutionary organisation in the working-class movement in the Britain of today.

## SCIENCE IN SOCIETY

**leisure** (ləzh'er), n. (Opportunity to do, for, afforded by) free time, time at one's own disposal (wait etc. one's ~e, wait t he has ~e; at ~e, not occupied, also d liberately, without hurry; at one's ~ when one has time).  
**lei'surely** (ləzh'er-), a. & adv. Hav  
**acting or done at, leisure, deliberate**

Paul Harrison's article 'For Better For Worse?' (*Socialist Review* No. 5 September 1978), although informative, highlighted several important issues which have remained unanswered. The vital nature of change induced by the large scale introduction of micro-processors has been predicted by many varied sources; the BBC programme 'Tomorrow's World' showed a futuristic workplace being staffed by a handful of technicians whose main problem was combatting the boredom brought about by 'regulating' efficient micro-technology.

The possibilities of the silicon chip have fired imaginations in a way that unwieldy computers failed to do. The reality of industrial robots on the shop floor has inspired concern unheralded for the bulkier hardware.

The silicon chip: to welcome, or not to welcome? That is the question. Paul Harrison maintains that 'workers are going to have to resist the introduction of new technology in order to defend jobs and living standards.' However, he goes on to say that any tendency to emulate the Luddites must be resisted as one should not be against new technology per se, only against such technology that is not under workers' control. Following on from this, he notes the positive benefits that micro-electronics could have for socialism.

This begs the practical question; if workers oppose the introduction of the new technology now will there be any 'new' technology for us to utilise in the future? In fact, present conditions render such opposition ineffectual.

The government's commitment to the micro-electronics industry will probably exceed £200 millions in the near future. Included in this sum are the NEB's investment of £50 millions in the micro-processing company, Inmos, and a three-year propaganda exercise costing several millions to demonstrate the usefulness of the silicon chip to the country's industries.

The Manpower Services Commission echoes an argument heard daily; if Britain does not take up the option of micro-electronics then it will fall behind in the

world market and effects on unemployment will be greater in the long run. This Commission has recently published a survey of job prospects for the next five years. In this it accepts that the traditional job market will be radically altered but it offers small comfort by stating that new jobs will be created especially 'for people who can design, install and maintain new systems.'

The survey goes on to say that the market will be stimulated by cheaper goods and services, which will in turn create new demands for more goods etc thereby creating new jobs. In delicious irony, the Manpower Services Commission plans to extend the use of computers in its job-finding role. People benefiting from this service may number from four to five millions by the early 1980s according to which projection you refer to.

If one accepts: a) the inevitability of new technology and b) the mass unemployment that accompanies this, then the socialist approach to work and leisure must be re-examined. At the moment, our main theory/tactics/experience is based in or about the workplace. In the SWP we see the main organs of revolution being workers' councils, and not a plethora of old age pensioners' councils, councils of the unemployed, student councils, housewives' councils etc.

To confront the problems of the army of the unemployed, we have a Right to Work Campaign which, amongst other activities, supports the struggle for a 35-hour week and campaigns for action against accepting redundancy.

In doing this we reinforce the productionist ideal that a man or woman is measured in terms of his or her job and echo the general consensus that the only meaningful existence in our society is obtained via the workplace (women are sometimes exempt from this ethic being both producers and reproducers at any given time).

However, with new technology, society may have to judge a person's worth using new criteria and socialism may have to look beyond the work place for the revolution.

Marx foresaw a time when a worker would not add his or her labour to the

process of production but merely act as an 'observer and regulator' in the proceedings. Michael Harrington in his article 'Leisure As The Means of Production' argues that leisure is the characteristic means of production in a socialist society. Given a period of abundance, technology will flower producing automation thus liberating the workers to enjoy the 'kingdom of freedom'.

The new liberty would be defined in terms of quality as well as quantity in a socialist society. However, under the domination of capital, automation does not liberate those workers and direct them towards the 'kingdom of freedom', rather they head for the 'citadels' of the 'kingdom of necessity' ie the dole queues.

Socialism has failed to recognise the potentiality of the unemployed as a united mass force. In the 1980s five million people may be unemployed and probably unorganised. The only body I have heard of calling for unions for the unemployed is the Work and Leisure Society which is campaigning for radical changes.

They are calling for a 20-hour week for all, with everyone receiving two thirds of the pay. This, they argue, would obviate unemployment and cut down the number of illnesses, injuries 'caused' by the 40-hour week.

However, because this Society is committed to capitalism, their campaign lacks a theoretical and practical foundation. They maintain (disregarding micro-electronics) that factories would have to be open for 24 hours a day with workers having three shifts (disregarding the illnesses and social miseries attending shift work) to maintain productivity.

The Work and Leisure Society has no positive suggestions as to how to utilise the resultant free time other than approaching big commercial interests and demanding that they come up with something to supplement booze, bingo and betting.

Is socialism doing enough in backing 'one hour off the day' campaigns? Should our commitment to leisure be more widespread? Do we have the theory and practice to relate to a more or less 'permanent' army of unemployed? These questions require answers and I would welcome comment and discussion on this matter.

Margaret R. Chinn.



# RURAL ROT

by Alastair Much

The left has paid little attention to the analysis of contemporary capitalist agriculture. Quite rightly worried about the nature of the industrial working class, the state, reformism etc, it has perhaps referred to Marx's famous comment on 'the idiocy of rural life' and passed on.

The problem is that this leaves the field open to the sentimental, the nostalgic, and the downright reactionary. In their hands the study of agriculture is not analysis but a powerful ideological weapon. The countryside becomes the home of all that is 'good' in society. It is seen as unchanging, stable, 'natural'. This sort of ideology is particularly attractive in times of economic crisis. To the seeming chaos and anarchy of the towns can be counterposed the carefully ordered society of the country where everyone appears to know their place. Go into any bookshop and look at the rows of rural nostalgia and you'll see what I mean.

The reality is, of course, totally different. Capitalist agriculture in Britain today is big business, both farming itself and the massive back-up industries. Rural society is also

divided on class lines, lines which might appear blurred on first impressions but are real ones for all that.

The stereotype of a farm is one run mainly by family labour producing a wide range of commodities.

In fact there is an increasing tendency to larger units concentrating on specialist production. This has been carried furthest on poultry farms where the notorious battery houses containing thousands of birds are controlled by a few firms, notably the Imperial Group. The Goldenlay consortium controls about 35 per cent of production and has 'a degree of freedom in price and marketing policy which industry generally doesn't enjoy'. (*Farmer and Stockbreeder* 23 September 1978). In general the tendency to vertical integration, where a single firm has complete control over every stage in the production of a commodity, has not gone as far in Britain as on the continent, although there are signs that it may become more familiar.

Most British food firms prefer to make contracts with individual farmers by which

they have a large degree of control over quality. In many cases they decide the acreage planted and the time of harvesting. This applies particularly to such crops as peas and sugar beet. The system has encouraged the growth of large enterprises which can guarantee the production of large quantities of standard quality and justify expenditure on the often expensive machinery required. By 1974 while only 8.5 per cent of farms were over 300 acres in size, they accounted for over 42 per cent of the area farmed. These farms themselves are further concentrated on the flat fertile plains of East Anglia, an area which accounted for a quarter of the national output of wheat and potatoes, a third of the vegetables and well over half of the sugar beet.

Such farming requires large amounts of capital. It has been estimated that it would cost more than £200 an acre to re-equip a 600 acre farm, a small farm by East Anglian standards. Tractors can now cost up to £40,000 each, with the more specialised equipment being even more expensive. Mather and Platt's SB8000 pea

harvester, for example, costs a cool £80,000.

This has meant new forms of organisation, particularly co-operatives. Many of these own machinery which is only used for brief periods of the year. Others are trading companies, owning their own feed mills, grain stores and fleets of lorries. West Cumberland Farmers has a turnover of £122 million a year and has just spent £850,000 on a new feed mill at Hexham.

The supply of machinery, fertilizer and drugs is done by large firms often in near monopoly control of the market. For example, five firms dominate the British tractor market, Massey-Ferguson, Ford, International Harvester, David Brown and Leyland. They are able to switch production from country to country, as the workers at Massey-Ferguson Kilmarnock combine harvester plant have discovered.

The result of all these changes, plus the dramatic rise in land values since the early 1970s, has been to destroy once and for all the idea that in farming there is some kind of 'ladder' and a high degree of social mobility. Unless you have a substantial amount to invest or inherit a farm there is little chance of acquiring a farm. Another recent development has been the buying of farmland by city institutions looking for a secure investment. The industry is more than ever one with an enormous gap between prosperous farmers and low-paid workers.

While there has been a massive increase in farm productivity since the war, farm workers have stayed firmly at the bottom of the earnings table. Their work is highly skilled, often dangerous and carried out in unpleasant conditions. In addition to the old occupational diseases of rheumatism and 'farmer's lung', there are now new hazards in the shape of the widespread use of chemical sprays to control weeds. Low pay is the result of the lack of alternative employment (often deliberately fostered in the name of 'conservation') and the lack of muscle of the main union, the National Union of Agricultural and Allied Workers. (The TGWU organises some 20,000 farm workers.) The union has about 130,000 members, not all employed in agriculture, and faces enormous difficulties in

organising a workforce which is geographically scattered.

White farm workers have a long history of struggle which is often ignored or not realised, their strongest response to terrible conditions has been to vote with their feet and move into the towns. There has, however, recently emerged a new determination to fight for better conditions, reflected in the 1978 pay claim. This called for the basic wage to be raised from £43 to £80, the introduction of a 35 hour week and an extra week's holiday, plus an improvement in overtime rates. In the end they settled for less, but for more than five per cent.

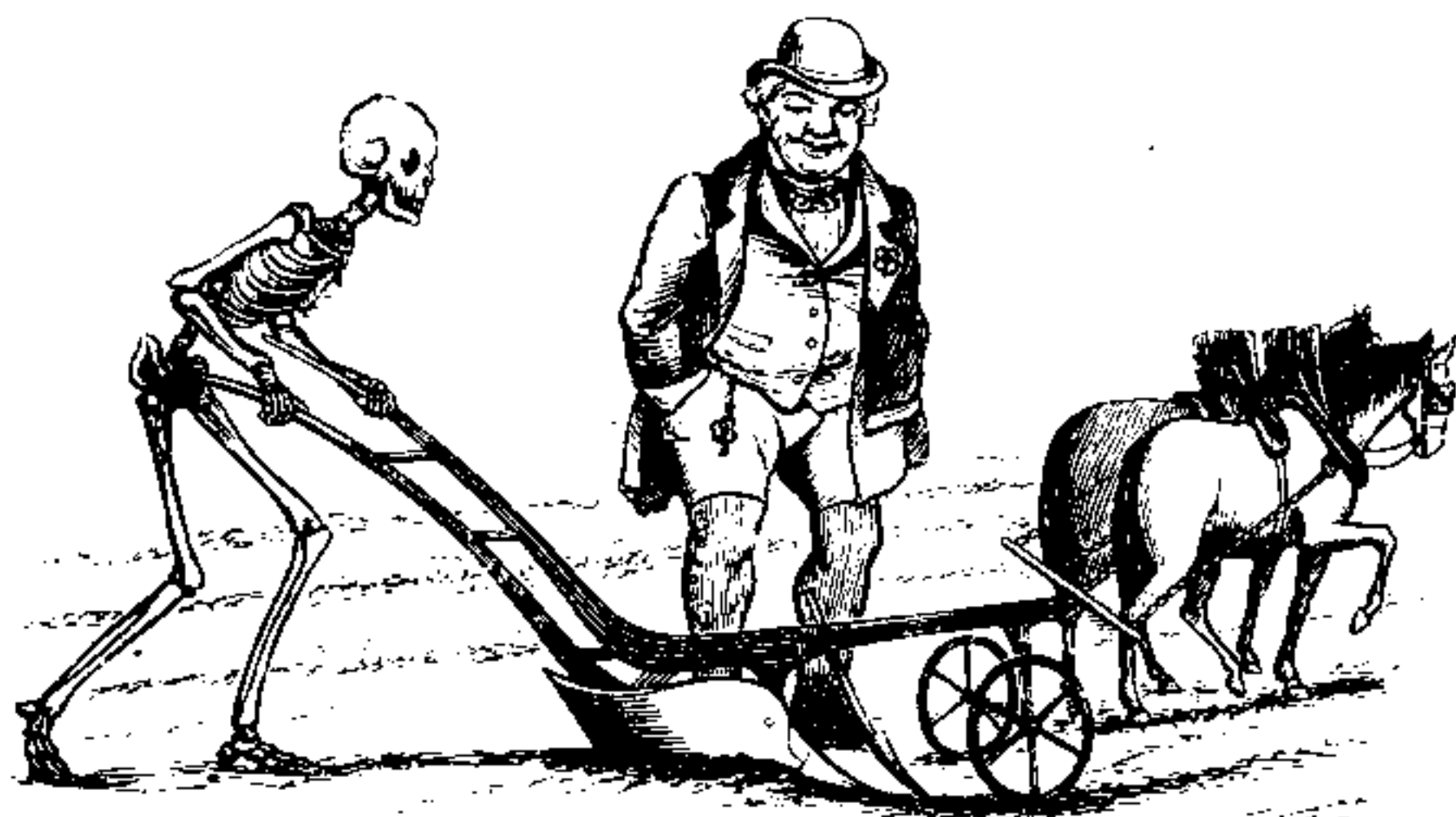
If ever there was a group of workers in need of support from other unions it is the farm workers. If industrial action were taken, it would be essential to get support from transport workers, workers in food processing plants etc.

I started by lamenting the absence of any serious analysis of capitalist agriculture. This gap has however to some extent been filled by the work of a group at Essex University. Their work is not yet complete, but these two books\* are an indication of the sort of work that needs to be done. They cover far too many areas to be adequately dealt with here, but amongst others they discuss the incredible power of the National Farmers' Union, which is such a well organised lobby that 'the Ministry (of Agriculture) sometimes appears in danger of being an adjunct of the NFU,' the question of class consciousness and deference, and the central importance of concepts of property to the way in which the ruling class maintain their ideological grip. Their focus, then, is much wider than agriculture. Unfortunately it has to be said that they are very academic in style, and of course ridiculously expensive, but I still think its worth getting your library to order them.

\* **The Deferential Worker** Howard Newby Penguin 1979

**Property, Paternalism and Power: Class and Control in Rural England**

Howard Newby, Colin Bell, David Rose, Peter Saunders Hutchinson 1978 £12.50.



This woodcut appeared on handbills circulated among farm labourers in the West of England to convene union meetings during 1874-5

## The Back Page

starts here with our new series based on Alex Glasgow's famous song 'Socialist ABC'. We start with the letter A, but to give you an idea what's to follow here's the song in full....

### The Socialist ABC: Alex Glasgow

When that I was and a little tiny boy  
Me daddy said to me:  
'The time has come me bonny,  
bonny bairn  
To learn your ABC'.

Now daddy was a Lodge Chairman  
In the coalfield of the Tyne  
And that ABC was different  
From the Fnid Blyton kind.  
He sang:

'A is alienation that made me the  
man that I am  
and B's for the boss who's a  
bastard, a bourgeois who  
don't give a damn.  
C is for capitalism, the boss's  
reactionary creed.  
and D's for dictatorship, laddie,  
but the best proletarian breed.  
E is for exploitation that the  
workers have suffered so long,  
and F is for old Ludwig Feuerbach,  
the first one to see it was wrong.  
G is for all gerrymanders like Lord  
Muck and Sir Whatsisname  
and H is the hell that they'll go to  
when the workers have kindled the flame.  
I's for imperialism and America's  
kind is the worst  
and J is for sweet jingoism that the  
Tories all think of first.  
K is for good old Keir Hardie who  
fought out the working-class fight  
and L is for Vladimir Lenin who  
showed him the left was all right.  
M is of course for Karl Marx  
the daddy and mammy of 'em all  
and N is for nationalisation--  
without it we'd crumble and fall.  
O is for over-production that  
capitalist economy brings  
and P is for all private property the  
greatest of all of the sins.  
Q is for quid pro quo that we'll  
deal out so well and so soon  
when R for revolution is shouted  
and the Red Flag becomes the top tune.  
S is for Stalinism that gave us  
all such a bad name  
and T is for Trotsky the hero who  
had to take all of the blame.  
U's for the union of workers, the  
Union will stand to the end  
and V is for vodka, yes vodka,  
the von drink that don't bring the bends.  
W is all willing workers, and that's  
where the memory fades  
for X, Y and Z, me dear daddy said,  
will be written on the street barricades.'

But now that I'm not a little tiny boy  
Me daddy says to me:  
'Please try to forget the things I said  
Especially the ABC'.  
For Daddy's no longer a union man  
And he's had to change his plea  
His alphabet is different now  
Since they made him a Labour MP.

(From *Close the Coalhouse Door*, a play  
about mineworkers written by Alan Plater  
with songs by Alex Glasgow)

# THE Socialist

## ABC

Work—for those who are not actually unemployed—is anything but an exercise in self-fulfilment; most of us experience our working lives as an oppressive routine, a weary round of frustration and subordination, which is devoted above all to making other people richer and more powerful.

Politics in our world is not concerned with finding ways in which the whole human community can expand and develop its common enjoyment of life, but is centrally concerned with exploitation, oppression, war, competition, division of men and women from each other.

The control of men and women over nature, far from being a proud collective achievement of the human race, rather appears as a growing threat to the very survival of mankind; the larger part of scientific effort is devoted, not to the expansion of human welfare and pleasure, but to the efficient destruction of millions of people in a war for which the great powers stand perpetually ready, and to the poisoning and polluting of people's lives here and now.

Our whole social organisation, far from being a means through which we express our common humanity, is dominated instead by divisions—of class, race, nation, sex—between people who oppose and subordinate each other, and whose chief motive of existence is the anarchic pursuit of profit at the expense of others.

Yet this world we live in is not something opposed to human nature. Human nature is still being expressed. The forms of human creativity, the forms of social cooperation, are certainly not those involved in the idea of communism, but they are, nonetheless, real forms of creativity and cooperation. The history of human civilisation is not something opposed to human nature, it is the actual expression of that very human nature.

On the other hand, there's also nothing inevitable or fixed about what we are now, and how we live now. If men have expressed their 'human nature' up to now in making the sort of world we inhabit today, they also have it in their power to transform what they've made so far and develop it a hundred-fold.

It is the marxist argument that there is a growing gap between what we do now, how we organise our society now, and how we could organise it. That 'gap' is capable of being realistically assessed, and realistically bridged.

Marx used a very general term to sum up the 'gap' between present-day reality and actual human possibility, between the way men and women live in capitalist society and the way they can live if they struggle for it. That general term was 'alienation'.

Alienation, for Marx, was a many-sided phenomenon, a single word for summing up the many facets of humanity's lack of freedom.

Under capitalism, men's characteristic powers to transform nature, to turn the wealth of nature to their own collective needs, stand against them. In his economic writings, Marx shows how the workers, in the very act of making useful goods, produce them in the form of commodities, which are not their property.

The more the workers produce, the more they enrich their employers. The more the very productive power of the working class is developed under capitalism, the more surplus-value they produce for the bosses, and thus the workers produce and reproduce the very means of their own exploitation and subordination.

Social wealth, the creation of the collective labour of men and women in society, appears under capitalist social relations as an alien and overwhelming force: capital.

Moreover, the very act of production itself, the activity of making and remaking things, falls more and more out of the producer's control as well. The workers' activity becomes more and more subordinated to the dictates of the employer and the employer's machinery, production line, computers, and so forth.

So, instead of his or her life being a central life interest, a source of pleasure, an opportunity to develop and extend his or her human powers of creativity in association with other workers, the modern worker experiences work as a misery to be shunned, a life sentence rather than an affirmation of life.

Capitalism has massively expanded cooperative production—but within a system of antagonism. Co-operation amongst workers arises, not from choice, but from compulsion by employers.

And this co-operation in the factories, organised by the employers, is utterly alienated also from its purposes: cooperative production in capitalist industry is not carried out to meet the needs of others, but to compete with them.

So fragmented is capitalist society that our actual dependence on each other almost disappears from view. Instead of our social organisation being a celebration of our common humanity, of our need for each other, we are forced to work to do the other person down.

Driven by the insecurities of employment, workers compete with each other for jobs, for houses, for state welfare. Skilled against unskilled, men against women, old against young, white against black, Protestant against Catholic, employed against unemployed—capitalism sets working-class people at each other's throat.

In capitalism people treat each other, not as ends in themselves, but only as mere means, not as people but as things.

This analysis of alienation led Marx to seek the solution of our social ills in revolutionary practice. Every aspect of alienation, without exception, arose from definite social circumstances and could be removed with the removal of these circumstances. The condition of alienation—our lack of freedom—has its source in capitalism. It has to be overthrown, not just theoretically, but in practice.

So quite logically, Marx's account of alienation led him, not merely to philosophical argument, but directly to practical revolutionary politics. "The philosophers hitherto", he wrote, "have merely interpreted the world in various ways: the point is to change it". *Colin Barker*★

★ This article is based on a chapter of Colin Barker's forthcoming introduction to marxism.



is  
for alienation