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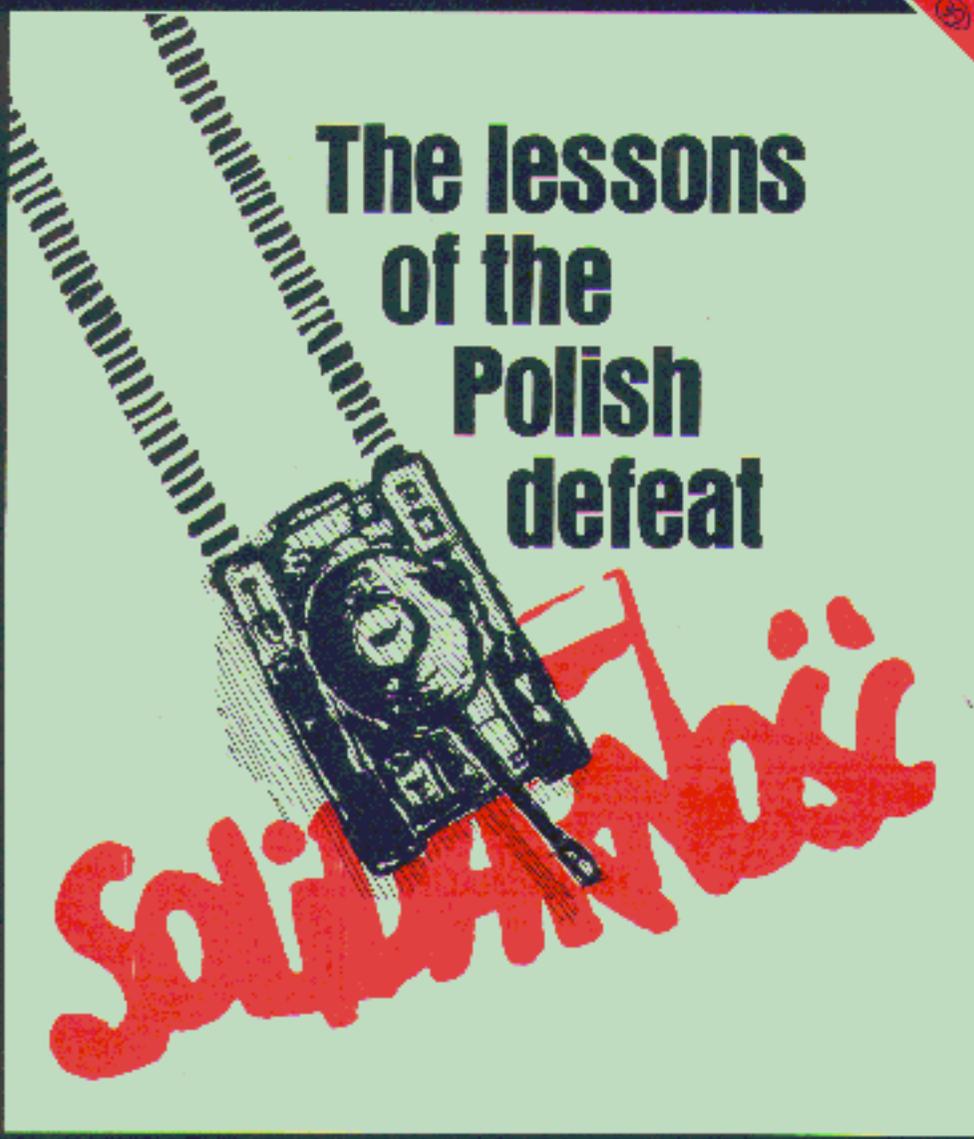
REVIEW

Monthly Magazine of the Socialist Workers Party

39

**JOBS
FIGHTBACK**
A survey of the last year
23 January - 19 February 1982 SWP

The lessons of the Polish defeat



Solidarność

'The Peace of Bishops Stortford'

If the history of the Labour Party was written up like those old style school history books then 'the Bennite Wars' look like being followed by 'the Peace of Bishops Stortford'. For Bishops Stortford is the home of the comfortable ASTMS training centre, where the leading lights of the Labour Party executive and the trade union barons held their two day summit at the beginning of January.

When they assembled on the fifth the press was gleefully predicting another nail in Michael Foot's political coffin. But when they emerged on the sixth, Foot was beaming about 'one of the best and most successful conferences in the history of the party', and David Basnett proclaimed 'peace has at last broken out in the Labour Party.'

Of course after the initial bright glow sceptics began to pick around in the embers. Tony Benn was not actually saying publicly that he was not going to stand for deputy leader. The Tatchell affair and the *Militant* inquiry were apparently not openly discussed. And, of course, quotes could be obtained from Bennite enthusiasts like Chris Mullin that as far as they were concerned the war was not over.

But the Peace of Bishops Stortford looks like being real enough, because it is grounded on the firmest base of any peace treaty—the recognition by one side that if they fight on to the end then they are going to lose. The side that is recognising that is the left.

After nearly three years of unprecedented left gains in the Labour Party, that may seem surprising. Only three months after Benn came within a hairs-breadth of humiliating Denis Healey even more so.

But already, in the autumn, there were a couple of disturbing signs for the Labour left of their underlying weakness. First there were the union 'membership consultations' for the deputy leadership. The way NUPE branches voted for Healey showed how thin was the layer of activists the left were enthusing. It also provided soft left union

leaders with a clumsy but effective weapon to use against the Bennite enthusiasts should they want to try a re-run.

Second there were the elections to the National Executive Committee at the conference itself. It wasn't just that the left lost control of the committee. The way they lost it was a sobering reminder that roughly half the trade union block votes were firmly under the control of openly right wing union leaders with the capacity to get together and play rough.

There is an atmosphere of fear in the party—fear of losing the next election

Since October the Labour left's problems have got worse. The evidence that the SDP is more than a nine-day wonder has become overwhelming. The traditional 'unity to win the next election' call was being remarkably ineffective before the conference. Now the SDP's successes have most powerfully revived it. As one leading hard left labour activist put it to me, 'There is an atmosphere of fear in the party'—desperate fear of losing the next general election.

The natural conclusion from that on the left is to settle for what they have already achieved. That is reflected in the pronouncements of some leading figures in the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy. It is also the rationale of the 'soft lefts' like Neil Kinnock. At the moment such people seem rather isolated outside the Parliamentary Labour Party. Fear of the SDP must inevitably attract a real base for them among constituency activists over the next few months.

Also working in that direction will be the debacle of the new left labour councils at the hands of Heseltine and the judges. Faced with the prospect of surcharges and defeat by the SDP in May there is going to be a lot of running for cover.

So far these powerful pressures have done there work rather messily. Immediately after the conference it looked as if Benn might settle comfortably into the shadow cabinet. But then there was the row with Foot about 'collective responsibility', ending in a draw—with Foot successfully blackballing Benn, but Benn still picking up a respectable number of MP's votes.

On top of that was the Tatchell affair with Foot apparently really going for the night of the long knives, and Benn really coming back fighting with his pronouncement that he was the real deputy leader. It looked as if the threat of the SDP was not making the slightest political impact. It also looked as if in the fury of the fight, both sides were making tactical blunders which made developments totally accident prone and unpredictable.

Certainly many on the 'hard left' seem to have greeted Benn's claim to the throne with embarrassment. And many of Foot's supporters must have thought that he was chancing his arm by targetting the relatively spotless Tatchell alongside the more easily isolated *Militant*.

But given the balance of forces, Foot can get away with his blunder and Benn can't. If necessary (and he dearly hopes it won't be) Foot can get a majority on the NEC to reorganise Bermondsey Labour Party or expel a few leading members of *Militant* and, with the eager union block votes of the right and the far more reluctant block votes of some of the left, get it endorsed by conference next October.

Those same forces, could, even more decisively, defeat Benn in a re-run deputy leadership election.

Of course the left could raise a lot of dust in the meantime. They have already demonstrated that over Tatchell. But at the end of the day it would be a deeply demoralising experience, very internalised and guaranteed to bring the full wrath of the Labour and trade union establishment down upon them. Then it really would be back to the 'bad old days of the fifties'.

They now seem to be recognising this. 'We cannot seem to be isolated into the position of what is seen by Labour supporters and local activists as one of continual aggression and in-fighting', says Labour Co-ordinating Committee secretary Nigel Stanley in a letter explaining why the LCC will not be supporting a new move to get together the Labour left under the banner Labour Liaison 82.

He also argues that, 'The deputy leadership campaign has shown that much more work is required outside, in the workplace and in the community.' For many of the Labour lefts that will be simply a ritual incantation to cover their falling into line behind Michael Foot (and Denis Healey). But a minority will take that lesson seriously. We must work alongside them and argue with them to take it to the logical conclusion.

Pete Goodwin



THE LABOUR PARTY: MYTH & REALITY

BY DUNCAN HALLAS

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A defeat for us all

'More than two weeks after the imposition of martial law in Poland, Marek Kowalczyk still cannot believe what has happened ... He sits at home in Warsaw brooding over where the Polish revolution went wrong ... Kowalczyk is typical of middle level Solidarity activists who pinned their hopes on democratic reforms. A short time ago he believed that the union's roots in Polish society were so strong that it would prove impossible for even the most repressive regime to remove them. Today he sees those roots withering around him.

"If the Russians had come it would have been different. Then we would have known who we were fighting against. But it's our own army. We're confused, and we don't know how to react." (Report from Warsaw, the *Guardian* 4 January).

A major defeat has taken place. The most powerful working class movement seen in Europe since the war has been halted in its tracks. The world's biggest union has been broken. The activists sit in internment camps. Those who try to resist get three, five or even seven year jail sentences. The membership, bitter and bewildered, are locked out until they sign pledges renouncing their own organisation and its interned leaders. In the factories the five day week has been scrapped, wages are held back as prices are

increased by up to 400 per cent, economic measures are pushed through which, as one advisor to the Zurich banks told the *Guardian*: 'are beginning to have a whiff of Friedman about them', mass unemployment threatens for the first time.

The defeat is not just a defeat for Polish workers. It is a defeat for all of us. Just as the great strikes of August 1980 that created Solidarity were an inspiration for others to follow — with Italian workers boasting they would turn Turin into the 'Gdansk of Italy' and American unions naming their protest at Reagan's cuts 'Solidarity Day' — so the success of 70,000 police and a 300,000 strong, mainly conscript army in crushing the union will be an example that right wing generals everywhere will not be slow to learn from.

Defeats can breed defeatism. That is the danger in Poland today, where underground activists are having to resist widespread demoralisation in order to hold together at least the remnants of organisation. It is also the danger for the non-Stalinist left internationally, who can all too easily fall prey to the paralysing conviction that nothing can be done against the military might of 'strong states'. For those who believe that, the Polish defeat becomes just one more inevitability, a proof, as they claim Chile was a proof, that to push reform beyond a certain point is to invite catastrophe.

socialist REVIEW

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Edited by Chris Harman

Assisted by Colin Sparks, Pete Goodwin, Norah Carlin, Sue Cockerill, Stuart Axe, Jane Ure Smith, Dave Beecham, Gareth Jenkins, Jill Poole, Christine Kenny, Jim Scott, Andy Durgan, Peter Court, Marta Wohrle, Noel Halifax.

Business Pete Goodwin, Jane Ure Smith

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Still more dangerous is the likely revival of '1984' notions of the Eastern states, of views which depict them as unchallengeable monoliths, against which nothing can be done. It is but a short step to deciding, however reluctantly, that defence of the 'Western democracies' is the lesser evil to the pressure of 'totalitarian tendencies'.

Yet the real lessons to be drawn from the Polish defeat are quite different.

First, Poland shows, despite everything, not the strength of the Eastern regimes, but their weakness. For 17 months the apparently all-powerful totalitarian apparatus was paralysed by a workers' movement that had spontaneously grown up underneath it. The system had created in opposition to itself a class capable of challenging it for power — just as Marx predicted capitalism would. The new power was sufficient still to frighten the regime's thugs as they moved in to the kill.

According to Solidarity activists who were interned:

'Ironically, during the first days of martial law, the security forces rather than the Solidarity activists seemed to feel more afraid ... The police went out of their way to be polite. It was as if they expected the tables to be turned at any minute'. (Quoted, *Guardian*, 4 January).

If at the end of the day, the regime's thugs were successful, there was nothing inevitable about that success. In any contest between rival powers, what matters is not only relative strength, but how that strength is

deployed, how each side responds to the moves of the other.

This leads straight into the second lesson. The militarisation of the Polish regime over a period of months meant that its forces were increasingly subject to a centralised command, which was clear that a final test of strength was inevitable, carefully testing the ground to see how favourable things were to it, while lulling the other side into a false sense of security through promises and negotiations. It only moved into action when success seemed most assured.

By contrast, Solidarity's leadership worked on the assumption that conflict could be avoided, that the generals were to be trusted in a way that the old party leadership was not, until a mere seven days before the final confrontation. Instead of testing their supporters in struggle, they urged them to keep calm, to refrain from strike action, to show stoicism in the face of endless shortages and queues, of police provocation and press slanders, of a growing militarisation of the country and increased threats to everything Solidarity had won.

This allowed the military to move against the union at a time of their own choosing, to take the union activists completely by surprise, and to smash its apparatus while the working class was bewildered, hardly knowing what to do.

The workers were defeated, not because they did not have the strength to defeat the regime, but because a leadership did not exist within their organisation that knew how to build and direct that strength. They are now paying the most bitter of prices for that absence.

representatives in Bydgoszcz — including one of the national leaders, Rulewski — Walesa first of all opposed calling for an immediate all-out strike and then called the strike off at the last minute without consulting the union's National Commission.

In the summer a new great wave of agitation swept the country, with a rash of 'local strikes', often including tens or even hundreds of thousands of people — dock strikes on the Baltic coast, a strike in the Polish airline LOT, the occupation by 14,000 women textile workers protesting against hunger in Zyrardow, the 180,000 strong one-hour general strike in Zelenia Gora, the print strike in Olsztyn over TV slanders, the strike in Radom demanding punishment for those who imprisoned and beat up workers in 1976, the hunger march in Lodz. At one point there were strikes in two thirds of the country's provinces. As late as October one report told that 'strikes and threats of strikes continue to dominate Poland ...' (*Guardian* 21 October).

The Solidarity leadership, far from trying to develop these spontaneous struggles into an onslaught against the regime, tried instead to bring them to a rapid end. Walesa was continually on the move, from city to city, urging people back to work. As one of the Gdansk Solidarity leaders, Andrzej Gwiazda, put it in July, 'Walesa is presently

devoting all his energies to suppressing strikes'.

This restraining of spontaneous struggles was bound to weaken the forces behind Solidarity. As we warned in *Socialist Review* back in April:

'There is a danger of the group around Walesa beginning to act like a conservative trade union bureaucracy. That would be disastrous, since it would mean Solidarity giving up its position as a focus, a leadership, for all those who are discontented and frustrated. Workers in small factories would no longer look to workers in large factories for backing, dissident intellectuals and students would no longer find any protection, the peasants would fall back into the passivity that comes from feeling they have been abandoned by everyone in the towns.

'The very scale of the social and economic crisis means that the balance of forces between Solidarity and the regime cannot remain frozen at the present level for long. Solidarity has gathered massive strength because it has offered people hope in a desperate situation. If it refuses to do things that build that hope, they could all too easily fall away from it. As that happened the regime would be able to refurbish the old mechanisms of repression in the localities and in the factories.'

Such arguments were not the result of any great, original insight on our part. They followed from the whole experience of the international workers' movement over more than one and a half centuries.

Once a workers' movement has reached the point of challenging the fundamental interests of a ruling class, it cannot stand still. Either it continues to grow stronger by supporting each and every struggle of the most oppressed and 'backward' sections of the population, who have never before even thought of politics, showing them how their interests can only be satisfied if they follow the traditionally advanced sections into an assault on state power. Or it begins to lose steam, to slide backwards.

By the summer, the dangers of 'standing still' were apparent to a growing number of regional Solidarity leaders. Gwiazda told the Solidarity national conference:

'Our union is doubtless in difficulties ... A year ago the authorities would not have dared to bring so many union activists to trial, a year ago the General Prosecutor's office would not have dared to launch so many investigations against independent publications and union press. In this respect, we have not achieved progress, but have gone backwards instead. This was because we did not respond to minor attacks which were meant to find out if we would concede.

'... I think we made a mistake when we did not firmly respond to the first attack ... We won't avoid conflicts through concessions. Concessions bring us closer to a fundamental conflict'. (*Congress Post*, BIPS, Gdansk 1 October).

The price of moderation

Solidarity was born from a spontaneous upsurge of workers, and gained its strength as the focus for everyone in the country who suffered exploitation and oppression. It was their self activity that held the regime back, for so long, from moving against the union. Yet hardly was the union in existence than the majority group in the union's presidium was trying to dampen down this self activity — in the misguided belief that doing so would prevent the regime attacking the union.

As early as December 1980 Lech Walesa was telling workers, 'Society wants order now. We have to learn to negotiate rather than strike.' It was a message repeated each time there were new flare ups of workers' militancy or fresh attempts by the regime to whittle down the power of the union.

When at the beginning of last year, hundreds of thousands of workers in Bielsko Biala and Jelenia Gora went on strike against the way the regime's officials and security police build themselves luxury villas and special hospitals out of state funds, one of Walesa's close colleagues complained:

'We want to stop these anti-corruption strikes. Otherwise the whole country would have to go on strike'.

In March, after a force of 200 police had beaten up and hospitalised Solidarity repre-

strong reasonable government we can negotiate with'. (quoted *Guardian* 20 October).

This judgement did not seem to have been affected either by the deployment of police, using tear gas, to arrest Solidarity activists distributing leaflets in Silesia nor by the dispatch of special detachments of soldiers to 2000 centres throughout the country 'to fight corruption, bureaucracy, and malfunctioning' and 'to intervene in local conflicts'.

On 29 October a token one hour national strike was called in protest at the police actions in Silesia. Yet this did not stop the National Commission of the unions agreeing less than a week later to call for a suspension of strikes for three months — at a time when Western reporters could claim that 'the growing strike wave appears to be the most serious since Solidarity was formed in August 1980'. (*Guardian*, 27 October).

It was at this point that the idea of either a 'government of national unity' made of Solidarity, the Church and the Party, or of a 'national accord' between the three began to be seriously raised.

Negotiating with Jaruzelski

On the second day of the Solidarity National Commission meeting in the first week of November an invitation was received from the government for Walesa to join joint talks with Jaruzelski and Cardinal Glemp for the Church. The invitation caused widespread confusion within the union. According to one left wing Western journalist in Poland, 'Strong regional leaders — in Warsaw, Lodz, Bydgoszcz, Szczecin — were against participation in the tripartite talks. But the National Commission did not take a stand and the next day the weekly presidium meeting of the union ended with a communique expressing goodwill to the talks.' (*II Manifesto*, 12 November)

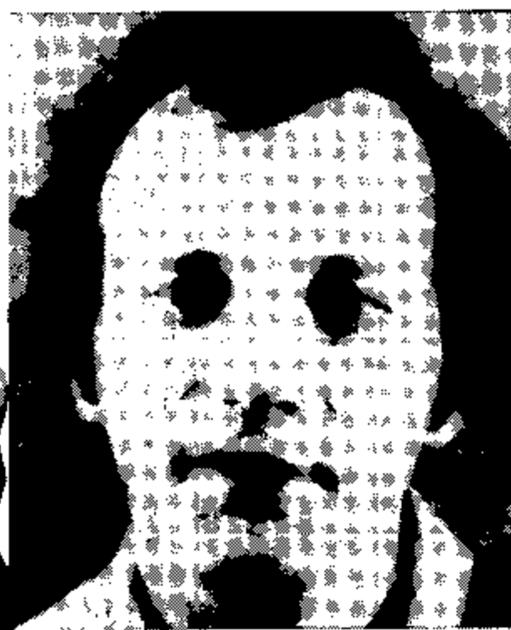
So in the month of November, when the final elements of the military takeover must have been being put together, the mass of union members saw their leaders engaged in apparently quite friendly talks with Jaruzelski—the head of the armed forces.

The inability of the radicals within Solidarity to cope with this manoeuvre by the regime had two effects.

The first and most obvious, was that the mass of the union's membership were lulled into a sense of false security. They were demobilised just at the time when the regime was preparing to mobilise its forces for a final confrontation. As late as 1 December 'Solidarity's negotiators expressed moderate optimism at the outcome of preliminary negotiations — Both sides showed a willingness to make concessions ...' (*II Manifesto*, 9 December 1981).

The second was to some extent to refurbish the image of the regime itself. Under Gierek and Kania it had lost its ability to draw behind it other sections of the population; its base had narrowed down to a couple of hundred thousand top managers, bureaucrats, police chiefs and army officers, and perhaps half a million middle ranking functionaries. Now Jaruzelski was trying to project himself as a new form of ruler, representing a hard-fought-for national

Kuron (below) started off believing that the regime could only be pressured. But Solidarity radicals like Rulewski (bottom right) and Gwiazda (top right) recognised that the movement could not limit itself in this way, but did not develop a clear alternative strategy.



The tendency of the Walesa grouping to ignore the feeling of other Solidarity leaders had already produced the beginnings of a split between 'moderates' and 'radicals' early in the year. At the time of the Bydgoszcz crisis in March the split became open: Rulewski and other Bydgoszcz leaders denounced Walesa from their hospital beds saying that 'Walesa has blundered. We can compromise on supplies of onions, but not on spilt blood'. The long time dissident Karol Modzelewski resigned as the union's spokesman in protest at Walesa's 'undemocratic behaviour'. Anna Walentynowicz — whose sacking had provoked the great strike in the Lenin shipyard the previous summer — was removed from her union position in the yard because she too opposed Walesa's compromise.

By the Solidarity Conference in the early autumn, the split was quite pronounced. It was said that although both Walesa and Gwiazda came from the Gdansk shipyards, they were not on speaking terms. Three candidates with various 'radical' views stood against Walesa for the presidency of the union and shared between them 45 per cent of the votes. And a number of 'experts' — intellectual advisors to the union of 'moderate' views — were voted off the new National Commission of the union.

Yet this did not fundamentally alter the approach of the leadership. Partly this was because Walesa was still allowed to nominate a presidium — the day to day leadership of the union between National

Commission meetings — packed with people who agreed with him. He was thus able to continue to urge an end to strikes and to proclaim the need for agreement with the government.

In truth, the 'radicals' did not have a clear alternative strategy to Walesa's. They demanded far more radical things than him — whether it was self management in the factories, free elections, or in Rulewski's case, a challenging of Poland's links with Russia — but did not have any mechanism other than the ones of simple trade unionism for achieving these things. Their aim remained to use the threat of strike action to get the regime to negotiate with them over concessions — not to build out of the workers' unity and strength created in the course of strike action a weapon capable of smashing the regime.

The radicals' successes at the Solidarity conference may have served to alarm the regime a little. But they did not alter the basic approach of the union to the regime.

The Solidarity congress ended on 7 October. For the next seven weeks the Solidarity leadership continued as before, to hold back the spontaneous movement at the base. On 17 October, when Jaruzelski replaced Kania as secretary of the regime's party — thus achieving a further concentration of power in military hands — Walesa seemed to welcome the change:

'At least it means power is concentrated in one man's hands. What we need is a

interest as against 'extremists' on all sides.

It is very difficult to tell — especially from a distance — how much effect this had in the final confrontation. But there are several indications that in the run up to the military takeover Jaruzelski did gain a certain popular support that had been lacking to his two predecessors.

A journalist with contact with Solidarity activists could write:

'Jaruzelski has a reputation, as premier, as an intransigent "liberal". As head of the army, he refused to use troops against strikers in 1970, 1976 and 1980. This has gained him great respect among the workers. And apart from this, he appears as a man of action more than a man of verbal promises'. (*II Manifesto*, 12 November 1980).

An opinion poll organised by Solidarity at this time 'showed that 95 per cent of the union's members put their faith in the union. In second and third positions came the church and the army, while the Communist Party was not even mentioned ...' (*II Manifesto* 22 November).

But another opinion poll was much more ominous from the union's point of view.

'Polls conducted by the Radio and TV public opinion centres showed that Solidarity's popularity, while still 70 per cent, had dipped from its summer high of 90 per cent, while 51 per cent was expressing approval of the government as opposed to 36 per cent a few months earlier'. (*Sunday Times*, 3 January 1981).

On 2 December the regime made a decisive move which should have destroyed all illusions in its intentions. It used hundreds of police with helicopters in a military style operation to smash an occupation by trainee firemen. It also announced it was calling upon parliament to grant it exceptional powers to ban strikes and demonstrations.

The immediate reaction of Walesa to the police operation was to urge continued moderation. He told a large crowd: 'We must stick together. The union is a powerful weapon hanging over the authorities — but it can't be triggered all the time'.

At a meeting of union activists in Radom the next day he repeated his plea for caution, maintaining that confrontation should be avoided and warning of the consequences of a general strike (*Financial Times* 4 December). But even he seems to have realised that the regime was moving towards confrontation. He went on to say, in words which the regime's radio broadcast a few days later in an attempt to discredit him, that 'confrontation is inevitable and confrontation will take place. Let us abandon all illusions. They have been thumbing their noses at us'.

The others at the meeting were much more radical than Walesa. They ignored his opposition to a general strike and voted to begin one the moment the government introduced its special law. And speakers went on to talk of a union organised referendum on the continuation of Communist Party rule, and if necessary the formation of a provisional government to oversee free elections. A former 'moderate' Zbigniew Bujak, chairman of Warsaw Solidarity, cal-

led for the formation of a workers' militia to operate during strike actions.

The radicals were at last beginning to talk in terms different to those of negotiations and winning the union to their positions. But they were doing so very late in the day, after the regime had had months to prepare its ground and when the union's strength had begun to decline. One speaker argued that about a third of the workers were beginning to accept the government's claim that it could solve the food crisis if only the strikes ended. Karol Modzelewski argued, 'The union is not as strong as it was; it is weaker and every activist knows it.'

Now the union had to try, at very short notice, to reactivate a membership which for months it had been criticising for being active. It was telling those who it had urged not to strike over food shortages now to prepare to strike over the right to strike. It was urging them to build a workers' militia to confront a government led by a general it had praised.

Confronting the army

In the week that followed, the union seems to have made some preparations for a confrontation. By 12 December, one report claimed: 'The majority of union activists see a confrontation as inevitable in the near future and are already taking counter measures in the factories; in the big factories the organisation of workers' militias is not infrequent nor is the forcing out of "orthodox" Communist Party members.' (*II Manifesto*, 12 December 1981).

But all this was too little and too late. The only way the union could win in an all-out confrontation was by a widespread and deep-rooted movement, challenging managerial prerogatives in each factory and the power of the police in each locality, questioning authority structures within ministries, giving support to every voice raised against discipline and hierarchy within the armed forces. This would have continually have thrown the regime on to the defensive, so that the bitter internal wrangling within it would have got worse and the possibilities of co-ordinated action by any of its forces would have been reduced to the minimum.

During the great upsurges of the Polish workers' movement in 1980 and again in the spring and summer of 1981, the Polish regime was forced on to the defensive in this way—its leaders did find it possible to give any consistent orders to those below them, and there were ripples of discontent within their armed forces.

Even in the highly privileged police, used to daily acts of repression, a movement began calling for the right to form a union linked with Solidarity. If the Solidarity leadership had had a *revolutionary* perspective, it would have called mass workers demonstrations in support of this movement, it would have leafleted every barracks and every police station, it would have offered protection in the factories to those from the ranks who the military authorities were trying to discipline. And alongside its open activity it would have encouraged the formation of secret groups of trusted supporters in as many military and police establishments as possible, ready to switch sides the moment the situation demanded it.

Against the background of such a movement — but only against such a background — it would have made sense to speak of workers' militias who were feebly armed and lacking in proper military training being able to defeat physically the police and the hardline sections of troops, while other sections of the army vacillated or came over to the workers.

Jaruzelski himself seems to have understood that. Certainly in three previous crises—in August 1980, March 1981 and the summer of 1981 — he had rejected calls from sections of the regime for military intervention, grasping that the spontaneous forward movement of the workers could tear apart his army. But by the beginning of December this spontaneous forward movement had stopped — or rather had *been stopped* by the repeated pleas of the Solidarity leadership.

It could not be restarted merely by the leadership doing a 180 degree turn. A mass movement only gathers strength as workers gain confidence for political battle from economic victories, and in turn see every political victory as feeding back into economic gains. Such confidence cannot be turned on mechanically by the leaders pressing a switch. Yet if the workers themselves lack such confidence, then they will never persuade any rank and file member of the armed forces that it is worth taking the immense risks involved in turning against his officers.

An army will only fall apart if its members think there is a good chance of the masses enjoying victory. Otherwise, every doubt within it will be stifled and it will operate as a monolithically efficient machine for carrying through repression.

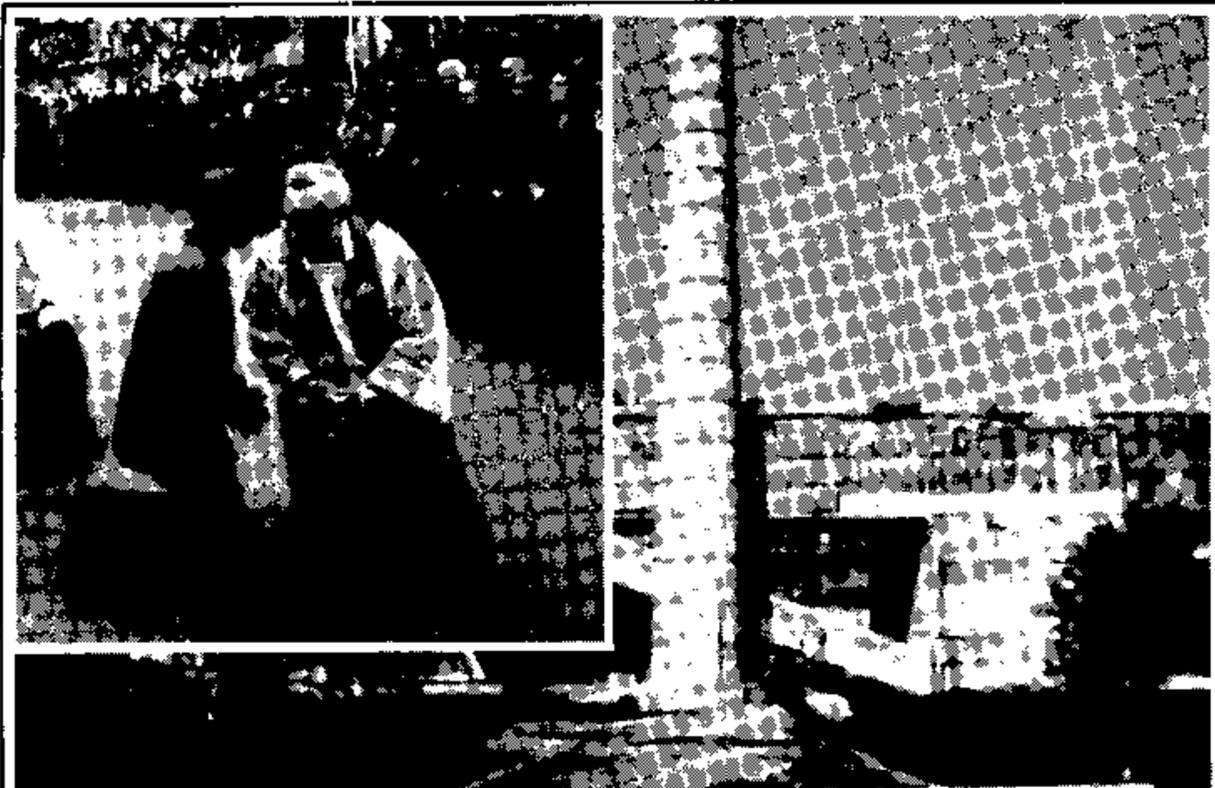
That was why Karl Marx could write back in 1848:

The defensive is the death of every armed rising; it is lost before it measures itself with its enemies. Surprise your antagonists while their forces are scattered, prepare the way for new successes, however small, but prepare daily ... rally in this way those vacillating elements to your side which always follow the stronger impulse and which always look for the safer side; force your enemies to retreat before they can collect their strength against you; in the words of Danton — audacity, audacity and still more audacity'.

Since Marx wrote, there have been numerous instances of the working class finding itself in situations where an all-out confrontation with the military forces of the state has become inevitable — but with a leadership which believes it can avoid such a confrontation, holding back workers from struggle and trying to conciliate their opponents until at the last possible moment, doing a complete about turn and expecting, miraculously, to enjoy victory. The result, almost invariably, has been serious defeat.

The about-turn of the Solidarity leadership was finalised at a meeting of the National Commission in Gdansk on 11-12 December. At this meeting:

'The majority of the Solidarity leadership took a position of total confronta-



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'People would display great faith in working class action, but still bow their knees before priests.' Just one set of hybrid ideas that characterise any working class upsurge.

tion and there were bitter attacks on Walesa for having taken part in the tripartite meeting with Jaruzelski and Glomp. The creation of a provisional government was a theme running through all the contributions.' (*II Manifesto*, 13 December 1981).

The extent to which Solidarity activists felt compelled by events to take a radical stand was shown by the way in which Jacek Kuron moved a six point resolution from the previous Radom meeting, calling for the union to hold a referendum on whether the Communist government should be replaced by a provisional government. Kuron was a former revolutionary socialist who had for

17 months insisted that his former revolutionary beliefs were 'unrealistic' and that it would be folly for the union to go beyond creating counter-institutions which would gain areas of freedom from the government while leaving the regime intact. At one stage in the early summer he had even played with the notion of a coalition 'government of national unity'. Yet now he was making proposals that only made sense as part of an insurrectionary onslaught upon the state.

It hardly mattered. That night all the delegates to the Gdansk meeting were arrested in their beds and interned. The union's membership awoke the following morning to find that the military had taken power, their union had been 'suspended' and that all strikes were illegal.

The battle of ideas

How was a union born from such a fantastic, spontaneous upsurge of workers' activity as that of July and August 1980 dominated so long by leaders who were concerned to dampen down further such activity?

The people who led the strikes and formed the union committees in the first place were neither hardened bureaucrats nor experienced rank and file activists. There were a few dissidents with years of prison and underground work behind them and a few veterans from the strike committees of 1970 or even 1956. But most were people taking

action and organising for the first times in their lives.

So, for example, the chairman of Solidarity's organisation in the Warsaw area explained 18 months ago:

'All our organisation is entirely new to us. It is run by people who have never organised a meeting or written a leaflet in their lives before.' (Quoted in *Socialist Review* 1980: 10)

This was true in every plant and every region. The union was not led by people who

had spent 10 years as shop stewards, five years as convenors, three years at Ruskin, 15 years sitting on the District Committee and then eventually ran for a full time position. It was built by people who were elected by their shops to strike committees in August and were delegates to a structure 10 million strong by October.

People's ideas are always shaped by the interaction of two things — the ideas that are dominant in the society around them and their experiences as they act together within that society. Which factor predominates depends to a large extent upon the degree of crisis in society and the level of collective struggle. In 'normal times' the ruling ideas are indeed the ideas of the ruling class — the notions that have been pumped into people's heads by the schools, the churches, the media and by the humdrum routine of every day life. At times of social convulsions and huge class conflicts new notions begin to emerge and to compete with these 'ruling ideas'. Consciousness is shaped by contradictory conceptions, some of which derive from collective self activity, others of which deny the very possibility of such self activity.

The tangled background

The Solidarity membership was no exception to this rule. On the one hand they had been through the great experiences of July and August 1980, with workers alone standing up against a monolithic state machine and forcing it, against all the odds, to concede their demands. On the other, they had been brought up in a society in which the prevailing ideas were a hotchpotch of Stalinist rhetoric, Polish nationalism and Catholic mysticism, and it was with this that they had to try to interpret their own self activity.

The result, inevitably, was the creation of weird, hybrid ideas. People would display great faith in working class action—but still bend their knees before priests. They would express an identity with long-established working class traditions by calling their union Solidarity — but in many cases would believe that President Reagan or Margaret Thatcher were their allies. They would hate the ruling party — but would identify with the army as an embodiment of the nation. They would oppose all authoritarianism — but stick pictures of the pre-war authoritarian nationalist Pilsudski on their walls. They would fight bitterly against corrupt local officials — and yet still believe in 'national unity' with these officials.

Only months of bitter struggle and of sharp ideological clashes could even begin to pull apart the contradictory elements of hybrid consciousness and create a real understanding of what society was and what needed to be done.

The process of ideological clarification was further complicated by another factor. The huge upsurge of the workers' movement pulled behind it many other sections of society — especially much of the middle class intelligentsia. These saw in the workers' action a way out of all the petty frustrations that had plagued their own lives. When the Gdansk shipyard occupied, a whole number of intellectuals went to the port to give the workers support and advice. The workers,

still lacking confidence in themselves, not only — quite rightly — welcomed this support enthusiastically, but often deferred to the allegedly superior organising and intellectual expertise of the 'advisors'.

The same process was repeated in a slightly different way in many of the small factories which were unionised in the aftermath of the Gdansk strike. Often the people elected to local union positions were not shop floor workers, but the 'intellectual elite' in the factory — the professional engineers, the upper grade white collar workers.

These people who began by following the lead of the shop floor were soon often taking over ideological leadership from the shop floor. Yet their interests were not quite the same as the mass of workers. They had relatively privileged positions within existing society, even if they did not like the ruling class. For them compromise, not confrontation was bound to be the highest goal.

Thus, one of Solidarity's 'advisors' Jadwiga Staniszkis has described the atmosphere in the first Gdansk negotiations when the 'experts' from both sides met together behind closed doors.

'A peculiar, semi-relaxed atmosphere, gentle, even ironic, prevailed. One reason was that the experts on both sides were more or less members of the same Warsaw milieu ... If it had only been a matter of our political attitudes we could easily have changed places ... This climate dangerously increased our mutual loyalty to each other ...'

This phenomenon too was something which often happens in great revolutions. Thus Trotsky described in his *History of the Russian Revolution* how, in the first days after the overthrow of the Czar in February 1917, the elections to the soldiers Soviets occurred:

'The soldiers trustfully elected those who had been for the revolution against monarchistic officers and knew how to say this out loud: these were volunteers, clerks, assistant surgeons, young wartime officers from the intelligentsia, petty military officials — that is, the lowest layer of the new middle caste ... The representatives of the garrisons thus turned out to be much more moderate than the soldier masses. But the latter were not conscious of this difference; it would reveal itself to them only during the experience of the coming months.'

Another factor of tremendous importance is the role of the Church. Both the Western press and Western Stalinists give the impression that the Catholic Church was the driving force behind the creation of Solidarity. The reality was very different. Throughout the last 18 months, the aim of the Church has been to prevent any great confrontation between the workers and the regime. At the height of the Gdansk occupation, the late Cardinal Wyszyński gave a sermon — the first televised in the country for years — in which he called for a return to work. At the height of the Bydgoszcz crisis in March the Pope urged a compromise, saying workers wanted to work not strike. On the day before the military takeover, Wyszyński's

successor Glemp issued what could only be seen as an attack on the radicals now making the running in Solidarity. In a letter to Walesa he spoke of 'menacing moods growing in our society which many see ending in confrontation, a sickness provoked above all by expressions of social hatred in contrast to the teachings of the Church.' And, of course, after the military had moved he urged 'Pole not to fight Pole' by engaging in active resistance.

The Church could not, however, simply turn its back on the workers' movement.

In Poland it is not in the position it is in, say, Italy, where it has vast holdings on the stock exchange. Its position depends on its ability to force the regime to make concessions to it — and often in the past, the regime has not been willing to, even going as far in the early 1950s as to put Wyszyński under house arrest. And so the Church has to maintain popular support as the only thing with which to bargain.

Polish nationalism

This means that at each great crisis point in the last 25 years, the Church has tried to give the impression of going so far with the opposition, while insisting that the aim must be compromise.

Because the Church maintains this position of semi-opposition and because in the past it has faced repression, it enjoys a level of popular support unknown in countries where it has always been tolerated. In Europe, only in Ireland — where also for centuries of British rule the Church faced repression — has it a similar popularity. And just as in Ireland it has always used its popularity against militant republicanism, so in Poland it has used it against any real militant resistance to the regime.

Finally the ideas of virtually all activists were, to some extent, influenced by an all pervading nationalism. It has to be remembered that Poland is like Ireland in one other respect, besides the role of the Church — its history has been one of long periods of national oppression. From the late 18th century right down to 1918 it was divided between Russia, Prussia and Austria, its language often suppressed, its people subject to draconian regulations. Since it had been the aristocracy who took the lead in the national insurrections against Russian rule in the nineteenth century, it was very difficult to establish an internationalist class consciousness among workers. In the rest of the Russian empire the Bolshevik Party always had the support of about half the organised workers. In Poland, by contrast, Rosa Luxemburg's revolutionary internationalist party was much smaller than the reformist, nationalist, Socialist Party.

Experiences from 1939 onwards served only to reinforce this nationalism — the second partition of the country, this time between Hitler and Stalin, (symbolised by the Katyn massacre of the Polish officer corps), the barbarity of the Nazi occupation (Poland was the only country to lose a greater proportion of its population in the war than Russia), the putting down of the Warsaw uprising and the near destruction of the city by German troops while Russian forces stayed stationary just across the Vistula in

1944, the horrors of forced industrialisation, forced collectivisation and Russian organised purges in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

Workers' lived experience has often been of repression that has hit *all* classes — even if it has usually been easier for the middle classes to evade its utmost consequences than for workers. Under those circumstances, national consciousness has all too easily overshadowed class consciousness. In Ireland, the radical ideology people struggling against oppression and exploitation traditionally moved towards was some version of republicanism, not socialism, so with nationalism in Poland.

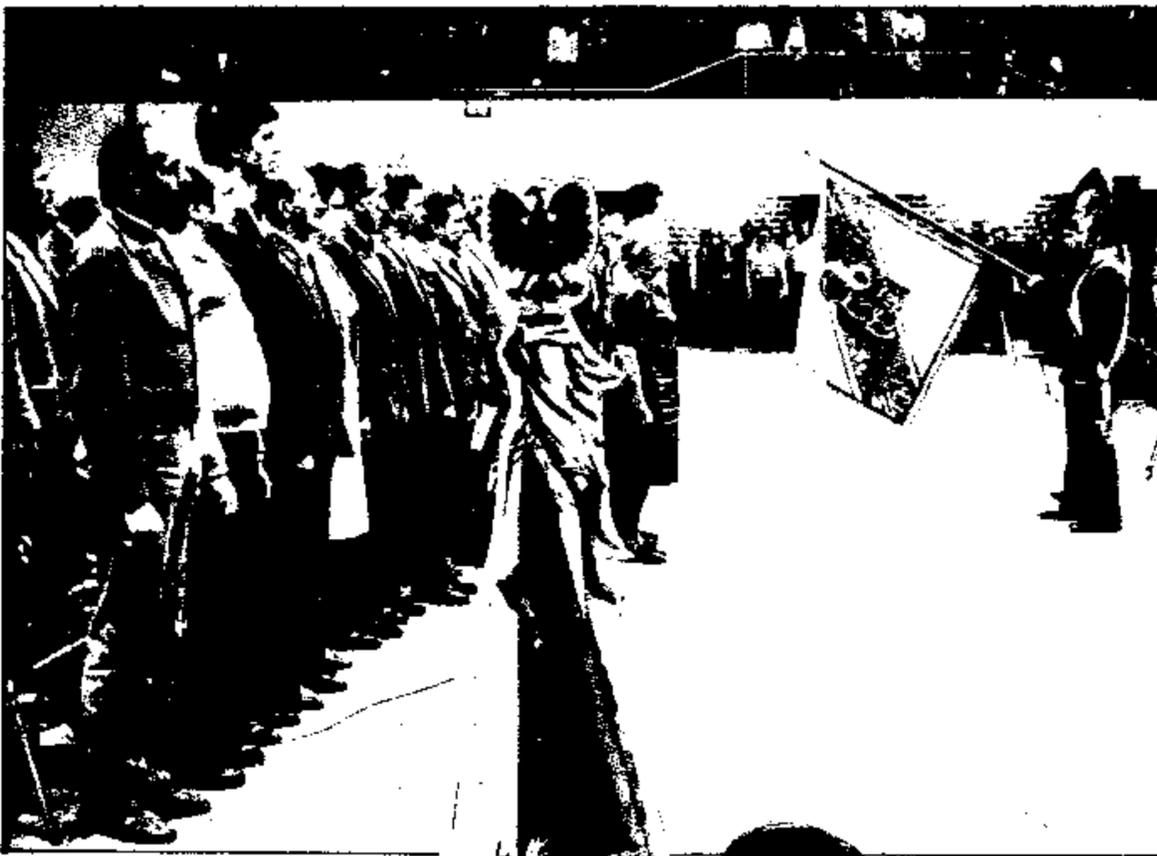
Hence the use of Polish colours and the Polish eagle by Solidarity — they play the same role as symbols of popular mobilisation as does the tricolour in Belfast.

Yet nationalism could only blind Solidarity members to their real enemies. The union was a product of industrialisation that had benefited a large and wealthy Polish ruling class (with salaries twenty times higher than a lot of workers, plus special schools, special clinics, special shops, state-funded villas, etc, etc) as well as its Russian overlords. That ruling class could all too easily take on to itself the garb of nationalism — especially when mixed with other old popular traditions like anti-Germanism and anti-semitism. After all the highest manifestation of the nation was the army — and by the autumn of 1981 the head of the army was also premier and party leader.

If some of those most discontented with the regime could move towards the right wing nationalist Confederation for an Independent Poland, with its nostalgia for the pre-war days, the regime itself could sponsor the nationalist Veterans Association and the anti-semitic rallies of the rabidly nationalist Grunwald Association. Significantly, when Jaruzelski addressed the nation after taking power, he was introduced as head of the army and premier, with no mention of his party position, and his justification for taking over was in order to save 'the nation' from 'catastrophe'.

Nationalism paralysed the movement in another way. Its hatred of Russia was usually accompanied by a feeling that nothing in practice could be done to ward off the Russian threat except for the movement to engage in 'self-limitation' so as not to challenge Russia's strategic interests. The most that could be done was to get reforms from the regime, while enabling it to assure the Russians that its contribution to Russian military might and the Warsaw Pact would not be endangered.

In practice this meant holding back the movement, discouraging 'unofficial strikes', street demonstrations and attempts to make inroads on the power of the state apparatus — in short trying to restrict the scale of mass radicalisation. Yet if the Russians did not intervene for 17 months and even left the final crackdown to the *Polish* army it was not because the Polish movement was unradical. They had intervened in Czechoslovakia 12 years before simply because a weak government had allowed discussion of mass strike action and independent politics to take place (especially in the intellectuals' appeal *2000 Words*). In Poland you had the



The two faces of nationalism. National anthem and flag at the Solidarity congress (above); and the army as the 'highest manifestation of the nation' (right).



reality of mass strike action and open political agitation, and not just discussion — and the Russians did not intervene.

In fact it was the radicalness of the Polish movement that frightened the Russians from invading. At a time when they were increasingly dependent for solving their own economic crisis on trade and investment links with Western Europe, the last thing they wanted was an Afghan type war in an advanced industrial state in the middle of Europe.

Groupings in Solidarity

Something else also held them back. This was fear of working class upheavals inside Russia itself. They feared a repetition, on a vastly more dangerous scale, of the strikes in their huge autoplants in June 1980, the street clashes which took place in Estonia later that year and the riot that broke out in the Caucasus town of Ordzhonikidze in the autumn of 1981. But many Poles were blinded by their nationalist disdain for all Russians, whether bureaucrats or workers, from grasping this.

The impact of these different pressures was to create within Solidarity three different — although by no means fully formed — tendencies.

The first was crystallised around Walesa and the Catholic 'experts' in the first months of the union's existence. It dominated the presidium of the union right up to the end and was strongly backed by the Church — Walesa had literally dozens of private meet-

ings with Wyszynski and then Glemp.

The second was the current influenced by the long time dissidents of KOR — especially Micknik, Kuron and Modzelewski.

These were much less prepared to concede any of the union's principled demands than Walesa and the Church-inspired current. But they had also long since gone back on previous revolutionary beliefs. They argued that the union had, by independent action, to force radical reform from the regime — and to avoid pushing for anything more than reform.

As Kuron wrote early in September 1980:

'We have to organise ourselves democratically and take the affairs of the country into our own hands. Yet full independence is impossible: we have to take into account the external forces guarding the leading role of the party in the state.

Three months later he elaborated:

'In Poland a great social movement is being born ... The people are taking their fate into their own hands. And nobody can stop them ... And anyway, to stop now would be to condemn themselves to catastrophe ...

'So we have on one side these great social movements, independent and self-governing in various spheres of life; but on the other side the need to preserve the so-called "leading role" of the Party, in other words its control over the central administration, the police and the army. It is necessary to reconcile these two

things. We must do this. We must form a completely new model resting on compromise.'

In the first upsurge of the workers' movement in the summer and autumn of 1980 such a perspective could seem to make sense. A regime which was taken by surprise and knocked off its balance was forced to retreat, conceding most of what the workers wanted. But as the crisis of the regime deepened, the perspective fell apart.

How could you refuse to put any brakes on the workers' movement and at the same time guarantee the regime's control over the police and the army? Especially when the regime could see the very success of the workers' movement threatened to undermine that control? How could you leave the regime could see that the very success of the workers' movement threatened to undermine its control? How could you leave the increased supply of goods in the shops?

By July 1981 this was absolutely clear to all concerned. At a Solidarity conference in Warsaw, the chairman of that region's union, Bujak, summed up the situation exactly:

'If we consider ourselves merely as a trade union, as the government expects us to, then we must think of ourselves as a trade union of seamen on a sinking ship.'

In the August issue of KOR's paper *Robotnik* there was a round table discussion by various leading KOR members and trade unionists on the way forward. The editor of the paper, Litynski, summed up the general feeling:

'We have arrived at a situation which seems to have no way out. The economy and the state are disintegrating. We can discuss pointlessly whether this decomposition results from conscious or semi-conscious sabotage by the apparatus of power or from the impotence of the power apparatus after the events of August 1980 ... Solidarity has accelerated this paralysing decomposition of the organs of power in a certain sense. The strategy that consists in standing aside to see how the regime moves and in making compromises with it seems ineffective. Solidarity loses its point and deludes itself.'

Bujak spelt out what the mood was among the workers:

'Our movement is weakening. At the beginning it was based on an implacable hatred for the regime and against the Party. But today that is not enough. Completely new motivations are necessary. The members of the union do not understand the tactics of the leadership ... The protest strikes and the local struggles do not succeed in uniting into a coherent plan. People were wary of me in a mass meeting at Ursus. Only when I explained that this self-management leads to a taking of power did people understand and agree with me ... In this phase people want a clear programme. It

doesn't matter too much whether they understand it, as long as they see it as a way out of the crisis. There exists a desire, one senses, for a strong government, although this would have to impose restrictions ...'

Kuron himself underlined this last danger:

'Part of society could turn to the idea of a strong government as a ray of hope. We can already see this idea grow around the figure of Jaruzelski ... They think a strong movement with the army as part can save the country.'

Thus the KOR approach inevitably broke down, with those who adhered to it wavering between the 'cool it' attitude of the Walesa group and the demands which could only mean an onslaught on the central power of the state. In practice, in the great arguments of 1981, different members of KOR took different sides, and people like Kuron would move from one position to the opposite and back again, until in the end, as we have seen, he proposed things which could only mean doing what he had ruled out as impossible.

The Solidarity radicals

The third tendency to emerge were the 'radicals'. In the strict sense of the term these were not a single tendency, but a variety of individuals and groupings characterised only by their distrust of the Walesa approach — hence the standing of three rival candidates in opposition to Walesa in the union elections.

They were activists desperately seeking some way out of the impasse they could see the movement entering, but with no clear idea what it was. Each could pick on some crucial aspect of the situation, but none could see how these different aspects fitted together into a coherent whole.

Reading their speeches to the Solidarity Congress, you have the impression of people trying to find their way out of a locked room, blindfolded. In the first days of December, the blindfolds began to slip a little — but then it was too late.

The failure of any of the groups within Solidarity to deal with the growing crisis led to another interesting phenomenon — a growing interest in the idea that the formation of *parties* could somehow overcome the inability of the union to act.

By the summer the right wing nationalist Confederation for an Independent Poland was growing rapidly — aided by the way the imprisonment of a few of its leaders made it seem like a persecuted, radical alternative both to the regime and the Solidarity.

But the demand for parties was much wider than that. People who a year before identified the very notion of a party with the regime's Stalinist party now saw some such structure as the way out of the impasse. As Kuron told the Solidarity National Commission in July:

'The awareness of the necessity for a transformation is extraordinarily strong. Hence the demand for a party. Wherever we turn everywhere there is the call for a

party. I've already heard the demand several times in this hall: "Let's form a party".'

Yet the formation of parties was conceived of as something separate from, even if parallel to, Solidarity. It was not thought of as a way of organising within the base structure of the union to co-ordinate the spontaneously developing struggles, regardless of what the 'moderate' presidium wanted, leading them in the direction of an assault on state power. For the notion persisted that Solidarity itself could not take power.

For Kuron the union had to preserve itself as a means of defending workers against whatever power existed, and therefore could not take power itself:

'Solidarity cannot carry out the work of transformation and formation of a new system. There is no one who can carry it out, therefore we must form a party which would carry it out, so the argument goes ...'

But:

'A party which overthrows the existing order and takes power becomes a party state. That we recognise already from 37 years experience'.

Yet a party which merely struggled for parliamentary elections, with the intention of taking part in them would, he admitted, get nowhere, since it did not yet have the means of bringing them about.

The talk of parties that took place was very much like an engine revving without a clutch: it did not connect with anything. Whatever its popularity among a minority of activists, it was, for the mass of ordinary workers something very remote: 'People are not interested in parties. Economic power, yes, but not political parties,' Bujak noted.

What was lacking in all this ideological ferment was a revolutionary Marxist pole of attraction — a genuinely revolutionary socialist tendency, showing in theory and practice the possibility of building the embryo of a new society out of the workers' self-activity and smashing the old state.

Such a tendency would have been able to fill the vacuum that existed from the summer onwards in terms of alternative policies for Solidarity and to have posed the question of the party in a way which connected with the movement.

It could have done so by showing that the party is not something that exists outside of the fighting organisations of the class, with their necessary openness and democracy, but rather a way in which those activists in these organisations who share a common revolutionary conception of the way to resolve the crisis, work together. In this way they co-ordinate their experiences and offer a coherent lead to the rest of the class, supporting *all* the workers' struggles, even those disowned by the national union presidium, attempting to point them in a common direction of challenging state power and bureaucratic state capitalist property relations at every point.

What is more it could have begun serious preparations for the inevitable confrontation with the state long before the rest of the union saw the need after 2 December.

A union can sanction an insurrection. But it cannot make the preparations for it. For, although the precondition for a successful insurrection is mass, open, public agitation involving millions of people, there has also to be secret, underground operations aimed at arming workers and at building cells of reliable supporters within the police and armed forces of the enemy. The most advanced workers, organised as a party, can do that, but an open organisation of virtually the whole class, like a union, cannot.

Furthermore, if you wait until you have won the whole class for an insurrection before making certain preparations, you are almost bound to be too late in doing so. For once the organisations of the class declare for insurrection, the ruling class is going to hit back, whatever the cost.

The fact that not even the embryo of a party existed in Poland is not all that surprising. The rise of Stalinism all but destroyed authentic socialism throughout the world for nearly two generations. The notion of socialism became detached from and opposed to the notions of workers self-activity and human liberation. In the West this meant that 'workers' parties' developed that could never lead workers struggles to power. In the East the effect was even worse: it meant that workers came to identify revolution with repression, socialism with slavery. Those who had seen the concentration camp with red flags above it could hardly be expected to sing their praises.

The fact that the official ideology of the society was a bowdlerised form of 'Marxism', far from aiding workers to understand the world, makes it more difficult. For they see this ideology as an integral part of an alien world, something that cannot possibly aid them. I know of foreign students who have rushed out to the bookshops of Warsaw or Prague to buy cheap editions of Marx or Lenin to be greeted with amazement by their East European fellow students: 'What are you wasting your money on that for? It's not on your course'.

The absent alternative

On top of this, it has to be remembered that the building of an oppositional party as opposed to small activist groups was all but impossible until the Gdansk strike forced the regime right back on the defensive. When such parties have been built inside totalitarian regimes, it has usually been under circumstances where, not only is the regime in crisis, but where there has also been aid from countries where large fellow parties can operate more or less openly — that was the case with the Marxist parties in Czarist Russia or the Communist, Maoist and Trotskyist parties in Spain in the last decade of Francoism. The experience of Stalinism meant that the Polish communities abroad were too right wing and the workers' movement too uninterested to provide such aid in Poland's case.

That does not mean that there were no Marxists active in Poland. At one stage Kuron and Modzelewski had been revolutionary Marxists, attracting at least some students in Warsaw around them in the mid-60s. They retreated into a form of reformism, but some of that tradition seems to



What is remembered about the Chilean coup is the naked repression. But what is forgotten is the powerful base it had in the rightwing parties and the middle class. Jaruzelski lacks that base.

have survived. Certainly in the summer of 1980 there were some revolutionary Marxists in the capital and a few Marxist articles appeared in the Szczecin paper of Solidarity.

But it is a big step from a few individuals making Marxist propaganda to the creation of even the beginnings of a network of Marxist activists in the factories and mines, let alone the barracks and the police stations. Against the background of widespread distrust of Marxism and with the powerful anti-Marxist ideologies embodied in the 'official' oppositional arguments to the regime of the Catholic Church and the Western radio stations, it is not surprising that step was not taken.

After all, Marxism in the West took a very long time to establish a foothold in the revolutionary workers' movement. The Communist Manifesto was published in 1848. Yet until at least the mid-1870s the predominant ideologies inside the workers' movement were a version of the Jacobin ideology of the

bourgeois revolution (Blanquism), a hankering back to the society of small commodity producers that preceded capitalism (Proudhonism) and a reformism that looked to collaboration with the absolutist state (Lassallianism). Even when the workers of Paris held power in the Commune of 1871, they did so on the basis of ideologies not based on workers' power. The result was a long period in which unnecessary defeats occurred, with only a handful of survivors from each defeat slowly realising the truth of what Marx said and preparing the ground for subsequent victories.

Stalinism has meant that what happened during the youth of industrial capitalism in Western Europe now has to be repeated during its old age in Eastern Europe. It is only through horrible, bloody experiences of trial and error, that the best workers will come to a Marxist understanding of the state capitalist societies and the historic role of their own class.

What future for generals?

Jaruzelski has inflicted a serious defeat on Poland's workers. He has seized their leaders and activists. He has broken their strikes and occupations. He has dismantled their national and regional organisations. He has forced what organisation still exists in individual plants to operate completely clandestinely. He has created widespread demoralisation.

It will take a long time to recover from

this defeat. We cannot tell from this distance whether it will be a question of years, as after the military coups in Chile or Argentina, or whether a shorter timespan will elapse, as after the successive waves of repression directed against Spanish workers in Franco's last years. All we can say is that for the moment those activists who remain at large are having to start all over again the arduous and dangerous task of building up

the elements of workers' organisation.

Yet at some stage a revival of the workers' movements is going to occur. For Jaruzelski is still a very long way from solving all his problems. You can do many things with bayonets, but, as Trotsky once noted, you cannot sit on them for long.

An army of 300,000 can patrol the main streets with its tanks, it can break down the gates of factories, it can put up cordons to stop people moving at night, it can even go in and make people work by pointing its machine guns. But it cannot, by itself, penetrate every aspect of a nation of 30 million people, of ten million workers. It cannot police their thoughts, it cannot stop them muttering, it cannot avoid the muttering turning into go-slows, local sit-in strikes, new underground forms of organisation, and, above all, it cannot stop accumulated bitterness breaking out into new mass strikes and struggles on the streets when it is least expecting them.

Jaruzelski's narrow base

For that reason the complete destruction of a workers' movement always involves more than just action by a country's army. It also involves the existence of a popular mass who support the repression. Thus, the suppression of the Paris Commune in 1871 was carried out by an army from Versailles — but it was actively applauded by nearly half of Paris, the bourgeois districts in the west, and by much of rural France. Mussolini and Hitler were able to do what purely military governments would never have been able to achieve, because they enjoyed the active backing of mass, petty bourgeois movements. When Franco staged his uprising in Spain in 1936, at least a third of the population were prepared to flock to his banner. Pinochet's coup in Chile in 1973 could only produce a stable regime because it received initial backing from powerful parties of the right and centre — which between them received more than half the popular vote — and from mass petty bourgeois movements like that of the lorry owner-drivers.

All of Jaruzelski's attempts to portray himself as a military patriot, concerned only with 'restoring order' have not yet succeeded in winning for him such masses. The regime had enormous problems before the 13 December coup because its only sure support lay with the 200,000 odd people who hold the most privileged positions close to the central political bureaucracy and the half a million or so petty functionaries who, by feathering their nests through one form of corruption or another, had earned the enduring hatred of the mass of workers and peasants. The military takeover has cracked together the heads of the warring factions within these privileged classes, and thus been able to make sure that things get done, at least for the time being. But it has not been able to widen its support beyond them.

If anything, it has lost the support which Jaruzelski himself enjoyed before the coup.

An uncensored journalist's report from Warsaw tells how:

'Almost nobody believes Jaruzelski's claim that there was no other option (than the coup) ... Popular hatred for the WRON (Jaruzelski's ruling council) is

widespread ... and everybody calls the leadership the Crow ... ('wron' in Polish). Poles today are not looking over their shoulders at Moscow. The swell of passive, underground resistance and hate centres firmly on the Crow. Almost nobody blames the Russians. All the talk is about the Polish military and police ...' (*Sunday Times*, 3 January 1982).

The scale of the communication clamp down is actually a sign of the regime's weakness. If it had a mass, popular base of any sorts, it would not need to close down telephone systems completely (a measure which itself must have devastating consequences for the running of the economy) nor to ban travel from one city to another. It would have supporters in every section of every factory, in every street, in every shop, only too willing to denounce anyone acting or talking in a suspicious way.

Of course, Kadar in 1956 and Husak in 1969 were similarly isolated. But they had advantages Jaruzelski did not. Both had at their disposal half a million or so Russian troops—prepared in Kadar's case to murder 20,000 workers and to deport to the Soviet Union thousands more, in Husak's case to threaten such measures if 'normalisation' was obstructed. The Russians and their allies have shown enormous reluctance this time round to get involved directly.

Secondly the Hungarian upheaval came at the close of what could be called the phase of primitive accumulation of state capitalism — when basic industries were built up at the cost of enormous barbarities. It was therefore possible for the victorious counter-revolution to buy a degree of reluctant consent to its rule by returning to a more orderly tempo of accumulation and raising real wages by up to 20 per cent.

In Czechoslovakia the system was already passed the stage where that was possible, but workers did not suffer materially worse conditions under the Husak regime than before.

By contrast all Jaruzelski can offer workers is the six-day week instead of the five-day week, an unprecedented level of price rises, and threats to shut 'unprofitable factories'.

He cannot offer workers anything positive, because of his urgent need to pay the interest owed to the Western bankers. The economic crisis today is not one of economic expansion, that can be overcome by going more slowly or by opening up to the world market. It is one of economic contraction, produced, in part, precisely by the closeness to the world market, and can only be solved by the most unpopular of measures.

Jaruzelski seems at least partially aware of how isolated his army is. He seems to have suffered from the delusion when he staged the coup that, once in complete control of things, he would be able to get the 'moderate' wing of Solidarity to negotiate an agreement with him. As one Western correspondent has reported:

'It is becoming increasingly clear that the authorities hoped to enter into some sort of dialogue with moderate leaders of the free trade union. Diplomats analysing the actions of the military authorities and their treatment of the Solidarity leader,

Mr Walesa, immediately after the takeover, believe they banked on separating him from radicals in the leadership and talking him into playing a role in national reconstruction.' (*Guardian* 5 January).

There is another indication that Jaruzelski understands that his base is very narrow — the fact that the wholesale imprisonments have not been accompanied by wholesale shootings as in Hungary or Chile. It is not that there are not the thugs in the police to do the shootings. It is that that scale of bloodshed would reduce still further the possibilities of getting the active collaboration from at least a minority of the workforce which is necessary to get industry running efficiently and to pay off the country's debts.

The fact that three weeks after the coup, industrial production was only 50 to 60 per cent of normal and lost production amounts to \$100m a day (according to one Western trade attache. *Guardian*, 5 January) shows how enormous his problems in this respect are.

Yet without widespread bloodshed, the general is not going to cow the workers into submission for all that long.

The economic crisis remains

None of this means his regime is going to collapse immediately. He has the guns and the tanks, and for the moment that is enough to break up occupations and demonstrations. What is more, with all the reins of state power in his hands, he will be able to buy the allegiance of sections of the middle class.

But, with his narrow base, it will not be long before he runs into all the problems that beset the regime even before the creation of Solidarity 18 months ago, only in a more acute form.

Jaruzelski has militarised the management of industry, putting officers to watch over the action of the planners and enterprise bosses. Presumably this is because he thinks — in the manner of military gentlemen everywhere — it was just personal slovenliness and ineptness that produced the

crisis, the wrangling between different interests, the corruption. He will soon find how mistaken he was.

For the moment 'increasingly reliable pointers suggest that industry is being strangled by shortages of raw materials, components, communications and by a failure to make decisions because martial law has created an administrative vacuum.' (*Financial Times* 5 January).

Because the military have no other base of support that the corrupt upper layers of society, they will rapidly come to share all the vices of those layers. Already there are reports that underneath the veneer of military control 'there continue to be signs that the party is wracked by infighting between hardliners, radicals and moderates ...' (*Financial Times*, 5 January). Doubtless it will not be long before such infighting is taking place between different generals, as they listen first to one voice then another in their desperate search for a wider base of social support and a way out of the economic crisis.

Those Solidarity activists who remain at large will not find it easy to rebuild organisation at first. But over time rebuilding should be possible. There will be all sorts of cracks in the regime that can be taken advantage of. For example, once the immediate post-coup emergency measures are removed (and a near-bankrupt regime cannot afford to lose \$100m a day indefinitely) many managers will be very eager indeed to increase production at all costs — it will make all sorts of concessions to avoid lightning stoppages. In this way the confidence of workers in their ability to fight and win will be rebuilt. As that happens in the crevices of society where the military machine cannot reach, the internal contradictions of that machine will increase. And as that happens, the likelihood will grow of new splits in the regime that the workers' movement can take advantage of to rebuild its national structures.

All this will take time. Wounds never heal overnight, and the Polish workers' movement has suffered serious wounds. But they need not be fatal. The class which rose again after the defeats of 1957, the defeats of 1970, the defeats of 1976 can rise again after the defeat of 1981.

Bankers and Cold Warriors

'Western governments yesterday generally sought to calm fears raised by the crackdown in Poland. They also avoided openly siding with Solidarity ... In Brussels Alexander Haig, the US secretary of state said he saw no signs the Soviet Union was about to intervene ... The general Western approach is to avoid dramatising the situation ... It was for this reason that NATO did not call an emergency meeting yesterday, diplomats in Brussels said'.

That was what the *Financial Times* could report the day after Jaruzelski's coup. The message from Washington, Bonn and London was loud and clear: the Russians had not intervened directly, so there was little for anyone to worry about.

The message came across in the editorials

of the serious newspapers on both sides of the Atlantic. The *Washington Post* described Jaruzelski's action as the last possibility for Poland. The *Christian Science Monitor* said he had in reality moved in an extremely moderate way. *The Guardian* insisted:

'There can be no doubt that General Jaruzelski, a man of patriotic and moderate reputation who has often repeated his refusal to turn his guns on restive workers, acted out of sheer desperation ...'

Yet within days the response had shifted markedly. The American government abandoned its low key approach and declared 'indirect' Russian intervention had taken place. Reagan announced economic sanctions against Russia. The whole Western

press proclaimed undying support for Solidarity. And then a bitter wrangle broke out between the Americans with their demand for action against both Russia and the Polish regime, and the European powers, led by West Germany and backed by Japan and the Vatican who advocated friendly pressure on Jaruzelski to proceed with 'reforms'.

The unified 'soft' Western response of the first couple of days was the honest response. For months the American and European banks had been urging the Polish regime to reassert itself so as to pay the interest repayments it owed them. Only ten days before a delegation of top bankers had flown into Warsaw and told the government unless it found some way to pay \$500m interest immediately, they would declare the country bankrupt.

The American banks in particular had been insistent that the Polish government squeeze the population to get the necessary cash. This was despite the fact that they had already made massive profits from their Polish lending. The *Wall Street Journal* reported five days before the coup that the bankers had 'found in governments like Poland borrowers who will pay at rates Western industrial powers would scorn. Some bankers privately boast that even were they forced to write off their Polish loans now they might show a profit on their loans over the last decade, so lucrative have been the deals'. Or, as one West German banker put it in the summer: 'The US banks see the Polish problem as no different from that of Bolivia or Nicaragua' *Euromoney*, July 1981).

It was hardly surprising that the banks welcomed the Polish coup just as they had welcomed the Bolivian coup or the Turkish coup. The day it took place, a West German banker told the *Financial Times*:

'What I am saying may be a bit brutal, but I think the Polish government was no longer in a position to govern the country. I now see a chance for Poland to return to a more normal working schedule and this could be a good thing for the banks.'

Mr Bernard Butcher of the Bank of America insisted:

'Whoever is running the country, we wish them the best and hope there is some return to a more productive economy.' (*Financial Times*, 14 December).

Two things produced the shift to a different governmental and press reaction in the days which followed.

First, was the extent of the resistance to the coup. It was not only that the Western ruling classes had a lot to gain ideologically by pretending to identify with this. More importantly, perhaps, it meant that the banks were not getting the 'more productive economy' they wanted.

Second, the Americans realised they had a heaven-sent opportunity to achieve international goals they had long been striving for — goals which had nothing whatsoever to do with Poland.

The US capitalism has faced a growing problem over the last decade. Although still having by far the biggest Western economy,

it no longer enjoys the absolute supremacy it used to. Its manufacturing industries are increasingly losing out to the Europeans and Japanese. The only area in which it has absolute supremacy over the other Western states is in military capability. But the cost of maintaining this has been undercutting still more its ability to compete economically.

It therefore has increasingly looked to military responses to international crises as the way to achieve its goals — in Central America, in the Middle East, and above all in relation to Russia. It believes that on the military front it can both humiliate those who would challenge US interests and force the other Western powers to accept policies that suit its needs. This is especially true in Europe; an intensification of the new cold war will force the Europeans to cling more closely to the US and, in the process, to bear a much greater burden of the Western Alliance's arms budget.

'The Americans quite cynically, decided to use the Polish crisis as a means of pulling the West Germans back into line.'

Not surprisingly, the more economically competitive Western states do not agree. The West Germans and the Japanese feel they do not need a Rapid Development Force to get their way in the Middle East or Central America — the Libyans, the Iranians, the Nicaraguans, even a radical regime in El Salvador will want to buy their goods and borrow their money regardless of the military balance. And when it comes to the Russians, the West Germans are in the middle of concluding a deal for a vast gas pipeline which will be massively profitable over the next 20 years. The Russians need that pipeline desperately and so, the West German government feels, they will not do anything to upset West German capitalism—even if its arms capability is not all that it might be.

These rows between the Americans and the Europeans were sharpening in the weeks before the Polish coup. The West Europeans made it clear they were not happy about the Camp David approach to the Middle East which placed complete dependence on Egypt and excluded the PLO. They boycotted Reagan's attempts to take sanctions against Gaddafi. A mere two days before the coup, they rejected US pressure to increase financing for NATO.

Perhaps most worrying for Reagan who was attempting to hot up the new Cold War were the friendly meetings the West German Chancellor Schmidt had first with Brezhnev and then, just as the Polish coup was taking place, with the East German leader Honecker. One of the great fears of the Americans for at least three decades has been that the Germans might be tempted to move to closer relations with the Russians at

the expense of their contribution to the Western Alliance, thus threatening still further the US's ability to protect its interests world wide. The meetings could be interpreted as tiny steps in that direction.

The Americans, quite cynically, decided to use the Polish crisis as a means of pulling the West Germans back into line. By raising the level of hysteria over Poland, the White House believed it could damage West Germany's relations with both East Germany and Russia, and repair the cracks in NATO.

If anything, the US has succeeded only in making the cracks wider. While the Americans try to create cold war hysteria over the Polish events, the West Europeans try to play them down. Reagan calls for sanctions against Russia. The West Germans meet with the Polish generals' emissary, Rakowski, to discuss continuing economic co-operation in return for cosmetic reforms which will give the military dictatorship a less obviously oppressive appearance.

These developments complicate the situation for Western socialists wanting to organise solidarity with our Polish brothers and sisters. We have to be doing our utmost to help them in their hour of need, using whatever meagre levers are at our disposal to ease the level of repression and to provide material support.

But at the same time, we have to avoid like the plague getting involved in operations that directly or indirectly help Reagan to intensify the Cold War.

Such efforts are already afoot in Britain, where the 'Polish Solidarity Campaign' has organised a demonstration with Tory and Social Democrat Cold Warriors on the platform, and the right wing union leaders, Chapple and Basnett have run an Albert Hall Rally of NATO enthusiasts from all four national political parties.

People who have long fought for the interests of American imperialism inside the working class movement, who supported the war against Vietnam and who never opened their mouths in defence of those suffering from the coup in Turkey or the political murders in El Salvador, are using the Polish events to undermine the movement against nuclear weapons and the new generation of missiles. The irony is, of course, that were these weapons ever to be used in a 'theatre war' among those to be exterminated first would be the population of Poland, including the 10 million Solidarity members.

The task of the Chapples and the Basnetts is made easier by the fact that a sizeable chunk of the Labour left are still influenced by Stalinist hangovers that prevent them showing the necessary solidarity with the Polish workers. For example, an excellent anecdote to the attempts to exploit Poland by the Cold Warriors would have been if CND had called for a solidarity demonstration of its own, making the connections between the struggles against repression and war, East and West. This too was not done because of the residual influence of Stalinism within the movement, and the field has been left open to the hypocrites of the right.

The onus falls upon us to fight for solidarity actions that genuinely help the Polish workers and sharply distance ourselves from the murderers in the White House.

Tony Cliff's *State Capitalism in Russia*

The Polish events are making many socialists look again at old assumptions about Eastern Europe. Mike Haynes argues that a great deal of enlightenment is to be obtained by reading a book first written 34 years ago, when Stalin was still alive and the number of genuine socialists opposed to him was miniscule.

If you haven't read Tony Cliff's *State Capitalism in Russia* it's about time you did. What you'll find there is a mass of information to show up the travesty of the claim that any sort of socialism exists in Russia. But if that were all that Cliff's book contained then it would just be one among many—although a pathbreaking one.

In fact Cliff's purpose is more than this. He aims to show why it is that Russia and societies like it can only be understood as specific forms of capitalism—as state capitalism. And it is this argument that still makes his book such a vital one for socialists today.

Of course, the view that the Soviet Union is a land flowing with milk and honey has few supporters on the left today. Even within the Communist Party people tend to

see it as some kind of degenerate form of socialism. But what they deny is that this degeneration has gone so far as to turn it into a capitalist state. However degenerate it may be, however barbaric its political forms, however much it acts like a capitalist state, they still hold on to the idea that there is some core there which is non-capitalist.

What this core is they can't quite agree on. Some find it in planning, others find it in nationalisation, still others would have you believe it's there in the cheap fares on the Moscow underground! What you can be sure of is that the one thing they do not base it on is the Russian working class.

The socialism they see there is not a socialism of self-emancipation. It is not something they control and run. No—if anyone claims to find socialism in Russia they find it in just those institutions that dominate and oppress every detail of the lives of ordinary Russians. They find it in precisely those features of Polish society today, for example, that millions of Poles joined Solidarity to protect themselves against.

But if this is so where does it leave the idea that generations of socialists have fought for—the idea of socialism as the working class taking control of society through its own action so that no longer the few rule over the many?

Cliff's answer is that it leaves it nowhere

and it is here that his book really takes off. He shows in detail how Russian workers were systematically robbed of the gains that they had made in 1917 and how, ever since the first five year plan began in 1928, they have been exploited to feed the might of the Soviet economy over which they have no control. He then shows how the attempts to defend this in Marxist terms have ripped the very heart out of Marxism as an idea of workers self-emancipation. The real tragedy of the Russian revolution was not just that it was lost—though that is bad enough—but that in attempting to defend the wreckage of that revolution the very idea that was fought for in 1917 is lost. Cliff's book recaptures that idea.

There are some on the left who would accept this and still draw back from calling the Soviet Union capitalist. They argue that it does not have the features they associate with capitalism—private property and markets. Planning and nationalisation may not make it socialist but they still distinguish it from capitalism. Cliff's great achievement is to show this argument up for the dangerous nonsense that it is.

The drive to accumulate

Capitalism cannot be reduced to a set of timeless institutions. It is the most dynamic society that has ever existed and its form is constantly changing. It is a set of social relations that work through different forms, and at the centre of these relations is the competitive drive to accumulate capital. Production is expanded in order to expand production further, for to fail to do so is to lose out in the competitive race. And this drive, Cliff argues, works as much through state property as it does through private property.

He shows how in 1917 the revolution tried to break the drive to accumulate, but that with the beginning of the first five year plan it once again became central to Russian society. Whereas once the revolution had set out to change the world, under Stalin, the aim became no more than to beat the capitalist world on the terms that it set the Soviet Union. To catch up and overtake—to outdo capitalism at its own game—was the end to which the revolution had been brought.

This, Cliff argues, is the real meaning of the planning mechanism. It has never existed to meet human needs. It does not serve the interests of the Russian population because they have no say in it. Each year it is used to pump out their surplus labour, to invest it in bigger and better machines, bigger and better weapons as the Russian state tries to compete with the West. Russian workers are used to build the power of the USSR Ltd.

Of course, to say that what exists in Russia is a form of capitalism is not to say that it is identical with what exists in Britain. It is a special form—what Cliff calls 'bureaucratic state capitalism'. It is a society whose structure is dominated by a bureaucratic state. But the basic processes that determine how that society works are the same as those in the West. It is a capitalist drive that puts life into these different forms and which ties them together with Western forms, just as that same capitalist drive ties together the very different forms in, say, Britain, Brazil,



India, Japan.

This part of Cliff's argument is vital, and it shows that his analysis is not just relevant to Russia. Since the book was first written in 1947 the trend, even in the West has been towards more nationalisation, more state control and more state planning. The failure of the Tories to currently reverse these trends in British capitalism is a sign of how strongly rooted they are.

Thus when Cliff argues that Russia is a form of state capitalism he does not picture it as an especially unique form. What has happened in Russia contains features that capitalism everywhere have taken up and developed in an intensified form. The real uniqueness of Russia lies in the way that this occurred on the broken back of the revolution.

Here, though too few on the left have recognised it, Cliff connects up with the thinking of the early Bolsheviks themselves. In fact, it was they who first developed the idea of state capitalism, but they developed it as a theory to explain the basic tendencies of world capitalism. Their argument was that as capitalism developed and competition intensified, so huge monopoly capitals would intertwine with their states to form state capitalisms. The future, said Bukharin, lies with forms that are close to state capitalism, and Lenin echoed this when he wrote of 'state monopoly capitalism'—a term he used interchangeably with 'state capitalism'.

It is this that leads to the vital political lesson of Cliff's book. For the argument about state capitalism is not so much about Russia as about the nature of capitalism here and now. The workers and ex-workers of British Steel and British Leyland know to their cost the real meaning of planning and nationalisation. They have no illusions that Michael Edwards runs a socialist enclave in British capitalism.

But what are forms like British Leyland or British Steel but forms of state capitalism? It is here that Cliff's arguments link directly to revolutionary politics in Britain today.

We are faced today with a growing demand on the left for radical alternatives, but too many still think in terms of nationalisation and planning. Even those who have shaken off the deadweight of Russia still fudge the issue of the role of workers control. More democracy—yes but the root of their vision is not workers themselves taking control and changing the course of history. And the danger is that so long as they fail to link their politics to the politics of workers themselves breaking the old society, they will be no more than proponents of British state capitalism.

We cannot change the history of the Russian revolution, but we can learn the lessons that Cliff draws in this book. The central one is that socialism is about self-emancipation and that is just as much a fight against the state capitalisms of British Leyland and the USSR Ltd as it is against the private capitalism of ICI. And if we can learn that lesson and win, the result will be a society as different from modern Russia as chalk is from cheese. It will be a society that truly expresses the hopes of 1917 because once again and more firmly this time the mass of society will control and will make their own history.



John Sturrock (Network)

Training or taming?

The Tories' proposed Youth Training Scheme has produced howls of outrage from Labour and trade union leaders. But, Gareth Jenkins argues, they accept much of the thinking behind the scheme.

The government will do anything, it seems, to fiddle the unemployment figures. It has already removed 20,000 people who are 60 or over, by persuading them to take extra social security in return for not registering as unemployed. Now it wants to remove some 300,000 at the bottom end of the age scale.

Norman Tebbit, minister for employment, intends to bring in a new Youth Training Scheme in 1983, lasting one year and covering all 16 year-old school leavers. It will replace the much criticised Youth Opportunity Programme (already covering 50 per cent of school leavers) and reflects many of the ideas put forward by the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) last May in its consultative document, *A New Training Initiative*. This massive expansion will, it is claimed, remedy some of the defects of the existing scheme: long enough to provide proper training, it will combine planned work experience with a minimum of three months off-the-job training or further education.

But there has been an outcry over the way in which the government plans to operate the scheme. In effect, the new one-year training scheme will become compulsory since no school leaver will be able to draw dole money till September of the following year. Trainees will be paid an allowance—but no more than approximately £15 a week. This compares with the present YOP trainee allowance of £23.50 (about to go up to £25), hardly a princely sum as it is. Thus, at a stroke, the government will manage to cut the unemployment figures and to make a considerable saving in benefit at the same time. It will also place a heavy burden on working class families as the total amount of

real income is reduced.

Predictably, Labour politicians and trade union leaders have been outraged. 'Slave labour' was the comment from Bootle MP, Allan Roberts; youngsters would 'riot and regard themselves as Hitler Youth', was the (peculiar) verdict relayed by Frank Allaun, MP for Salford East, from one of his constituents. Even the Shadow Employment Secretary, right-winger Eric Varley, condemned the package as 'miserly'; and Len Murray declared of the proposals that the government had managed 'to rob them of their real purpose and value by contaminating them with mean-minded prejudice'.

But, as this last quotation would suggest, financial considerations apart, there has been little critical comment on the proposals themselves. Len Murray, for example, claimed that the government has borrowed some good ideas from the MSC's proposals for reforming industrial retraining, and Eric Varley stated that the Labour Party welcomed an extension of educational training for the young: 'The MSC has brought forward imaginative and far-reaching proposals.' Apparently, if the government were only to increase the suggested allowance then Labour would be happy.

But are the ideas behind the proposals that welcome? In the words of the White Paper, the aim will be:

'To equip unemployed young people to adapt successfully to the demands of employment; to have a fuller appreciation of the world of industry; business and technology in which they will be working; and to develop basic and recognised skills which employers will require in the future.'

These bland terms, which few Labour and union leaders would dispute, are in fact geared to the government's vision of the labour market for the mid to late 80s. That is of a labour force constantly adapting to changing technology (the microchip, for instance), and only a proportion of it at work at any one time. That in turn necessitates breaking down the resistance created by the retention

of traditional skills and the formation of a workforce docilely responding to changing management demands. It is the social component of monetarist ideology.

In other words, the government aims to persuade young people to accept as their normal lot long-term unemployment interspersed by occasional jobs (on the bosses' terms). It has precious little to do with acquiring 'skills' in the traditional sense, and much more to do with the continuing process of 'deskilling', which is also connected with the run-down of apprenticeships.

Interestingly, it is this aspect of Tebbit's proposals that has received least attention. The government has set a target date of 1985 for the phasing out of traditional time-served, age-restricted apprenticeships, which it clearly feels leave too much power in the hands of skilled workers and such unions as the AUEW. It will gradually withdraw financial assistance for skill training which does not move towards a new system of training to standards recognised by industry. In this, it is doing no more than following the MSC's original document, which 'attacks apprenticeships as inadequate for future needs because of the lack of teaching in adaptable and generic skills. It calls on the unions to remove "outdated barriers, particularly in key areas of skill training".' (Merylin Moos, *College Rank and File*, No 32, Autumn 81).

The scheme and the riots

With the disappearance of apprenticeships the government intends one more blow at skilled wage rates. But the move to 'reform' apprenticeships only reflects what Hughie Scanlon attempted to do in engineering when he was president of the AUEW. It was rejected by all interests at the time (including employers and educationalists), but most strongly by his own membership, which recognised the erosion of traditional rights such a move would represent. In the present downturn period it is difficult to conceive of a similar rejection.

No doubt, the government in bringing forward these plans — particularly those affecting 16 year-olds — has its mind wonderfully concentrated by the riots of last summer. But in fact the thinking antedates the riots and goes back to the MSC document of last May. In that form it has already gained the backing of Labour and union leaders (hence the moderate approval given to the substance of the proposals). What one and all fear is that young people will never develop an allegiance to the system, either through a job or the state welfare system.

The riots gave an inkling of what that failure to develop an allegiance might involve. The thought that a riot could develop into a more sustained assault on the system is one that brings a shudder to all parliamentarians, whatever their reformist hue. The only division between Tories and Labour seems to be the amount of cash for trainees and the conscription aspect of Tebbit's proposals. That, indeed, is bad enough, but we mustn't forget, even if others choose to, that at the back of the proposals is a further deskilling of the workforce and conditioning it to low wages — if and when available.

The nuts and bolts of the anti-union laws

Norman Tebbit's new anti-union proposals are likely to be law by next summer. Mark George shows how, together with the Employment Act of 1980, they take the legal position of unions back to the beginning of the century.

When the present government came to power, one of its major proposals was for radical reform of the law relating to trade unions. They intended to remove rights and immunities which had been hard won in the rise of the unions in the 19th century, and effectively to smash the power of the unions to take effective action. With a vicious economic policy to implement, the Tories wanted to be sure the unions were in no condition to cause a repeat of the defeat of the 1970-4 Tory government at the hands of the trade unions.

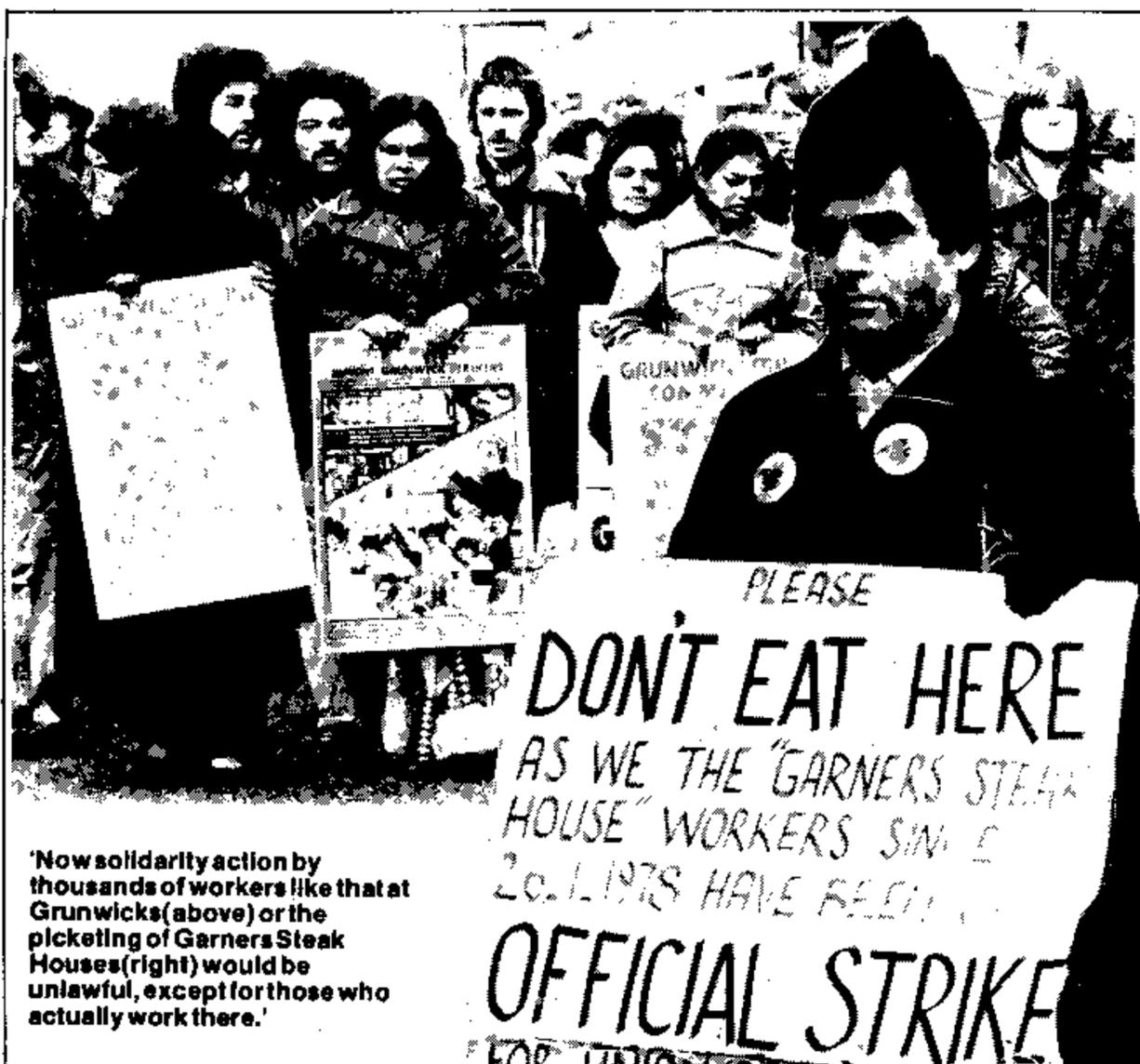
Part One of this scheme, the 1980 Employment Act is already law. Now Tebbit's proposals are likely to be law by next summer. Taken together, the 1980 Employment Act and the new proposals represent the most serious challenge to the unions since the 1971 Industrial Relations Act. Indeed, major parts of that hated Act have been resurrected. As a result, the unions will be in a worse legal position than they have been since the beginning of this century.

The 1980 Act has already introduced important changes. Millions of workers will

no longer be able to sue for unfair dismissal and those that can will find that they have to prove that the dismissal was unfair. Women wanting to return to work after a pregnancy will now be caught out by more complicated notice provisions and if they do return, may have to make do with an alternative job to the one they had.

As part of the attack on union organisation the 1980 Employment Act has reinforced the rights of workers who do not want to join a union. Section 23 of the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978 protected workers from pressure by employers to join non-independent unions, ie unions controlled by the employer. By deleting the reference to 'non-independent' unions, the section now provides a scabs' charter by making it unlawful to pressurise anyone to join any union. Under the 1980 Act the union can be ordered to contribute to the compensation paid to a scab who is dismissed for refusing to join a union, but only if the employer makes such a request. Under Tebbit's proposals, the scab can require the union to be ordered to pay the compensation. The amount of compensation payable has also been greatly increased.

The 1980 Act also undermines the closed shop by creating new categories of workers who, if sacked for not being union members, will be held to be unfairly dismissed. These include those who object to union membership because of 'deeply held personal convictions'. The Act also requires new closed shops to be approved by at least 80 per cent of the workers — but if a worker still does



'Now solidarity action by thousands of workers like that at Grunwicks (above) or the picketing of Garners Steak Houses (right) would be unlawful, except for those who actually work there.'

not join the union and is sacked, he can still claim unfair dismissal. Tebbit proposes to extend this to existing closed shops so that dismissal for non-membership of a union in a closed shop would be unfair if there had not been a recent ballot showing 80-85 per cent in support of it.

Until the 1980 Employment Act the position on picketing was still roughly the same as it had been since 1906 — ie it was lawful for persons, in contemplation or furtherance of a trade dispute, to attend at or near a place where another person works for the purpose of peacefully obtaining or communicating information or persuading a person to work or abstain from working. Even this immunity for pickets was limited enough. It was subject to judges deciding what amounted to furthering a trade dispute and to police discretion as to the number of pickets allowed. It did not prevent police from arresting pickets for a variety of 'public order' offences.

The 1980 Act has introduced fundamental changes. The immunity now extends only to those who attend *at or near their own place of work*. Union officials can only attend with members they actually represent. Anyone else attending a picket can be sued for damages. So picketing of another plant, even of the same employer, becomes unlawful — as, for example, the picketing by Laurence Scott workers of their parent company in Doncaster. The effect on union recognition struggles, in particular, could be devastating. These rely on outside help. Now solidarity action by thousands of workers like that at Grunwicks or the picketing of Garners Steak Houses would be unlawful, except for those actually working there.

Excuse for copping-out

Tebbit proposes that for the first time since 1906 a trade union should itself be liable for damages for any act which is outside the limits of lawful industrial action — ie secondary picketing and other solidarity action, with fines up to £250,000 for the larger unions.

Vicious they may be, but the Tories are no fools. They remember the bitter resentment caused by fines on unions under the 1971 Industrial Relations Act and how that Act brought the unions into direct conflict with the courts. More important than the fines, the Tories see their proposals as a means of ensuring that the unions will themselves curb unlawful action by providing that the union will not be liable unless the National Executive made the dispute official or failed to condemn it. This provides the perfect cop-out for the Duffys and Chapples to sell out their members by refusing official support for industrial action and ordering a return to work and a ban on picketing.

Directly linked to this is the further limitation of what amounts to lawful industrial action. The 1980 Employment Act has already outlawed some forms of secondary action to prevent action being taken against any but the immediate suppliers or customers of an employer with whom there is a trade dispute. Now, even this will be unlawful. By restricting trade disputes to a dispute between an employer and his own employees, action against an employer who

is not involved in a dispute with his own employees will be unlawful. Such action most often occurs where unionised workers put pressure on another employer to recognise a union. Again, the consequences for basic solidarity action are catastrophic.

Also banned will be action in support of disputes occurring outside Great Britain such as the blacking of products meant for South Africa or Chile. Similarly, 'political strikes' will also be illegal. This would cover TUC Days of Action as well as action by local authority workers against cuts in council services.

Tebbit's free-wheeling axe is also aimed at 'union labour only' agreements, such as are operated by many local authorities. The Tories claim that such agreements unfairly restrict the 'freedom' of workers not to belong to a union. In reality they want to smash union power so that poorer conditions and pay can be imposed. And just in case anyone gets any ideas about fighting this ban, the government also intends removing the immunity from being sued for damages from any person who organises or threatens industrial action to pressurise an employer to agree to a 'union labour only' clause in a contract. Finally, just to tie things up completely, action against an employer to prevent him fulfilling a contract because not all employees are in a union would also be unlawful.

At present, dismissed strikers can claim compensation if they can prove discrimination. Re-enacted by the last Labour government, this provision was intended to protect militants from being victimised. Now the government proposes, that after giving notice as short as perhaps four days to return to work, the employer will be lawfully entitled to dismiss anyone remaining on strike, thus making victimisation easy and lawful.

The total lack of any official fightback against the 1980 Act has made the Tories confident that they can get away with it again. The detrimental effect of these measures cannot be over-emphasised, making unlawful a whole range of industrial action and giving union executives every excuse to sell out those workers who do take on the law.

Just how confident the Tories and their ruling class allies are is illustrated by the recent case of Ted Elsey, assistant secretary of the Inland Revenue Staff Federation. During last year's civil servants' strike, he followed around senior management who were scabbing on the strike. Under the Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act 1875 this is an offence. Even though his conviction only amounted to being 'admonished', the fact that such antiquated legislation could be used at all is indicative of things to come. In fact, apart from the Shrewsbury pickets, this Act has not been used for decades and the section under which Ted was charged, not since 1890.

None of this would be so bad if the working class was in anything like the condition to fight that it was in the early seventies. Despite the present weakness, however, a fightback has to be built and those workers who are prepared to defy the law must be supported. The difficulty of that task is matched only by its urgency.

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The rusting chain of Central America

The bitter war being fought in El Salvador is only one link in a chain of struggle in Central America. Mike Gonzalez explains.

Honduras has a new president—Suazo Cordoba. In world terms it may seem an insignificant event; yet in the delicate balance of Central American politics, it does have important implications.

The new president immediately declared his lifelong anti-communism, his undying opposition to 'exotic political imports'. And well before the election day, his Liberal Party had made a secret agreement with the army not to limit its power in any way.

Honduras, with its 3½ million people and a per capita income around \$600 per year, is a key element in Reagan's Central American strategy. Under US guidance, Honduras may seem to move towards a 'guided democracy' in the months to come. Yet in a region locked in a war of classes, Honduras will not be allowed to move away from the military form of government it has had almost continuously since 1963.

Honduras may give an appearance of democracy, but its commitment to the joint struggle against 'subversion' in Central America cannot be—and is not—in question.

During the last year, Honduran forces, have been involved in a number of joint operations with the Salvadorean army against the guerrillas of the FMLN-FDR. Last year, it was the Honduran army that drove hundreds of peasants back across the frontier river Lempa; the peasants were then savagely murdered by the army of El Salvador.

And in last autumn the bombing of a refugee camp inside Honduras brought forth only formal protests. In fact, news of the massacre might never have reached the press had not Bianca Jagger and the president of the World Council of Churches happened to be visiting the camp at the time.

Honduras is only one link in a rusting chain. Around its borders a mass struggle is developing. No election can resolve it, though there are forces at work desperately trying to channel it back into a parliamentary direction (see below).

In El-Salvador, Reagan had hoped that \$25 million of additional military aid would ensure a quick victory. It did not. The guerrilla organisations, grouped into the FMLN-FDR, enjoy mass support; they have 5-6000 people under arms and twenty times that number in support. They claim to control over half the country, and have recently carried out actions in the suburbs of the capital, San Salvador. As the economy enters deeper into crisis, with the fall of the coffee price combined with the flight of capital, they have intensified their attacks on

'economic targets'—bridges, electricity pylons etc.

On the other hand, any form of mass political activity among the urban working class is impossible. Thus the *political* leadership of the movement consists largely still of individual politicians, many of whom were members of the government until the beginning of 1980, yet the development of an independent working class leadership, depends on the future course of the armed struggle not just in El Salvador, but throughout the region.

Clearly the Salvadorean army cannot win a military victory nor can the FMLN-FDR. The army is corrupt and has a high level of desertion. Those who remain have turned to systematic terror on an incredible scale to try to destroy the support for the guerrillas. Reagan and Haig, for their part, are resisting suggestions of political compromise; at the same time, the political costs of generalising the struggle are rising daily.

In El Salvador, Reagan had hoped that \$25 million of additional aid would ensure a quick victory. It did not.

The failure to crush the guerrillas in El Salvador, has opened a new political space throughout the region.

In Guatemala the level of guerrilla struggle has risen dramatically over the last few months. In the mid-seventies a number of organisations (especially the Guerrilla Army of the Poor—the EGP) began to work with the Indian committees. The result is that today, for the first time, the Indians (who make up 57% of the total population) are actively involved in military activity. 19 out of 22 provinces are in a state of war, and the main guerrilla organisations have, at least publicly, recognised that future success depends on developing urban organisations of a mass kind. It remains enormously difficult, however, to build such organisations in a country which has lived for thirty years under a regime of such brutality.

In 1954, the moderate reformist government of Jacob Arbenz was overthrown by force of arms with direct US backing. The gradual modernisation which Arbenz had promised was stopped before it began, and a continuous regime of terror since then ensured that Guatemala remained a country of cheap labour and cheap holidays, where great natural wealth fed the industries of the north.

Guatemala continued to receive more economic aid than any other Central American country. And when Carter held back some military aid in the short-lived 'human rights' campaign of 1978-9, Guatemala simply spent \$89 million on arms purchases from Israel and South Africa. At the same time, Guatemalan businessman began to



make hefty contributions to Reagan's election campaign.

In Honduras itself land occupations through 1980 have been followed by workers' demonstrations and land takeovers by 500 peasants in the week before the election. Costa Rica, for so long called the Switzerland of Central America, faces a profound economic crisis which has brought unprecedented workers demonstrations against unemployment and the rising cost of living. Characteristically, Ms Kirkpatrick, US ambassador to the UN, on a recent visit, advised the government to reform the army that Costa Rica abolished in 1948!

Closer still to Reagan's heart, there have been massive demonstrations in Puerto Rico and the Borniquen Liberation Front has started guerrilla attacks on economic targets.

The general response of the US government has become less and less clear in recent weeks. George Bush, the vice president, visited the Dominican Republic in October to warn them of the coming struggle against Cuba. Haig, has made increasingly threatening statements about direct intervention against both Cuba and Nicaragua. And a two-month long joint US-NATO exercise, which ended in mid-October was clearly a preparation for a direct attack against Grenada.



The clearest statement came, as usual, from Henry Kissinger. Addressing the Chilean Chamber of Commerce in Santiago, he called for all-out war in Central America as the only solution.

In fact, the training of anti-Sandinista forces has continued apace. US military advisors are now working to reconstruct the Central American Defence Force first established in the early seventies, to coordinate the war of classes in El Salvador and Guatemala. The official position is in fact that its first detachment—the Atlacati Brigade—has already lost half its members in El Salvador.

Yet despite this, and rising quantities of military aid, Reagan has seemed reluctant to back Haig's hard line. He has hesitated, for example, to provide his Guatemalan friends

with the promised amounts of military material. Obviously his hesitation stems from doubts about whether the US should enter another protracted imperialist war when it is obvious there can be no quick, decisive victory.

On the other hand, Reagan's economic strategy for the region demands such a victory. The plan has already been previewed in Jamaica, where the uncritically pro-US Edward Seaga defeated Manley in the elections. Seaga immediately announced the creation of a new state agency whose job would be to attract private foreign investment and tourism back to Jamaica. The island would also become an open market for American goods and technology (particularly in the energy field) and for stockpiled raw materials. The other part of the pro-

gramme, according to Reagan government's new policy on economic aid, would be a general withdrawal from public sector spending—be it welfare, housing, education, or subsidies for essential food.

The 'Jamaican model', however, requires certain preconditions—above all, the ability to impose policies on the working class, even when such policies mean rising unemployment and a further collapse in an already intolerably low standard of living.

For the future of the economies of Central America and the Caribbean are to be even more deeply intergrated into the US economy—hence recent proposals to form a North American Common Market (Canada, the US, and Mexico) and the Caribbean Basin Project. But this demands the destruction of the working class movement and, as in the past, its reduction to a state of terror and demobilisation. As the struggle intensifies and spreads, that task becomes more and more *difficult and costly* in political terms.

The Mexican connection

There has been before the UN General Council a motion from Mexico and France calling for a *political solution* to the crisis in El Salvador. It is not as selfless as it sounds.

Mexico and France both have an economic interest in the area, and Mexico particularly has a political concern too. In the first place, Mexico is supplying both oil and financial credits to El Salvador. For Mexican capital, both private and state, it is profitable arrangement, provided that stability is soon restored and the debts repaid. But as long as the economic crisis remains, it is risky investment.

Secondly, the political echoes of the developing struggle in Central America are coming too close for comfort to Mexico's own potentially explosive society. Recently, Mexico returned a number of Guatemalan refugees, most of whom were later found dead and horribly mutilated. On the other hand, Mexico is also anxious to retain some political independence from the US and the continue to present itself to the world as a champion of human rights.

The hope presumably is that in El Salvador a political solution will bring the FDR to power (and similar bourgeois-democratic—or most probably Christian Democratic—regimes elsewhere) and separate it from the mass organisations of the FMLN. Economic stability will then return and with a certain level of economic development.

This might have been possible while the world expanded economically. But in the midst of a general crisis of the world economic system such expansion is impossible. From Britain to El Salvador the solution put forward by each section of the capitalist class is the same rationalization on a world scale, structural unemployment, and a general depression of the standard of living. That is what is being put to the test in El Salvador and that is why it is so close to the working class in Britain. If capitalism has an international view of how to resolve the crisis, then our response must equally be internationalist, recognising the common struggle of all workers, wherever that class war is being conducted.

'The wheel has turned full circle'

In the two years since white rule ended a wave of strikes have hit both Zimbabwe and neighbouring Zambia. John Rogers describes the strikes and their political consequences.

The image of the 'white man's burden', the stamp of his 'civilising mission', lingers long in the two southern African territories which used to be known in the colonial era as Southern and Northern Rhodesia. Zambia, the old Northern Rhodesia, is seen as a third world country. Southern Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, is seen as an advanced country.

This is because, the *Daily Telegraph* and *Daily Mail* insinuates, there were not enough white settlers in the Northern territory to quell the workers' strike movement which swept the Rhodesias in 1964.

'Independence' had to be conceded immediately by a Tory government to the only political force, Kenneth Kaunda's United National Independence party (UNIP), which could guarantee production on Zambia's copperbelt.

In Southern Rhodesia Ian Smith's white twentieth of the population promised another thousand years of rule. Harold Wilson's new Labour government huffed and puffed but did nothing in 1965 when Smith made his Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI). In 1980 the new Tory government conceded to Mugabe's Zimbabwean African National Union (ZANU) that they had managed to whittle minority rule down by 985 years.

In the intervening period a war footing in between the two Rhodesias had enabled both Kaunda and Smith to subdue black workers. Since Mugabe brought Zimbabwe-Zambia into sisterhood again, the bottled up frustrations of war weary workers have exploded into a militancy which both Mugabe and Kaunda have found difficulty in controlling. Two years of strike actions have made all the sophisticated distinctions between backward Zambian and advanced Zimbabwean agriculture and industry meaningless.

South Africa's Anglo-American Corporation and the British based Lonrho had, in any case, been allowed by Kaunda during the war to increasingly dominate Zambian agriculture, just as they now overshadow economically the Zimbabwean white settlers.

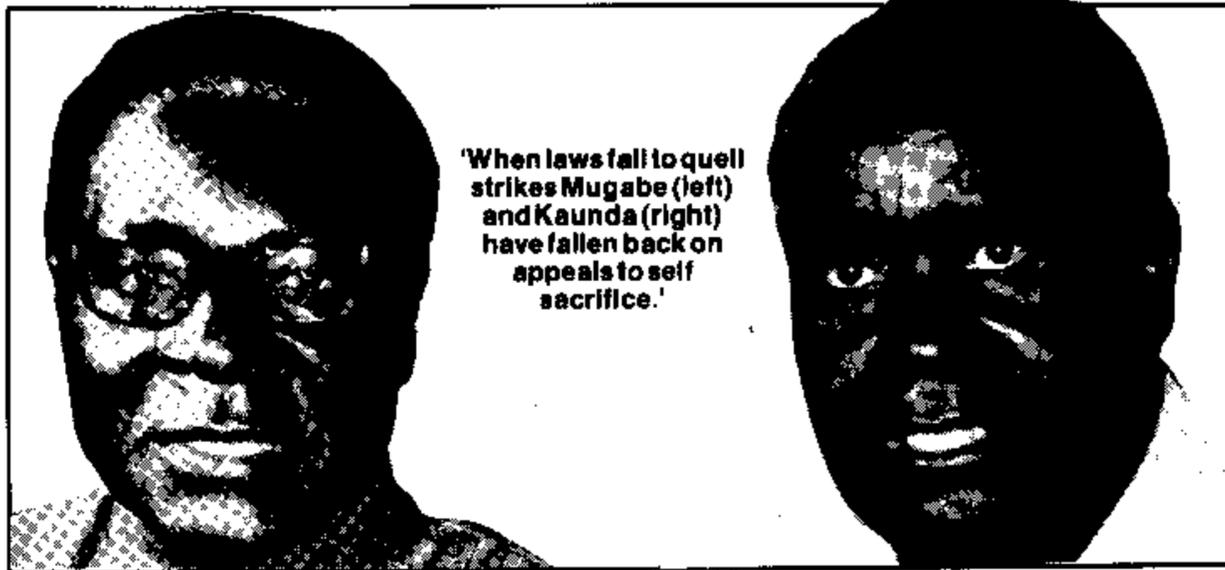
Black workers' have struck against the price of maize, the staple food. The two multi-nationals have monopolistic control over the maize price. In the process of the maize strikes racist myths of efficient white farmers upholding white civilisation have been displaced by the reality of inefficient white farmers being driven out of business.

Over 500 white farmers in Zambia have

sold up to Anglo and Lonrho in the past two decades. In the past year Mugabe has been powerless to prevent black peasants redressing the 50/50 division of white and black land which UDI had tried to prop up. Black Zimbabwean squatters have seized land abandoned by inefficient white farmers.

In industry, the other great legacy of civilisation, the cosy relations between trade union leaders and government, have also been shattered by strikes.

Zambia's 27 different unions have had members inside the leading committees of government since 1964. The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions held its inaugural congress in February 1981. An odd mixture of 50 old white led unions and new black led unions were cobbled together in one movement by order of the ZANU government's Labour Minister, Kaingai. In Zambia ZCTU represents an extraordinarily high density of three quarter trade union membership amongst 400,000 Zambians in paid



'When laws fail to quell strikes Mugabe (left) and Kaunda (right) have fallen back on appeals to self sacrifice.'

employment. In Zimbabwe the 200,000 members of The Congress represent one in five of workers. But two years ago only 77,000 had found it worthwhile being registered under Smith's Industrial Conciliation Act (ICA) as trade union members.

The consolidation of Zambian unionism and the mushrooming of new Zimbabwean workers' organisations during 1980/81 resulted from a complex tangle of wage demands to compensate for inflation, principally in maize, leading on to political strikes because of victimisation.

Between March and June 1980 Zimbabwean workers greeted the end of Smith's rule with strikes over wages, shorter working weeks, the dismissal of racist or authoritarian supervisors and foremen, bonus schemes, shift allowances, safety precautions at work and an end to compulsory pensions schemes which they saw as of no benefit. In all 172,000 working days were sacrificed by Zimbabwean workers compared to 64,000 during 1964, the previous record year for strikes. Within a year, the 9,000 striking cane cutters on British owned sugar estates to take just one group of the 1980 strikers, had formed the nucleus of the 16,000 strong new Agricultural and Plantation Workers' Union.

Mugabe's reaction to the 1980 strikes had been one of furious condemnation of workers for taking things into their own hands. Wankie coal miners working for Anglo-American were, along with the cane cutters, one of the few groups of Zimbabwean workers who had repeatedly struck in defiance of the Smith regime. Yet they were singled out during 1980 by Mugabe. Troops were used to drive them back to work, ironically at a time when striking gold miners in Anglo's South African concerns were being batoned back to work by police. The leadership of the Zimbabwean Mine Workers Union were hopelessly compromised in the eyes of the Wankie miners by their support for Mugabe.

Mugabe used Smith's old Industrial and Conciliation Act as his 'legal' justification for repression of strikes. Kaunda, faced with 120 strikes and go-slows involving a tenth of the labour force and 100,000 hours between June 1979 and 1980, had tried without success to use his Industrial Relations Act of 1967.

Both laws had been drafted with the help of British TUC advisors acting through the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU). Both had an elaborate arbitration framework, making it illegal for

workers to strike for several months while their grievances are examined. Both were defied by the 1980/1 strikers. Between mid-1980 and mid-1981, Kaunda was helpless to prevent 84 illegal strikes involving 46,000 workers and 200,000 working days.

When laws have failed to quell strike actions (Wankie miners were out again in November 1980 despite the repression of their June 1980 action) Mugabe and Kaunda have fallen back on appeals to self-sacrifice. Both 'nations' are land-locked and dependent on South African railways and ports for the majority of their imports. Strikes by nurses and teachers in Zimbabwe during October 1981 and strikes led by copper miners in Zambia during January and June 1981 illustrate that workers are refusing to take the brunt of the economic stranglehold that South Africa wields.

For three days running in October 1981 teachers and nurses lobbied their respective ministries to protest about this and demand immediate settlement of outstanding pay demands. On the third day the demonstrations were so large that the government lost its nerve. The strike had spread to include 12 cities and towns. In Salisbury baton wielding police arrested 500 nurses from Harare Hospital and 250 primary and secondary tea-

chers, while in Fort Victoria 72 nurses were arrested and 195 teachers in Gatoma.

The ZCTU affiliated Zimbabwe Teachers' Association has fully endorsed the actions of the Mugabe government against its members including the subsequent sacking of 70 strikers. ZCTU was advised by Jim Mortimer, formerly a full time official of AUEW Tass, afterwards Chairman of the arbitration service, ACAS, and sent by the TUC in July 1981 to Zimbabwe. Mortimer is part of an international trade union 'aid' exercise. Black teachers must be cynical about the lavish \$17,000 funding of ZCTU's new office by the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU).

Through their experiences of strike activity which brings them into immediate conflict with their 'radical' nationalist government, Zimbabwean unionists are establishing their self identity. They are distancing themselves from the idea of disciplined loyalty to the nationalists leading their unions that the ICFTU was brought in to help promote.

In January 1981 the frustration of Zambian workers at food shortages boiled over. Nearly all the 56,000 Zambian Mine Workers Union members in copper and cobalt mines struck and were swiftly followed by clerks in banking and insurance. Union leaders pleaded in vain for a return to work so the police were sent in, ending in a riot at the Mufulira mine township with 50 miners injured and one 14 year old boy dead. The regime hastily ensured the improvement of food supplies.

After a lull in protest action for six months supplies had again broken down and 10,000 copper miners again struck, some at the same mines as in January, some at others. This time they were joined by railway workers fed up with forever being blamed by Kaunda as the culprits in supply breakdowns. This time wives and children joined miners in setting up barricades as police again opened fire. There was a partial return to work for a week when Kaunda promised to talk to union leaders about pay increases to compensate for a 50% increase in the price of the maize staple since January. When nothing was forthcoming the third major strike again brought the copper-belt to a halt. Pay increases were agreed.

One of the most vivid scenes at the height of the third strike was the besieging of the Mineworkers headquarters by miners infuriated at the wheeler-dealing of their leaders behind closed doors with Kaunda.

Militants carried placards bearing the legend 'Solidarity'. They made comparisons between the food shortages and rigid bureaucracy in Poland and Zambia. They pointed to the copper plaque in the lobby of their unions plush five-storey building. It claims that the headquarters is dedicated to the memory of 23 black miners killed by colonial policemen in 1936 for striking. One militant commented:

'The wheel has turned full circle. We are back where we started as an organisation opposing those in power. About the only thing we haven't got in common with Polish miners is the Russians breathing down our necks.'

Iran: the chaos behind the repression

Hassan Tabrizi is an Iranian socialist who recently left Tehran. During a brief stay in a European capital, he spoke to *Socialist Review*.

What is the real extent of Khomeini's support in Iran?

I believe that no more than 15 per cent of the population, perhaps even less, are genuine supporters of the regime. That's about the same proportion as supported the Shah. The Shah's class — the wealthy, the top army people, those who ran the apparatus of state, all those depending for their privilege upon him — constituted some 10 per cent to 15 per cent of the population. Similarly, those dependent upon today's regime for their income and for their privileges, plus a core of real believers in the Imam (Khomeini) make up a quite small fraction of the population.

There is of course an important difference between the Shah's and Khomeini's supporters. Khomeini's people are willing to die for the Imam, and the fact that many of them are organised together as part of the regime's attempt to build a new 'state machine', gives them a greater significance than their numbers would suggest.

The Shah's state collapsed. The army, the police, the courts and so on were all paralysed. Now they have been partly reconstructed by Khomeini's regime. This *attempt* at a state apparatus is manned by the ruling group — the Islamic Republican Party — and its supporters.

The hard core are to be found in the *Pas-daran* (the Revolutionary Guards) and amongst the *Hezbollahi* (the IRP street mobs). Most of these are lumpen proletarians without any class instincts. They have been successfully integrated by the regime on the basis of supporting the Imam and 'fighting against America'.

Then in the factories and offices and schools there are the 'Islamic Societies' — the *Anjoman Islam*. They organise IRP supporters in the workplaces. They discipline workers and schoolkids, watch out for dissent and organised opposition, make sure that people pray, and so on.

Together these people constitute the only part of the population that really supports the government. They sometimes create the illusion of more widespread support for Khomeini, but it is always an illusion. The real base of support is very small.

How can you be sure about that? What about all the people turning out for the funerals and demonstrations last year? Even on the television here it seemed that millions were involved, and they quite clearly supported the regime.

The real numbers supporting Khomeini have diminished rapidly over the past two years and especially over the past six months. While those on the demonstrations

were once genuinely counted in millions, things are very different today.

Those of us living in Tehran who are interested in such matters have become experts at 'the numbers game.' We can, I assure you, make very accurate assessments of the size of demonstrations, and all the official claims are widely inflated.

After the funeral procession for Rejai and Bahonar the press agencies had the numbers at over one million. I am certain that the really figure was no more than 200,000. The 200,000 are the core of Khomeini's support in and around Tehran. They were bussed and trucked in from all over especially for the event.

There are other examples. On September 22, the government tried to organise what it called a 'massive' demonstration of school-kids against the opposition — really against the Mujahidin. The kids were really pressured into turning out, but they were able to mobilise only 10,000 to 15,000 — that's nothing in Iran.

On both these occasions people stayed at home. Many are afraid to go out, but on the occasion of the funeral demonstration, many more did not show up because they were really quite satisfied with the assassinations.

Just how is the economy and the administration being run at the moment?

There is anarchy. The basic problem is that neither Khomeini nor any other of the leading figures have any notion of the sort of economy or society they are trying to create. Remember that they have spent their lives thinking about and talking about fundamentalist Islam, about the earliest years of Islamic society — in the seventh century. Impose their vague and abstract notions on the highly-developed society of Iran in the 1980s and you have chaos.

Khomeini knew that he wanted to destroy the Shah's dictatorship, but that is all he knew. Faced with the problem of taking political control he has had to try and use what has remained from the Shah's system, but that of course is itself partially destroyed, and is in the process of further decay.

I would use this analogy — Khomeini has moved into the Shah's palace, wrecking it as he does so. Now he has decided to live in it. The result is chaos. There is the appearance of order, with Khomeini's administration, the Majlis (parliament), the courts and so on, going about their business and the old apparatus of state, the ministries of this and that, the financial institutions etc, built in the Shah's time, trying to limp along rather pathetically. The overall result — a mess.

Under these circumstances many top administrators and civil servants have just stopped trying. Many of them are in open revolt — the Central Bank for example, hardly bother any longer. There is a stream of people dropping out altogether, with others being purged as 'liberals', and the

result is a rapid turnover of people in key positions. It is just not possible to run the country under these conditions.

Some, of course, do benefit from what's happening. Many young opportunist technocrats and administrators, who are basically untrained, have risen rapidly. These people move up the various hierarchies of the ministries, planning boards and so on, on the basis of their uncritical commitment to the regime. Of course, the more they proliferate in influential positions, the more they gum up the works.

This process is encouraged by the fact that under Khomeini while power has been centralised at the very top, elsewhere it has been broken up in lots of little bits. In the fight for the bits and pieces of influence the process of degeneration of the economy and the administration is further speeded up.

Beheshti, by far the most far-thinking of the religious leaders, seemed to understand what was happening. He tried to prevent the paralysis spreading. When he was assassinated there was no one left who understood the need for a coherent approach to government. The present leadership are a pretty pathetic bunch who are mostly held in contempt by those administrators who have remained in office.

Let me give a concrete example of what I mean by 'chaos'. Some of the mullahs have tried to cut down on the waves of executions, realising that the brutality of it all was doing the government serious damage. They couldn't stop it. Short of Khomeini announcing that all killing must stop — which he is not prepared to do — the fact that there is no systematic chain of command, no coherent state structure, means that the revolutionary guards simply go on killing. Many people would be prepared to offer at least qualified support to the regime, but there are not even gestures made in their direction. The purges and killings go on and on.

What about the state of the economy and the way it affects ordinary people?

I would put inflation at 60 per cent to 70 per cent for basic goods. The black market has shot up recently and now the average ratio of black market to official prices is about 4:1. Queuing is getting very bad. In Tehran we have been getting eggs only once a fort-

night — then families are permitted only to buy 15 eggs. Oil production is no more than 400,000 barrels per day, leaving Iran with a trade deficit of nearly \$1 billion per month.

The state of the country's financial reserves means that no letters of credit are being issued for food imports. In November the usual supplies of frozen chicken from France and meat supplies from New Zealand did not arrive — the government was refusing to endorse payment.

I do believe there will be demonstrations at some stage during the winter over food supplies and prices. People are frustrated and very angry.

Under these circumstances how long can the regime survive?

I think there are two ways of looking at things. First, the question of whether they can survive the next six months, under this intense economic pressure, and with growing anxiety amongst most people. But second, *if* they survive the next period, there is a good chance they will hang on for a couple of years, with the economic decay becoming progressively worse.

If people feel as frustrated as you suggest, and so few genuinely support Khomeini, why have the opposition not made more rapid gains?

Massoud Rajavi, leader of the Mujahidin, claims that 10 per cent of the population support his organisation. I believe that estimate is about correct. Millions more passively support the idea of opposition to the regime, but are too scared or unconfident to participate in active opposition.

Here, of course, the left face their biggest difficulty. The Mujahidin — they for the present dominate all organised opposition to the regime — delighted people when they came out fighting in the streets, and in the summer when they (we assume it was the Mujahidin) pulled off the assassinations. The effect of the Mujahidin confrontation with the Revolutionary Guards in the streets was absolutely electric when it first happened, and it has had a very serious effect on the guard's morale. Most of them, for example, will no longer wear uniform near their homes, they are under great pressure and there have been many defections. The guards are down to perhaps 4,000-5,000 in

Tehran, though there are 10,000 in the militia, and thousands more at the front.

The Mujahidin have directed almost all their fire — literally — against these people. They have lost 500-600 in street clashes, and of course nearly 3,000 in executions. They claim to have a guerilla cadre of 10,000 to 12,000 and another 60,000 in their militia. Again, I believe them. But over the past two months they have largely withdrawn from open confrontations, and cut down on the bombings. In part this is due to the fact that the cost to them in open fighting has been very great, but it must also reflect the fact that they see little in the way of results if judged by the involvement of larger numbers of people in active opposition.

In the autumn the Mujahidin declared 'the month of blood' against Khomeini when they said he would fall. He didn't. They called for extensive strikes. They didn't get them. The Mujahidin have not been able to mobilise beyond their own numbers, and the fact is that though there is widespread sympathy, there is no organised working class support they are able to draw on.

There is no point in merely negatively criticising the Mujahidin who, alone among the opposition foresaw that the current repression might occur, and to some extent prepared for it. But like the true 'left' in Iran — those calling themselves Marxists like the Fedayeen (Minority), Peykar and the grouplets, the Mujahidin missed the opportunity of building in the working class when there was a real explosion of workers' activity in the period after the fall of the Shah. At that time factories were occupied, there were active workers' committees, and so on. At the same time there was a real political vacuum.

But there was no tradition in Iran which could have directed the left into that movement. The idea of building a Leninist-type party was simply absent — except in the rhetoric. Now we pay the price.

It is believed by some in Iran that the Mujahidin are now prepared to kill Khomeini. The argument goes that in the past such an assassination would simply have consolidated support for the regime. Now, it is said, that Khomeini has been properly 'exposed', that the Islamic Republic has been shown up as a chaotic mess that cannot even feed the people, and is efficient only at killing helpless prisoners and 'suspects', if the Imam goes, then what remains will collapse. This may be correct, but there is no alternative leadership. This is the problem with taking a militaristic approach.

But at least the Mujahidin are principled and consistent. The Tudeh (Communist Party) and the Fedayeen (Majority) are both integrated into the regime's 'apparatus'. They specialise in shopping supporters of the leftist organisations in exchange for positions in the media, administration etc, so that they can continue the struggle against 'the main enemy' — America.

It is tough enough persisting with the idea that we do have to build a workers' party in Iran. These people, with their attempts to give a 'left face' to a regime which is quite murderous and violently anti-socialist help to make the conditions in Iran that much more difficult.



Despite huge rallies after the fall of the Shah, like this Fedayin one, the left did not build in the factories.

Alan Sillitoe: Passion without prescription

Alan Sillitoe's first published novel (after five refusals) in 1958, *'Saturday Night and Sunday Morning'* received a fanfare of publicity. Along with people like Braine, Stan Barstow and Sheila Delaney, writing against a backcloth of the 're-discovered' industrial north, Sillitoe remodelled the contours of British literary culture. Terence Rattigan and smoking-jackets gave way to the voices of a working class caught in the drudgery of everyday capitalist production, yet experiencing the unprecedented affluence resulting from the post-war boom.

At the centre of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* rages Arthur Seaton. He buries the daily stench of red-metal and cooling fluid beneath a life of insatiable boozing, fisticuffs and a partiality for other men's wives. The Friday pay packet makes the shop-floor agony worthwhile. Not, though, without some rustlings of an anarchistic reaction. As Seaton argues:

'If they said, 'Look, Arthur, here's a hundredweight of dynamite and a brand-new plunger, now blow up the factory,' then I'd do it, because that'd be something worth doing.'

A meaningful political consciousness is never really attained by Arthur, too consistently seduced by the easily regulated piece-work and the stylish wardrobe of tailored draped jackets. Seaton votes Communist but dislikes the idea of sharing. The confusion in his politics reflects the chaos of his life and is expressed in the very shapelessness of the novel itself.

In Sillitoe's celebrated short story, *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*, 17-year old Colin Smith relates from prison his life of crime, his hatred of authority, his father's death from cancer and his mother's spending spree with the £500 insurance money.

As he glides across country on his daily permissible run of freedom, he sketches out a plan for maintaining his integrity against a crafty governor keen to convey the idea that his Borstal is progressive so long as the inmates co-operate. For Sports Day the governor pins his hopes on Smith to win glory for their institution. Although streets ahead of his rivals Smith throws the race in a magnificent act of defiance, denying the governor both his ambition and his policy of taming society's rebels by engulfing them into the whole toadying system.

Generally, Sillitoe's characters in the early works stand as rebels in spirit, but not in deed. They sense the need for sharp social change, but lack the political commitment. A number of the Nottingham stories present revolutionary rhetoric (as with Liza Atkin's gut feelings, in *The Ragman's Daughter* col-



lection, that the local factory strike hadn't gone far enough). The later novels, however, develop a more purposeful cutting edge, reflected in the greater maturity of the written style. A new richness of language enables Sillitoe to create immensely powerful portrayals of characters who, while intensely conscious of their class, strive towards a goal to transform the total social fabric and by definition, themselves.

In *The Death of William Posters*, Frank Dawley's soulless existence, coupled with the creeping knowledge of unfulfilled possibilities, leads him to wander in search of the truth within him.

The theme of serious revolt is developed in the second novel of a trilogy, *A Tree on Fire*. Here the reader encounters writing memorable for its power and precision. It taps the full range of the emotions, tempering the revolutionary socialist's resolve to break the system.

Frank Dawley's trek across the Algerian desert is more than one man's hell in the search for purpose and liberation. It is about the FLN and their dogged fight in the Algerian war of independence against the French; and in the telling it is the story of oppressed peoples in collective struggle everywhere. Small bands of revolutionaries smuggle arms to an underground movement in combat with an imperialist army which controls the skies with helicopters and chemicals. Arthur Seaton's Nottingham would seem light years away. Yet Sillitoe does not let the reader forget the inner conflicts a revolutionary carries around the heart. Dawley lives the tension of unencumbered revolutionary action and the recurring image of the women and children left behind.

Tree of Fire also harnesses Dawley's life to that of Handley, his artist friend—a picture of restless energy on canvas exploding beyond the conventions of a bourgeois society that shamefacedly exploits his talents for profit. The book, however, is flawed like a number of Sillitoe's works, by a fitfulness and unevenness. *Raw Material* suffers from this. But then, just when the reader begins to despair at the endless philisophising about truth and the writer, the mix of documen-

tary and fiction springs to life. The pages pulsate with the flesh and blood of identifiable people amidst the storm of their lives. Grandfather Burton, proud, Victorian, cruel and chauvinistic, squeezes out the lives of his wife and daughters through crude fear. The cumulative force of grinding poverty blacks out human kindness. It knots itself into Burton's spare, sinewy frame.

Raw Material also reaches great heights in Sillitoe's recounting of the Somme horror in World War I. The subject of war and its lunacies crops up frequently in his writings. Talking of the one million young lives squandered to pre-empt the 'danger' of revolution, he notes 'If Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton, the British class war was fought out on the Western Front with real shells and bullets.' And Edgar Burton tastes the reality. From a hole in the ground he could see them:

'... lying asleep in clumps and rows, some without legs and arms, all sinews ashen and shattered. Another man is wounded by a shrapnel bullet entering his stomach. He tries to spit out his shoulder-blades but they won't come loose, so he falls.'

At last year's Cheltenham Literature Festival a number of people walked out during Sillitoe's reading of extracts from this work. Clearly, it was too raw for them.

The problem, however, that socialists would find in his work is that his politics fail to follow the logic of his creative inspiration. Although Sillitoe's essays, for example *Mountains and Caverns* are always worth reading for the insights they yield on social injustice and politics, in the end a picture of pessimism pervades their pages. The interviews that he has given to journals and newspapers reinforce this judgement.

There lies a continuing ambiguity in his steadfast belief in the predominance of individual personality over collective endeavour. The writer, he claims, is revolutionary, standing as an independent social critic. But human beings, he argues can only hope for reforms rather than revolution, inevitably dragged down by the conservatism of 'human nature'. In a *Times Literary Supplement* article he specifically attacks marxism because 'both Marxists and advertisers have this much in common: to them the ordinary people are 'the masses' and not individuals.' Which simply repeats the many misreadings of Marxism, and demonstrates a blindness to Marx's, 1844 *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, which consistently show how the individual personality can flower but not within capitalism.

Sillitoe in the end refuses to see the inequality and the savage conflicts as products of a particular type of system. He either meekly explains them away with the catch-all phrase of 'the tragic condition of existence' or ploughs his way through a series of contradictions. For instance, his fierce attack on nationalism in *Mountains and Caverns* is countered elsewhere by a staunch pro-Zionism. One more case of the libertarian writer strong on passion and soft on prescription?

Harry Cowan

**THE JOBS
FIGHTBACK**

**IN
1981**

John Sturrock (Network)



Last year was a year in which the threat of unemployment dominated workers lives and frightened all but the most resolute away from struggle over other issues. It was a year of defeats punctuated with catastrophes. Yet there were some struggles against redundancy and closure. By the end of the year a scattering of occupations were taking place, even if few enjoyed success.

In the following pages we look at some of the most significant of the struggles. **Dave Sherry** writes on the successful occupation at Lee Jeans in Greenock. **Lindsay Greig** looks at the long-drawn out struggle at Lawrence Scott in Manchester. **Gareth Jenkins** and **Marte Wohrle** provide a balance sheet of the Staffa dispute in East London, and **Sue Cockerill** examines the defeat at Rover Solihull. Finally, **Ralph Darlington** discusses attempts made to organise the unemployed.

The one that won

Over the last five years organised workers on Clydeside have taken a prolonged hammering. To any socialist, with even an eye on the workplace, the period has been one long catalogue of treachery, defeat and abject surrender.

Sadly, 1981 turned out to be no different. It was a year that started badly with the crushing defeat at Linwood and the loss of 6,000 jobs without a fight.

Even when strong groups of workers did fight back over the last 12 months — like the lagers who occupied at Bestobell, or the miners who struck against the closure of Bedlay pit, or more recently the skilled production workers who fought at Rolls Royce — the outcome was either total defeat or shoddy compromise.

Yet there was one surprising and significant exception to the general trend — an exception that shone like a bright beacon in a very dark night.

That was Lee Jeans, the now famous seven month sit-in at a Greenock jeans factory, which ended in a moral victory for the workforce and gave a boost to all those who supported the occupation.

Many *Socialist Review* readers will have been involved in raising support for the struggle. But the experience of those seven months is worth examining in some depth — especially since the outcome is considered to be one of the very few victories that we won last year.

Lee Jeans (Inverwear as it is known today) is a small factory in Greenock, a big shipbuilding town 20 miles down the Clyde from Glasgow. Before the sit-in, the plant was owned by a US multinational clothing firm, Vanity Fair, who owned 40 factories nationwide.

VF's history is a typically sordid one. They opened the Greenock factory in the mid-1970s and pocketed huge government grants for doing so. By the end of 1980, they had moved the cutting room from Greenock to Ireland, where the government hand-outs were even higher, and where the workforce were reckoned to be more docile. The writing was on the wall for Greenock, and in February 1981 the company decided to close the plant, transfer production to Ireland, and throw 240 workers onto the dole.

The company never really expected trouble. Greenock was a union closed shop, but the organisation concerned — the NUTGW — was rated a pushover. More importantly, the workforce, nearly all women and the majority of them teenagers, had no experience of struggle, no tradition or organisation.

Yet VF experienced what they thought would be only a temporary setback. When they announced the closure in February the women, unpredictably, occupied the factory. At first management kept their nerve, judging the spontaneous occupation to be a forlorn gesture, doomed to failure.

But from the start the women and men fought and organised as if their lives depended on it.

In Greenock unemployment was creeping

up to 20 per cent and the women, particularly the younger ones, knew they could have no future outside the factory.

Precisely because they knew they were weak and isolated, the women were prepared to accept help from any quarter. Outside assistance was offered and received from the start. Primarily through local shipyard stewards, a sympathetic TGWU full-timer, and the Right to Work Campaign, the news of the Lee Jeans occupation was spread in the first few days.

Thousands of 'unofficial' collection sheets were distributed. Local shop stewards set up a trade union support committee; and the Right to Work Campaign organised delegations from the occupation and took them around all factories and workplaces in the Clydeside area. It was also able to bring senior stewards from the recently successful Gardners occupation into the sit-in, and they explained the steps needed for victory.

Throughout the first six weeks, the women's union, the NUTGW, refused to make the strike official or to pay strike money. The union's leaders were scared that the sit-in would bring the union into conflict with the law. But support continued to flood in from rank and file trade unionists. All the major shipyards and engineering plants began to organise weekly collections for the sit-in. The leaders of the NUTGW were forced, reluctantly, to support the dispute.

Suddenly, Lee Jeans was becoming the symbol for a dispirited movement, and morale in the occupation rocketed as the response from the outside grew. Despite the sacrifices and the disruption to personal life the women were growing more determined.

Belatedly, the bigwigs of the movement started to rally round. The Scottish TUC, who had been slow off the mark, responded to the groundswell of rank and file support.

The Lee Jeans struggle became so popular that the STUC put out the red carpet at their annual conference in Rothesay (strikers are rarely prominent at STUC gatherings, but this strike had won a certain amount of respectability — even the popular press was championing the women at Lee Jeans). For many people it was a bit of a novelty, but every little bit of support helped.

When the management attempted to evict the women and use the law, local shipyard workers turned out in force — and there was no eviction.

But along with the official blessing, came the strings of the dodgy advice. Midway through the sit-in it was becoming clear that more than moral and financial support would be needed.

The collections, the ovations, even the visit of Michael Foot to the sit-in — all these were useful. But it was the RTWC and the *Socialist Worker* who argued that the key to actually winning the dispute and saving jobs, lay in blacking VF. That would mean stopping the movements of goods from the Irish factories and cutting off their source of revenue — particularly in the lucrative Scandinavian market.

The RTWC organised nationwide pickets

Scotts: Hard lessons of our eight month fight

of VF shops and retail outlets, to draw attention to the fight, but argued that winning the active support of rank and file dockers was the crucial next step.

Conflicting advice came from the NUTGW and from the STUC. They were reluctant to campaign for blacking, and instead set up meetings with all and sundry to discuss the half-baked idea of a workers' co-operative at Lee Jeans. For a while the dispute was side-tracked by the very people who should have been organising a blacking campaign.

Eventually the women approached dockers' shop stewards and blacking was set in motion. But at this stage the NUTGW ended official backing for the strike, and strike pay was stopped. Undeterred, the women fought on.

In the late summer the deadlock was broken. A consortium including the Dickie Dirts Jeans Empire and a former manager from VF offered to buy the plant from VF and restart production — employing all those still involved in the sit-in.

The support that the women had built up and the blacking on VF's goods were having an effect on the company. Under this pressure they agreed to sell to the consortium.

Seven months after the sit-in began, a new management re-opened the factory, employing the 140 workers still sitting in.

The outcome at Greenock was not a total victory. It took a bitter, seven month occupation to save just over half the jobs. Perhaps, 10 years ago, that might have been considered a defeat.

But things have changed. We are in a period of set-backs and mass unemployment, with as yet no real resistance, and no working class generalisation. The inaction and downright opposition of our own trade union leaders make things that much harder.

But the Lee Jeans sit-in shows that jobs can be saved if workers have the will to fight and understand the need to win solidarity from other workers.

The sit-in also tells us that when workers do resist, they learn to overcome their own weakness and conquer their own backwardness in the process of the struggle itself.

During the sit-in, women who had never spoken in public before, talked to mass meetings, trades councils, shop stewards' committees and demonstrations about the need for a fightback. For seven months they defied the law of the land.

Only last month, a trade union delegation from the re-opened 'Inverwear' factory visited a women's factory occupation in Norway giving support and advice to other workers in struggle. That could never have happened a year ago.

But the impact of Lee Jeans was felt not just by those directly involved in the sit-in. At least a few of the many male trade unionists who gave money to the sit-in every week, were forced to see women in a new light.

Today, the 140 workers at Inverwear may be relieved that they still have a job to go to. But their problems are far from over. Their only guarantee for the future is to build up and maintain a strong shop floor union organisation to defend their jobs, wages and conditions, inside the re-opened factory.

The eight months long fight for the right to work by the Laurence Scott workers in Openshaw, Manchester is a testament to the determination and solidarity of the workforce. Despite many setbacks the men and women involved have held together and fought together. Such solidarity, no matter whether the dispute is ultimately won or lost, will remain as an answer to those who say workers will never stand together, will never stick together.

But to say just that would be a disservice to the strikers and to the movement. The Scotts workers have had to fight in a political climate as hard and cold as last month's weather. Sold out by their union leadership, evicted from their factory, now under threat from the Tories' Employment Act, they have had to try to find a way to fight through all these difficulties. It is not surprising that a few mistakes have been made from which others will learn.

Spreading the strike

The Scotts dispute began in April 1981. The background was simple—a dawn raid takeover by Mining Supplies of the Laurence Scott Electromotors group in October 1980. Three months after initial promises of jobs for all, the closure of the Manchester factory was announced.

The workforce, mainly skilled, producing motors for the mining industry and for the Admiralty, were stunned. Many entire families, fathers and sons, brothers and sisters, worked and had worked at the factory for over 40 years. Their shock was turned to bitterness by the knowledge that they had been taken for a ride by Arthur Snipe, managing director of Mining Supplies and that their particular factory had been profitable for the previous three years.

The works was to have finally closed in by July 1981. After the exhaustion of all procedures by April 21st the workforce decided, not unanimously, but with a clear majority, to occupy.

In many ways both the stewards committee and the workforce were taken by surprise by their own decision. Occupation was not a new tactic—Laurence Scott had been the first to occupy in the Manchester sit-ins of 1972, but then it had been part of a national campaign. Now they found themselves alone.

Within the first week of the dispute a party of stewards visited Gardners for advice on how they had conducted their sit-in. However as the Gardner workers were conscious, fighting redundancies and fighting total closure, were very different propositions.

Unlike Gardners, inside Scotts there was little tradition of political organisation. While trade union solidarity was good—delegations had been to the Automat dispute on a regular basis, collections were always taken for disputes—the stewards were not active outside of the workplace,

either in the Broad Left, in the district committee or elsewhere.

Initially, the expectations of the stewards committee were very high. The general downturn inside the movement had passed them by—they expected support to be quite easily obtained, and more dangerously, although conscious of Boyd and Duffy's role in the Derek Robinson affair, they did not seriously conceive that on such a principled issue the union would dare let them down.

As a result the first weeks of the dispute were essentially passive. Delegations went out around Manchester and some began to go further afield. But the main dynamic was taken up by approaches through John Tocher, AUEW Divisional Organiser, and the stewards committee to the Yorkshire miners.

However these moves through official channels led simply into a bureaucratic bog. No clear statement on blacking Mining Supplies products could be obtained from Scargill or from anyone else. Scargill's position was that before the miners could take action against Mining Supplies, the other Scotts plants in Norwich and Mining Supplies itself would have to be involved in the dispute. In other words Scargill's undertaking came down to saying that if all the Mining Supplies companies were out and produced nothing, he would black what they produced.

Even worse, the approaches to Scargill resulted in a resolution going to the NUM nationally. Once this occurred the AUEW National Executive with Boyd and Duffy started to move in on the dispute, for of course underlying the dispute there lay an issue of far more concern to the AUEW leadership than a fight for jobs—the spectre of the Employment Act. Any blacking of Mining Supplies factories would also involve secondary action.

The AUEW executive had a time bomb ticking in their hands—they wanted the dispute out of the way.

Unfortunately, inside the factory these bureaucratic manoeuvres simply diverted attention from the workers themselves taking action. The idea of picketing Mining Supplies in Doncaster had been frequently raised but the then-convenor, Bob Penchion, had been extremely reluctant to go



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down that road.

As time dragged on, and little materialised, more and more of the stewards could see they were making little progress. Finally, an action committee was set up to discuss what could be done. A fortnight's programme of action was decided on and agreed on by the stewards' committee, leading up to putting a picket on Mining Supplies in Doncaster.

Delegations were sent out to Norwich, Doncaster and suppliers of Mining Supplies, British Oxygen, the Doncaster trades council, the AUEW district committee, and of course, the Mining Supplies stewards were all informed of the decision to picket and asked for support. The picket was not designed to get the workforce out—it was clear there was no possibility of that—but to stop supplies coming in or out, especially the oxygen.

Very rapidly, things started to move.

August to November were depressing months for the Scotts workers. On the same day that the agreement was signed with Duffy, Arthur Snipe's lawyers had been in court for a possession order to evict the Scotts workers. The order was only given after the executive council had had time to withdraw all support from the dispute. The order was acted upon only after the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions had withdrawn their support nationally. It was carried out by fifty thugs carrying pickaxe handles and clubs at 3 am (it later emerged that these same thugs had been used to evict students at Manchester University and workers from Meccano.)

The period following became a long series of fine speeches and no action. MP after MP expressed their support for the Scotts workers, Tony Benn even came down to the picket line, leading trade unionists gave their verbal support, but all the time behind

though unofficial, proved far more successful than had been anticipated. The Doncaster miners' panel made a decision to black all Mining Supplies products. British Oxygen were refusing to cross the picket line and a clear momentum was building up in Scotts favour. At this point the Scotts workers hesitated.

The reason for the hesitation was the taking out of an injunction by Snipe, naming six individuals under the Employment Act. After taking legal advice, the six named stewards signed affidavits stating they would not go to the picket line in Doncaster. Court proceedings were delayed for a fortnight. During this period the stewards committee was undecided on what attitude to take finally towards the injunction. Having gained time to make this decision, they found that the ground was rapidly disappearing from under their feet.

The AUEW national committee decided to support Boyd and Duffy. The national Confed secretary then approached Gormley asking him to use his offices to inform all miners that the Scotts dispute was unofficial—with the clear implication that it should not be supported.

The use of the Employment Act sent shivers up the spines of the national TGWU officials. Further pressure was undoubtedly put on the TGWU by Duffy. As a result the BOC drivers, unable to obtain any instructions from their only officials in the T&G, decided to cross the picket line. A majority of other drivers followed suit, and the picket was rapidly becoming ineffective.

Meanwhile, the Yorkshire area committee did not follow the Doncaster panel's decision to black Mining Supplies products, but merely restated their position that lorries crossing the picket line would be blacked.

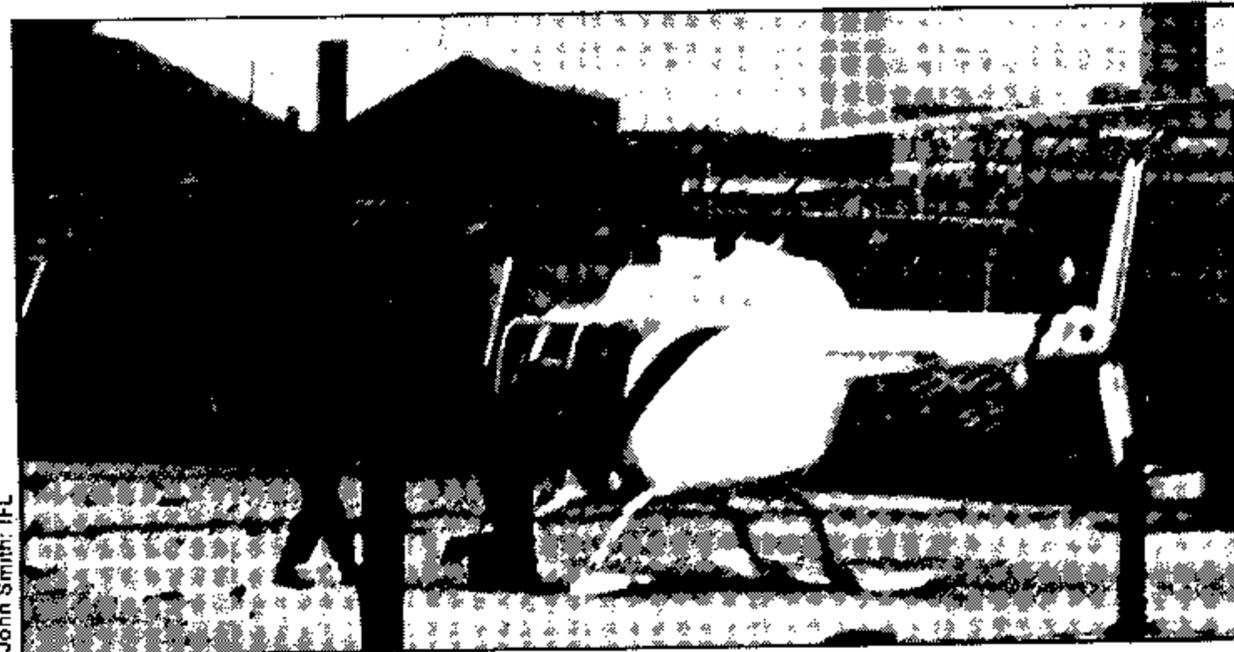
Hence by mid-December the momentum was clearly building up against the Scotts workers. This, coupled with blizzard conditions made the withdrawal of the picket inevitable. The stewards decided to withdraw on Tuesday 15th December—and defying the injunction without any picket line to defend became academic.

Unfortunately, the Scotts workers battle with the courts might not be over. It is still possible that Snipe, wanting his pound of flesh, will pursue those named on the injunction for any losses incurred as a result of the Doncaster picket. Plainly, if that occurs, a campaign will be required in their defence.

Thus after eight months Scotts workers find themselves back in Manchester, continuing to picket the Openshaw factory. There is little value in speculating what will be the eventual outcome—the important thing now is to learn from the entire experience.

One thing is fundamental: strikes cannot be viewed in isolation. Their success or failure depends as much on what has happened before the dispute has occurred and the general state of working class organisation as on the moves that are made in the course of the actual struggle.

Militancy today is not enough to save jobs, nor is mere technique. Consistent political work in the factories and in the localities whether in or out of disputes is a necessity to have any chance of winning when the struggle actually occurs.



John Smith: IFL

Helicopter scabs at Laurence Scott...

Snipe indicated he was prepared to talk but on condition that the picket did not go ahead. The stewards committee was strongly advised by the union to hold back their action to see what came out of the talks. They ignored this advice and in the first week of July mounted their picket in Doncaster. By the end of the week it was having a significant effect on Snipe.

However, on Friday, July 10th, Duffy and a number of other leading national officials met Snipe and an agreement was cobbled together. This agreement was not recognised either by the Scotts workers, or the AUEW North Manchester district committee. Nevertheless it was immediately made clear that unless it was accepted the AUEW EC would move against the strikers. At this point the picket was withdrawn from Doncaster.

This proved to be a costly error. However, it was understandable in the circumstances. Rumours were flying around the workforce that the dispute had been settled. The stewards committee were reluctant to have their best activists away from the factory when a mass meeting was coming up. They were also worried Snipe would move to evict them. But nevertheless, mistake it was.

From that moment until the picket went back on Mining Supplies in November, the stewards committee centred all its efforts on trying, first to keep official support, and then to regain it.

the scenes, any requests for active support were met with a deafening silence. Many of the Scotts workers just could not believe what was happening to them, nor understand why when they were fighting such a principled battle for jobs, support should be so lacking.

The weaknesses of the movement, not just at the national level, but at the rank and file level were plain to see. Unlike at Roberts Arundel or Automat where hundreds, if not thousands, of Manchester engineers had turned out in support, when Scotts had been evicted no stoppages took place. No large demonstrations happened—just a small number of politically committed trade unionists turned out in solidarity. But unfortunately that was and is the reality.

In working out their response to these problems the Scotts workers moved unsteadily and sometimes in contradictory ways. Indeed the process of learning delayed the relaunching of the picket in Doncaster.

However Snipe's escapade with the helicopter and the flying scabs dramatically brought it home to Scotts workers that they had to escalate the dispute. Going to Doncaster was obviously the key to the dispute. In early November the stewards decided to relaunch the picket with the help of the Right to Work Campaign.

But here the stewards lack of confidence was to cost them dear.

The first two weeks of picketing, even

Staffa: Giving in with victory in sight

The Staffa dispute in East London lasted ten weeks. After three weeks of occupation the strikers were evicted by three hundred policemen invading the factory. Thereafter, picket lines and delegations to all parts of the country, seeking financial support and blacking, kept up the pressure. In the end, though, just before Christmas, the workers accepted a new deal from management: the jobs will eventually go when Staffa moves to Plymouth. But the terms offered by the employers are a distinct improvement on the original.

The outcome wasn't a victory. On the other hand, this first-ever London occupation over jobs, wasn't exactly a crushing defeat either. What features ought we to look at and learn from in the current period?

The first point to note is that although nobody would put the East London industrial estates in the leadership of working class struggle in Britain, the dispute didn't come out of nowhere. In Staffa's there has been a good tradition of wage militancy, with initially the CP and then the SWP playing an important role. But a management offensive first drove out the CPAUEW convenor and then victimised his replacement with the introduction of a phoney redundancy scheme on a last in first out basis which in fact succeeded in getting rid of the convenor and a good proportion of the shop stewards' committee.

This should have weakened the organisation and resolve of the Staffa workforce. But the irony was that the very success of the management offensive brought into the union leadership a new generation of younger militants not held back by tradition, who were eager to have a go.

That also meant an openness to ideas. The victimised ex-convenor maintained regular contact with militants from Staffa's (not just the shop stewards), so that when the move to Plymouth came up a good deal of discussion and exchange of experience had gone on, which was useful preparation for a struggle against management.

The relationship between the shop stewards and the workforce was also an important factor. On the manual side roughly half the workforce is West Indian and Asian. The tradition of trade union organisation and involvement is stronger among the Asians, and they, in particular, because of their involvement in anti-racist organisation in the community, could be pulled round struggle in the factory. The young white militants, who constituted the leadership, were able to break down barriers and ensure involvement.



...and police scabs at Staffa.

The decision to occupy didn't come out of the blue. Extensive discussion took place at three mass meetings before the occupation, at one of which, Tom MacAfee, the Gardner's convenor, spoke about their experience. The decision to occupy was taken at a mass meeting and was raised by the AUEW convenor, Dave Green, who sensed the mood was right, without the shop stewards' committee taking up a formal position on the question. So the Staffa workers were fully involved right from the beginning, and that, together with the well-organised system of raising money and sending out delegations, was their strength. As another shop steward, Chris Newson, says:

'The action of occupation was really taken as a last resort. But now we know that it was the only effective direct action we could have taken. We did toy with the idea of strikes and selective stoppages. With an all-out strike, management are still in control at the centre of things, they can still get the lorries in and out, and keep the company ticking over. An occupation hits them where it hurts.

'Once we had occupied the immediate thing was finding our way around, setting up committees, and organising publicity. Communication is one of the most important things, publicising what you are doing and getting support.

'As the occupation progressed we got more and more self-sufficient. Which is just as well as we really had to go it alone. We had no coverage in the national press at all. We had meetings with the GLC who promised to put pressure on the company, but nothing came of it. Our local MP Brian McGee was disgraceful. But we found out the company had got to him first. The same with the AUEW — it took us weeks to get official recognition.

'At the end of the day we had to take action in our own hands and go it alone.

'We have learnt a lot of lessons:

'1) You must make sure that you have got the workforce behind you, not just

their vote but their commitment.

'2) It is essential to get everybody doing something, keeping them involved.

'3) Never run a strike away from the picket line. You have to take the committees to the picket line so that you can be seen to be doing things.

'Another thing is involving the wives or husbands of the strikers and the local community.'

However, there were also built-in weaknesses that showed through in the end. The struggle was led by an alliance between two minorities, which formed a majority able to silence those willing to accept the original management offer of a £1000 pay-off per worker. One minority believed that they could win the battle to retain jobs; the other, that better redundancy terms could be secured. Both believed in militant struggle and that was the unity that enabled them to dominate the right, who never wanted a fight and remained discredited.

There was also a difference between the two unions involved. Nearly half the total workforce were staff and organised by ASTMS. Their organisation and leadership were weaker than the AUEW's and they were dominated by the officials. On legal advice they left the occupation to picket on the outside — a division that undoubtedly helped the police in occupation-busting. Clearly a united struggle is necessary, but it should be on the highest level rather than the lowest common denominator, and the AUEW were right to insist on maintaining the occupation. On the whole ASTMS were fighting for better terms, rather than jobs first and foremost.

The interesting point by way of experience of the struggle is that those involved in the delegations to other factories became convinced that jobs could be maintained. During the ten week dispute the original handful convinced of this grew to a sizeable minority.

But the crunch came with the increased terms finally offered by management. The acceptance was not due to a domination by right-wing, scabby elements. It was rather that the money militants won out over the jobs militants, the soft-line over the hard-line socialists (in the final vote some 40 out of 200 remained committed to continuing struggle). The alliance between the two minorities split. People vacillated.

The acceptance should not be seen as a defeat. The improved terms were the result of the blacking campaign. There is no doubt that the bosses were scared and anxious to settle on terms relatively favourable to the workforce: a guarantee of work for everyone for six months — with the possibility of negotiating that to a year; an immediate seven per cent pay increase for everyone; phased redundancies during the move to Plymouth, with enhanced redundancy payments roughly worth £6000 per worker (a very considerable improvement over the original offer).

There is also a guarantee of steward organisation. The AUEW and ASTMS convenors will be the last to be made redundant unless requested otherwise. There are obvious dangers in that, of course, which are

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fully recognised by the stewards, of becoming incorporated. On the other hand, negotiations and a continuing struggle can also be ensured.

The final point, in respect of weakness, is the damage caused by Labour Party ideas. The liaison committee with MPs, which involved continually dragging people up and down to parliament, and the GLC suggestion of putting up money for a cooperative, both held out the illusion of a solution other than through struggle. MPs didn't contribute to the raising of financial support or the blacking campaign and the net effect of Labour Party involvement was a tendency to produce demoralisation, with workers thinking, 'how can we win if these people can't help us.'

Probably Staffa workers were within two weeks of getting the company to stay in Leyton. Management were very insistent on getting the blacking lifted, which suggests that it was biting hard. So, although the workers went back without a victory they didn't return smashed. In particular, the guarantee of work over a period of time and the maintenance of shop steward organisation are important checks on management power. They give the workforce a breathing

space to look round for whatever alternative employment exists and keep confidence intact.

The terms of the deal also prove — and it's an important lesson in the present period when few outright victories are likely — that the level of struggle influences the nature of the outcome. If you don't fight you can be sure of getting very little. If you do there's a chance of finishing up with something better, even if not everything you hoped for. There is also the experience learnt and stored up for future use. As Chris Newson says:

'Hopefully people will look to the Staffa strike as a lead for their own disputes. Even though we lost we did show that it can be done if you stick at it. If we had stayed there until after Christmas we would have won. At this stage we had even managed to get the miners blacking.'

'In the final analysis the tactic of occupation is the best one we have got. It means you can control from within, at the heart of the struggle. For the first time we were in control of the company. Occupy, keep them out, the longer you keep them out, the stronger you get.'

How Rover fell at the last hurdle

The SD1 plant was a very modern one, opened in 1976, and with a record of high productivity. At the first announcement of 1400 redundancies or transfers to other plants in the summer of 1979 the SD1 stewards unanimously decided to oppose the management's proposals and to fight for job-sharing and a shorter working week with no loss of pay. But at the mass meeting the following week, the stewards were turned over, although they were unanimously supported in opposing compulsory redundancies and unilaterally imposed manning levels.

Following the meeting, the foremen handed out details of the new manning levels. Raghil Ahsan, a worker at the plant since 1976 has described what happened next in a very useful article:

'In the next two to three days, the company distributed redundancy forms. There was such a rush to fill them in that they ran out of forms. The number of people applying was amazing; in one section 28 out of 35, in another 30 out of 32. According to one estimate about 2000 out of a workforce of under 4000 applied.' ('Solihull: Death of a Car Factory,' *New Left Review* Sept—Oct 1981)

In his article, Ahsan also spells out what the attacks on organisation and the speed-ups meant—automation deskilled the jobs almost totally, staggered breaks from the line means that people had little opportunity to discuss what was happening with the rest of their section; the stress of trying to 'work back' or beat the line to earn more breaks led to intense fatigue, nervous breakdowns,

tensions in the family.

Small but telling indications of the success of the management tough line were that workers no longer clocked in people who were late, and that whereas usually at Christmas management found it impossible to run the tracks on the afternoon of the last day before the holidays, last year they got a full day's production. Under these conditions, it was hardly surprising that many people, including militants and stewards, wanted to get out, even if only to the dole queue. And many applying for redundancy were well aware that they wouldn't get another job.

Nevertheless, action was taken—for half a day in support of Derek Robinson, and in April 1980 over BL's decision to impose its '92-page document' on conditions.

In both cases, defeat followed. The lack of shopfloor confidence in the ability to win was met not by leadership nationally, but by outright pressure to accept on the part of the AUEW, and delaying tactics and collapse in the face of BL management by the TGWU.

The leadership again backed down in the face of threats of closure over the 1980 pay claim, despite a two-to-one vote for industrial action. When management pressed for compulsory redundancies, a SD1 mass meeting voted to oppose this by occupying the plant. Then new speed-ups were announced and there was a stoppage throughout SD1. But the threat of closure was used by the convenor to get the workers back in. The increasing speed-ups led to more volunteers for redundancy.

This was the background when management announced the closure of the plant in May last year.

A fight did begin. The shop stewards met

and voted to 'resist the closure by any means necessary', and the mass meeting supported that decision. An Action Committee was set up and a £1 levy imposed on the workforce. Bulletins were put in and badges produced. On June 4th a demonstration was held, with nearly the whole workforce out, together with a contingent from the adjoining Land Rover and Range Rover Plant. Workers at Cowley plant assured SD1 that they would not accept work transferred there from Solihull.

But even then there were signs that the shopfloor was not really prepared to go all out to save the plant. Pat Hickey deputy convenor noted in *Socialist Challenge* that the £1 collections were disappointing and that 'the stewards tend to go with the mood of the section rather than lead and change it.'

Rumours began to circulate that the committee had rejected improved redundancy terms, and that the management were prepared to pay an extra six or eight weeks pay. A mass meeting was held on June 17th to try to dispel the rumours. The workforce again voted to resist, this time almost unanimously.

Throughout the response of the trade union leadership was to say that it would support actions by the Solihull workforce, never actually giving a lead. This only compounded the problem of lack of confidence in the rank and file, who effectively felt that they were on their own.

But the major setback occurred on 30 June, when a mass meeting rejected by two-to-one the proposals to ban work on a new paint process and to picket the plant to prevent movement of equipment during the holidays. The action committee were divided after the meeting, some arguing to try to build on the one third favourable vote, others that it is all over. On the shopfloor, some workers were furious that the decision of the mass meeting wasn't being accepted as final and the closure terms finalised.

The final act came with the meeting of the management and union officials nationally on July 6th. The company refused to back down, and Grenville Hawley, national secretary of the automotive group of the TGWU, could only say to SD1, 'We'll back you but you have to provide the troops.'

A mass meetings two days later confirmed what was expected — two thirds voted against continuing resistance to the closure.

The Solihull experience must be recognisable to many people who have been trying to fight job loss over the last couple of years. Firstly, that the fight for jobs cannot be separated from the fight over conditions and organisation. The defeats suffered over speed-ups, pay, and discipline paved the way for both the lack of confidence to fight, and the desire to get out, even if the alternative is the dole.

Secondly, that the role of the officials becomes more important when the rank and file lack the confidence to go it alone.

In that situation the officials have consistently failed to respond. They have shed crocodile tears over the job losses and done deals over the redundancy pay, instead of giving a lead. They have sidetracked the fights that have happened or sold them out altogether as at Laurence Scotts.

Organising the TUC way

Mass unemployment has posed a major new challenge to the trade union movement. Hundreds of thousands of working people are being forced out of the unions as a direct result of redundancies. At the same time a whole generation of young people face the real possibility that they might not be able to enter permanent employment, and therefore participate in trade union activities.

The dramatic fall in trade union membership accompanied by the equally serious decline in union funds has been too severe even for the union bureaucracy to swallow. In a number of unions the problem has become acute. In the last year APEX have lost 25,000 members (16 per cent of the entire union), the ISTC have been decimated with the loss of another 30,000 members, the AUEW have lost 150,000 and even the giant TGWU have seen no less than a quarter of a million members disappear.

Meanwhile the existence of a growing body of unemployed who have either not been organised or become separated from their union has increasingly been of some concern to the union leaderships. 1981 saw a significant shift in approach as the TUC General Council found itself compelled to at least organise some gestures of opposition to the growing dole queues. The problem of the organisation of the unemployed became a constant theme in the course of their deliberations. Last year's wave of riots across Britain's major cities underlined the long-term consequences of neglecting the task.

There is no doubt that the TUC were becoming somewhat embarrassed at today's persistent Right to Work Marchers and what they viewed as 'left extremist influence'. However national union officialdom recognised that they could not stand aloof indefinitely from organising the unemployed. Yet, predictably enough their response has been woefully inadequate. Let's examine their three main initiatives.

Firstly, a number of unions have begun to reconsider their attitude towards what form of trade union services and organisation should be provided for the unemployed. The TUC in particular, have encouraged unions to retain their unemployed members so as to avoid them becoming isolated and cut off from the rest of the organised movement.

However a recent survey by *Labour Research* revealed just how far the unions have moved on the issue. While forty-four of the largest unions permit *existing* members of the union who have become unemployed to retain membership, twenty four have rules which explicitly *prevent the recruitment* of the unemployed generally. This is because membership is limited to those 'working in', 'engaged in' or 'employed in' the particular industry.

Twelve other unions have rules which are either silent on the topic or specifically state that the unemployed may be recruited *only if they pay full contributions*. Three allow members in training to join and remain members *with limited rights* if unemployed. And five permit the unemployed to join with full rights and reduced contributions

(although for three of the five this is effectively linked with training).

The denial of rights for unemployed members is staggering. In the ISTC unemployed members cannot vote. In the NUM the unemployed cannot vote in ballots for national positions. In the NUR only employed members may be elected.

More amazingly a reduced level of contributions paid by the unemployed in many unions is *dependent upon their length of membership* (usually fifty-two weeks). If this membership has not been completed the unemployed has to pay *full* contributions.



That special TUC touch on the Jobs Express.

Under such circumstances the Right to Work model resolution demanding a National Unemployed Workers Union (allowing full trade union rights *and* dual membership with a union controlled by the unemployed themselves) is something we should continue to campaign for as vigorously as possible. Although snubbed by the union bureaucracy, support for a NUWU from an important minority of delegates at last year's FBU, TSSA, CPSA and NUPE union conferences is an indication of the concern felt by many rank and file trade unionists.

A second and further belated TUC initiative has been their active encouragement of the growing numbers of unemployed centres that have been set up—providing a meeting place and advice service for the unemployed. National union executives have enthusiastically backed the centres. Yet they have proved to have been a soft option—receiving little commitment of effort, resources or funds. Worse, they have been allowed to turn into recreation centres that have merely institutionalised unemployment inside four walls—and have no useful function at all in fighting the Tory jobs' blitz. Significantly, the number of unemployed taking advantage of the centres is miniscule.

It has been left to Right to Work supporters to campaign for the unemployed centres to be turned into vital organising bases of the jobless to go out to local disputes, helping on picket lines—and above all linking the battle for the right to work with those fighting for jobs *inside* the trade unions.

Yet perhaps the most spectacular and certainly most promising development over the

last twelve months has been the attempts by sections of the union leaderships to organise national unemployed protest marches, like the People's March for Jobs and the Jobs Express Train.

There is no doubt that the People's March was a tremendous success. The 500 marchers were enthusiastically greeted by token workplace stoppages and large demonstrations in a number of towns and the 150,000 strong rally in London proved to be the biggest protest against unemployment seen since the thirties.

Over the last few years the Right to Work Campaign has vividly displayed that unemployed marches are indispensable for involving the unemployed in activity and dramatising the tragedy of being out of work. Yet the RTWC simultaneously argued that marches *alone* cannot stop the jobs rot. Only the *employed* have the power to strike and force the employers and Tories to concede the right to work. It was an unofficial rank and file miners' strike in February last year that forced the Tories to do a mini-U-Turn over proposed pit closures.

The unemployed, of course, cannot threaten strikes. But by organising and demonstrating the unemployed can help campaign for such action from trade unionists. Right to Work marches have provided an important mechanism for relating the energy of the unemployed to the isolated militants in the workplaces.

Unfortunately the movement the People's March generated did not consciously connect with the struggle in the workplaces against loss of jobs. In fact for many union leaders supporting marches is *an alternative* to fighting redundancies.

Trade union history books should be engraved for life with the case of Brian Mathers, TGWU Midlands Regional Secretary who had the nerve to welcome the People's March into Birmingham having just sabotaged the Ansell workers' jobs battle. Mathers encapsulates the entire problem with the whole TUC approach to the unemployed.

Global unemployment figures are made up of hundreds of little defeats like this in which workers accept the sack often because their own version of Brian Mathers stood in the way of militant solidarity that could have saved jobs. 1981 was littered with such defeats, like those at Holman Machell, Radio Basildon, Bestobells, Plansee, Chloride, Glencroft, Staffa.

At the moment workers are afraid of striking, taking action to stem the jobs' massacre. Not just because there are three million people without jobs, but also because they fear lack of support. They feel isolated. And it's that isolation the Tories want to increase. That makes it vital to attempt to generate the maximum support for those workers who *do* decide to fight back. Battles like those at Laurence Scott, Lee Jeans may seem like small fry compared to the tens of thousands who greeted the People's March—but *they are the stuff out of which a genuine fight for jobs is made*.

Tragically the TUC's Jobs Express highlighted in even more grotesque relief the failure to relate unemployed youth to workers in struggle. The result was predictable. Despite official backing from the unions

Life in the colleges but death at the conference

and the financial resources of the TUC at their disposal, an embarrassing rally of about 5,000 greeted its arrival in London. To add insult to injury two days later 15,000 public sector workers came out on strike and marched through London protesting at the threat to jobs posed by Heseltine's spending cuts.

Ironically, the TUC has always accused the Right to Work Campaign of splitting the young unemployed from the trade union movement. In fact Right to Work Marches have done quite the opposite — taking marchers to visit factories, stand on picket lines, collect money for workers fighting for their jobs. Yet how much greater could be the impact of a fighting movement of the unemployed, backed by the TUC, that sought solidarity with workers, particularly those in dispute.

It would contribute to shifting the mood of resignation and acceptance of unemployment so prevalent within the movement at the moment. It would vividly display that there was a real alternative to Thatcherism, that the *enthusiasm* of the unemployed with the *muscle* of the employed could be moulded into a militant industrial struggle against the Tories.

Yet, quite obviously that is precisely what the TUC does not want. Their reaction to Norman Tebbit's proposals for a Youth Training Scheme to replace YOPs and wipe some 160,000 youngsters off the unemployed register revealed the crux of the problem.

Len Murray complained the Tories had 'spoiled some good ideas with mean-minded prejudice'. They are officially opposed to the compulsion inherent in the threat to cut off benefits for those refusing training places and the pathetic offer of a £15 a week allowance. Yet Tebbit's proposals were drawn up substantially from recommendations on youth unemployment made by the Manpower Services Commission *unanimously supported by both the CBI and the TUC*.

At the heart of the problem is a profound *political* weakness in the entire TUC approach to relating to the unemployed. *We* are in favour of the unity of the unemployed and the employed precisely because it's only those in work who have the industrial muscle to stop redundancies. Furthermore that workers' power is also the mechanism for constructing a mass movement that cannot only kick out the Tories, but can ultimately transform society itself.

The participation of the trade union bureaucracy in supporting jobs' protests however inadequate is to be welcomed. It can only help strengthen the forces of resistance to the Tories on the ground. We should utilise further TUC initiatives to join in united activity with all those in the localities concerned to reverse the jobs' offensive. However we should retain an *independent* Right to Work presence that differentiates our distinctive political approach. Both are inextricably linked.

We need to argue forcefully the whole gambit of our ideas on how to really organise the unemployed, how to fight closures, our attitude towards the Alternative Economic Strategy — at the same time as seeking to involve as large numbers as possible in activity against the Tories.

For more than twelve months the student movement has been at a very low ebb. In many colleges it has been difficult even to get quorate union meetings.

But suddenly — and rather surprisingly since the issue is hardly a new one — the cuts in higher education spending have emerged as something students are prepared to fight over once more. **John Rees and Jane Ure Smith** look at what has been happening.

So far the fightback is clearly not of the same order as the occupations over teacher-training cutbacks in 1976 or those of 1977, and to a lesser extent again in 1979, when scores of colleges were occupied in protest against increased overseas student fees. It nonetheless looks like a beginning.

Midway through the term both the Polytechnic of Central London and University College Cardiff went into occupation against the cuts. Both worked hard to spread the fightback, sending delegations to speak at other student union meetings, and in the case of Cardiff, winning support from local workers who joined them on the picket line. But the net result so far has been a number of one and two-day token occupations in the run up to NUS conference and promises of action next term.

On the one hand there's a great deal of enthusiasm for direct action — at NUS conference 90 colleges signed an emergency motion supporting students taking action and urging for more. On the other hand there is a lack of experience since nothing has really happened amongst students for the best part of two years, and more importantly, a lack of confidence on the part of the most active students that they can win support for an occupation in their colleges. At PCL, various militants from other colleges hung around the occupation — some for the full three and a half weeks — because they saw no hope of building a fight back on their own patch.

The situation in the colleges basically still reflects the low level of struggle outside, where factories like Lee Jeans and Staffa, Gardners and Laurence Scott have fought tenacious battles in defence of jobs essentially in isolation. But the prospect of a more generalised fightback amongst students — albeit in a patchy and fragmented way — exists next term because the policies of the student movement are far more volatile than the politics of the workplace.

NUS winter conference was in stark contrast to the mood in those colleges taking some kind of action against the cuts. It was without doubt one of the most right wing conferences that the NUS has held. The causes go back some years.

For most of the 1970s the union was dominated by the Broad Left, an electoral alliance of the Communist Party and effectively the National Organisation of Labour Students (NOLS), plus some independents. By 1979 however the strength of the BL was ebbing and, extending the logic of the Broad Democratic Alliance, the then-president of NUS, Trevor Phillips, launched the Left Alliance. This was basically the old BL plus the Liberals.

The new group was always unstable, having been foisted on the membership from above first by NUS president Trevor Phillips and later by his successor, CP member David Aaronovitch. By the end of 1980, and coinciding with the rising tide of Bennism, NOLS decided that the Left Alliance had become too right wing for them to stomach. (The defection of ex-NUS president Sue Slipman from the CP to the SDP surprised no-one: the Left Alliance's politics had pre-figured the SDP for two years prior to the latter's formation.)

Leading with the right

NOLS break from the Left Alliance was initially a success. At Christmas conference 1980 Aaronovitch and Andy Pearmain (the two leading CP executive members, though Pearmain has since left the party), received a very rough ride, culminating in the removal of Aaronovitch's responsibility for Government Economic Policy, a major area of the union's work.

At the following Easter conference Aaronovitch only retained the presidency against the NOLS challenge by 16 votes — votes from the Federation of Conservative Students. That margin of 16 votes repeated itself for all the full-time executive positions where a NOLS candidate ran against the Left Alliance.

The main reason for the viciously right wing nature of this year's Christmas conference was that NOLS presence disappeared without trace. They had the same number of delegates as before, the largest of any group on conference floor, but their intervention in the debates and in the fringe meetings was practically non-existent.

Left reformist thinking revolves around the idea that success amounts to presenting a left wing manifesto and left wing candidates to the voters. Last Easter's NUS conference proved — however narrowly — that it isn't the case amongst students. The Labour Party conference, again narrowly, proved that it isn't the case in the Labour Party, while the SDP have proved it isn't the case nationally. The right — Foot and Healey — have accurately judged the present mood of the electorate and adjusted to it. And since even the most left wing Labour Party members are still electoralist, they have had to adapt to that, and consequently the stuffing has been knocked out of NOLS.

The truth is that however much the Labour lefts talk about rank and file or extra-parliamentary activity this is not



Students at Central London Poly confronting the police last term

Alanc Bamping PCLSU

where the heart and soul of their politics lies. After all, if all that you are interested in is extra-parliamentary activity, why remain in the Labour Party, when the SWP does it better. Even if you are taken in by the 'mass party of the working class' line, the very least you could do is join one of the entrust sects. But significant numbers of the Labour lefts are unlikely to do either, since in practice their activism is always subordinated to their electoralism. That is why they are in the Labour Party in the first place and that is why electoral defeat has such a catastrophic effect on their morale and allows the political initiative to pass to the hands of the right wing.

None of this should cause glee amongst revolutionaries. The collapse of the left reformists is a serious set-back for the whole of the left.

At NUS the collapse of NOLS sealed the fate of the already weak Socialist Student Alliance (SSA) — set up by the International Marxist Group (IMG) as a centrist grouping in order to recruit left reformists. In the end, of course, the left reformists recruited the IMG who have now joined NOLS. Shortly after conference they tried to dissolve the SSA. Unfortunately the SSA politely declined the offer leaving an embarrassed IMG to pull out alone.

Those who voted to maintain the SSA however did not do so because they oppose the drift towards the right and the Labour

Party. They did so because in the best traditions of 'Beyond the Fragments' they don't want to be part of *any* political party at all.

These developments left a huge gap on the political map between the Socialist Worker Student Organisation (SWSO) on the left and the Left Alliance on the right leading the wet Tories, the Liberals and the SDP.

NUS winter conference was in stark contrast to the mood in those colleges taking some kind of action against the cuts

It is a measure of how right wing the Left Alliance is that the SDP seems to be having difficulty gaining a foothold in student politics. This is because the Left Alliance already occupies the political space they would like to stand in, not only in the sense that the Left Alliance has now shrunk to contain only the CP and the SDP's national allies, the Liberals, but also because the Left Alliance at conference rely on the support of the moderate swamp which would be the SDP's natural constituency.

The SDP shouldn't worry: an article in *Marxism Today* last October provides the answer:

'...it is likely that many SDP activists — including ex-Tories — will want to contest next summer's elections for sabbatical posts as Left Alliance candidates ...'

In fact the successful SDP group at the London School of Economics debated whether they should call themselves the Left Alliance when they first set up shop!

It was the collapse of NOLS at the recent NUS conference which allowed this motley crew on the right to lead a minor witch-hunt against SWSO. Nevertheless SWSO members managed to intervene consistently and to organise a fringe meeting of 600 people at which Owen Carron, Bobby Sands' successor as MP for Fermanagh and South Tyrone, spoke. Ten people joined SWSO during the weekend.

The prospects for a light back against the cuts next term are marginally boosted by the fact that the NUS Executive is calling for a week of action against the measly four per cent offer on student grants. They are calling for strikes rather than occupations, and then only by first and second year students. But given the mood amongst a large section of students it may be enough to ignite a spark bigger than we've seen in a year or more.

Holocaust handbooks

The huge growth of CND during the last year has inevitably inspired the publication of whole range of new books on the subject. Peter Binns takes a look at four of the most important and accessible of these, all recently published in paperback.

Overkill — The story of modern weapons.

John Cox

Pelican £1.75.

Nuclear Nightmares — An investigation into possible wars

Nigel Calder

Penguin £1.50.

As Lambs to the Slaughter — the facts about nuclear war

P. Rogers, M. Dando & P. Van den Dungen

Arrow £1.75.

The Politics of Nuclear Disarmament

Martin Ryle

Pluto £2.50.

John Cox's *Overkill* was first published in 1977. The current expanded edition is a real classic as a handbook for those who want the military and scientific background explained. It is well informed about the weapons systems themselves and their history, about rearmament East and West and about Britain's bomb. This is a book that should be read by every socialist.

At a technical level there are only a few minor criticisms to be raised. The book is already somewhat out of date on the American MX missile, it fails to do justice to the huge increases in accuracy and fire-power of the new generation of US nuclear warheads (like the mark 12a and W78 re-entry vehicles, whose 'lethality' can be five times and more greater than the present best), and it wrongly asserts that Israel and South Africa have refrained from testing nuclear weapons.

More important is a confusion about cruise missiles. They are too slow, he tells us, to be used as 'first strike' weapons; they take two or three hours to reach their target, and in that time the Russians could already have launched their own missiles. But this assumes they will have prior warning, which they can only get from military satellites. Yet it is a comparatively easy task to 'blind' the electronic sensors of these satellites—it has happened accidentally recently when a large oil storage fire in Siberia put American satellites out of action for some time. Due to their ground-hugging performance, unlike the much faster ballistic missiles they will not appear on the long range radars until it is too late to 'launch on warning'. So they are ideal first strike weapons—cheap, plentiful, very accurate and difficult to detect.

Notwithstanding these points and the rather woolly final part which deals with CND, *Overkill* remains the handbook on nuclear weapons. It is however closely challenged by *Lambs to the Slaughter*, a handbook which has been produced by researchers at Bradford University's peace studies depart-

ment. The real strength of this book is military rather than scientific. Its military history is excellent, it shows how the SALT I agreement did not reduce but encouraged new weapons systems, and it contains a very good assessment of current military strengths. In two areas it is outstanding—radiation and the Trident missile. It shows more clearly than anything else I have come across the world-wide catastrophe that would result from radiation from even a moderately sized East/West confrontation. And there is a specially chilling section on the real role of the submarine-launched Trident missile, which they convincingly argue is as a 'depressed trajectory' first strike weapon.

Lambs to the Slaughter is clearly and powerfully written, and for someone who is frightened away by blocks of statistics and modern science it is probably a better handbook than *Overkill*. In the same highly readable vein is Nigel Calder's *Nuclear Nightmares*, which is also a very powerful work. It is specially so because it is written by a man who is not actually a supporter of unilateral nuclear disarmament. What he has done is to spell out the variety of the routes to nuclear warfare and the chances of each one of them happening. The strength of this work is in the fact that it takes what our leaders and generals say seriously, and then shows how the nuclear nightmares follow absolutely logically from that. For an exposure of the contradictions involved in our rulers' official policy it is as good a work as you could find.

The politics that lie behind these three useful books, of course, leave much to be desired. But they do not stand in the way of their very real achievements. And *Overkill* at least concludes on the need to build CND even if it does not give us much clue about how this is to be done. *Lambs to the Slaughter* on the other hand is informed by politics that are on occasions naive, right-wing or just plain silly. We are told that the cause of the war drive in the modern world is not class society or capitalism in deep crisis, but rather the nasty way technology has advanced due to the lack of moral fibre amongst some scientists. To get rid of the bomb we must 'propose solutions which are not consequent on an effective reordering of the world political system'.

For their part the authors concretise this in terms of a proposal to set up an incredibly complex three-tier multilateral treaty, the aim being 'the phasing out of all strategic nuclear weapons through the medium of these treaties'. The contradictions here are really quite astonishing. Having completely demolished the myth that East and West have been at all sincere in their multilateral manoeuvres hitherto, the authors suddenly bring out yet another multilateral proposal for them to manoeuvre with—as though the problem is that of the ignorance of the negotiators rather than the goodwill of the superpowers themselves.

None of this, however, is more than a minor irritation to be found in the book. *Lambs to the Slaughter* is such an excellent

handbook that it can be overlooked in assessing its achievement as a whole. The same however cannot be said for the final work, Ryle's *The Politics of Nuclear Disarmament*. I must admit, when I read it I was shocked to see quite how wretched it was in a number of important ways.

First of all there is the influence of EP Thompson. Ryle has picked up none of his good points (the scathing attacks on the establishment, the pungent rhetoric and so on), but most of the bad points. The worst of these is Euro-chauvinism. We are told, 'Undoubtedly Europe—Europe of the Enlightenment and of the democratic strivings which have followed it, the Europe which has exported its civilisation along with its barbarism to so much of the world—now finds itself faced with a historic peril'. This is due to 'the especially close relationship which binds us, as client state, to the American superpower'. 'Europe is in peril, not because of (internal)... tensions, but because of the hostility of the superpowers'.

This is nonsense. For a start the carve up of Europe in 1945 was not managed by Stalin and Roosevelt on their own. Churchill—as became very clear from his diaries—played just as important a role. And Britain is not now the unwilling victim of US 'hegemonism' but eagerly encourages America's every move. The same is true for the other major European participants. In fact the historic decision in 1979 to install cruise and Pershing 2 missiles which brought about the massive growth in CND was in fact forced upon America by Germany, Britain and other European members of Nato.

It is also very important in terms of its political consequences. For what this implies is that the threat of nuclear destruction is to do with outside political events, not the class structure at home. The strategy for fighting the bomb must therefore exclude the class struggle.

Not surprisingly this is connected with some pretty right wing views elsewhere. Ryle tells us, for instance, that multilateral disarmament (if it could be achieved) would be preferable to unilateralism. In other words a carve-up of the spoils of the world between the national ruling classes is to be commended—so long as they go about it peacefully. So long as they 'only' oppress their own populations at home rather than other ruling classes overseas we should support them—and this from someone who claims to be a socialist!

We could go on but it would be pointless. Suffice to say that Ryle thinks that 'a nuclear disarmed Britain need not seek at once to leave NATO, for NATO might then become a forum for disarmament', and that CND's 'first breakthrough must be made' in 'the parliamentary Labour Party'. There is no mention of the class struggle in Britain today and how CND could affect it except a one-sentence support of the 'Jobs not Bombs' slogan. There is no discussion of the history of CND last time round, what went wrong, and therefore what there is to be learnt from that. In fact the whole book is just a rambling collection of populist verbiage, wretchedly superficial in its disregard for history and in its philistine insensitivity to workers' problems and struggles.

Don't knock the ostrich

The Forward March of Labour Halted

Eric Hobsbawm. Edited by Martin Jacques
Verso Editions £2.95

In 1978 Eric Hobsbawm used the occasion of the annual Marx Memorial Lecture to deliver a sermon to the Communist Party on what he perceived as the crisis facing the left in Britain. It was subsequently published in *Marxism Today* and as the inner party struggle between the 'Industrial' and the 'political' wings of the CP developed both sides used the essay as a coat stand for their respective analyses.

The results have been published in this collection and pretty abysmal most of them are too. If Hobsbawm made his original statement in order to provoke a serious attempt at a reassessment of where the Broad Left/CP strategy had gone wrong in the past twenty years, he must be a bitterly disappointed man.

Hobsbawm's basic argument is that due to a number of conjunctural factors, structural changes in the working class, the decline of the manual sector, sectionalism, the failure of the trade union and left leadership to go beyond economic militancy, the labour movement is now in an impasse—the forward march of labour has in his opinion halted.

In the original essay Hobsbawm poses no way forward or attempts no solution to the crisis. His analysis peters out into a series of Marxist truisms about 'man making his own history' and the need to re-assess our past. It's as if he thinks he has the solution but is waiting for the comrades' response to the diagnosis.

The comrades were not too long in rising to the bait. The first essay, a bad tempered, dismissive piece by Ken Gill, quickly puts comrade Hobsbawm in his place—how dare he question the advances made in the past twenty years?

Particularly how dare he question the advances made by the Scanlons and Jones's as opposed to the Lawthers and Deakins? Or, though he is too modest to mention it, the Ken Gills? Thus on the social contract Gill can still talk of 'a number of politically progressive demands ...' — demands which did not come out of thin air; they arose from the struggles of the period which Hobsbawm writes of as being one of 'narrow economism'. Thus for Gill the Social Contract would apparently have been O.K. if the Labour government had only stuck to its promises. This no doubt explains his failure to fully oppose the Con-Trick at the TUC and his dropping of the only resolution attacking it at the TUC conference.

As the debate develops the level of contributions moves further to the right. It is now obvious from this book just how far to the right

the CP has drifted in the past ten years.

For instance Mike Le Cornu, a CP steward at Heathrow, upbraids Gill for his failure to fight for the 'politically progressive demands contained in the Social Contract' and of adopting a cynical and opportunist attitude to it. Kevin Halpin ruins an otherwise quite realistic appreciation of the situation by tagging on the party line (or rather one of them) about the progressive advances made in TUC and Labour Party policy ... the only problem he admits is getting them implemented.

This ends the first part of the book and to be quite rude, it is in the main 'knee-jerk Marxism' which contributes nothing to our understanding of the present crisis.

The second part is slightly more interesting in so far as Hobsbawm has to stretch himself to answer some of his critics. There is a long interview with Tony Benn, which like other long interviews with Benn I find impossible to read, and therefore will pass over. I presume nothing new was said or I would have read it in the *Guardian*.

This is followed by another discussion session which has the obvious improvement of an article by Steve Jefferys which locates the crisis precisely within the political line of the 'British Road to Socialism' and the inability of the CP to come to terms with this.

Of the other contributors Hilary Wainwright adds a 'fragmentary' piece which really says nothing which we have not criticised more fully in the past and I am not being dismissive by failing to comment on

it. For *New Left Review*, the co-publishers, Robin Blackburn displays yet again his ability to blow in the political wind. It's a long way from the LSE and Red Bases and for Blackburn the winds of change are reflected in the sails of the Labour Left. The Labour Party is, we are told, re-making itself and the 'Communist University of London has won respect on the left', apart from that our main failing appears to be that we have not recreated the Plebs League or the Labour Colleges Movement.

It is easy to be dismissive but I

must admit that I found the book boring and largely irrelevant to the present crisis. Ostriches are of course a much maligned species of birds and it falls in the main to the human variety to spend time with their heads in the sand. There is no proof in this book that if the CP genus of ostrich took its collective head from the sand it would be able to see for its blinkers.

In fact Hobsbawm's summing up of the debate in the last section of the book is a classic example of this. For him the solution to the problem posed is not just the 'broad democratic alliance' but an even broader democratic alliance which would by his definition include not just the SDP but the Tories too.

Jim Scott.

Fresh air feminism

Tea and Tranquilisers
Diane Harpwood
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Diane Harpwood is now a department of Employment clerical worker after years as a housewife and mother.

Her fictional diarist, Jane Bennett, is married to David and her two small girls. She loves David dearly, but wonders gently why he doesn't ever think to help around the house. At the weekend:

"Hi noon," I said when he arose, poor pet he needs his rest, but a sling for his right arm would serve as well as the bed."

We follow Jane's life through a year—a year of nappies, no money, valium-insulated isolation, the inevitable support (it's the only support around) of 'Les Girls' at the

school gate, an occasional evening out at the bingo hall:

"The high spot of the evening was the "Big Link" with King's Lynn. A disembodied voice came through the loudspeaker, "Hello, to you, the El Dorado in *Benton!*". "Hello, King's Lynn" shouted our announcer and then we all had to shout "Hello, King's Lynn". The woman behind me said they do this at holiday camps too, they link you up with other holiday camps. "Great," she said with nodding head and narrowed eyes."

Highlights of the year are when Katie is finally potty-trained, when David gets a new, better-paid job, a once-yearly visit to Jane's parents. Hardly momentous, perhaps? But Jane's down-to-earth attitude and wry humour make you realise what real life is like for thousands of

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women:

'Suggested to David that we find another hobby... "Oh, yeah," he said, "Well, they've asked me to join the darts team but I thought you'd object."

It's the innocence that kills me.'

We all need a breath of fresh air and this book is the sharpest, wittiest, most original breeze yet through the mountains of dreary moans we generally think of as feminist literature.

Susan Pearce

Bookshorts

There are a number of recent titles of an anti-imperialist and third world character worth mentioning. Two books on Zimbabwe, a strong pro-ZANU-PF view, David Martin and Phyllis Johnson *The Struggle for Zimbabwe: The Chimurenga War* (Faber £10.95) and David Smith and Colin Simpson *Mugabe* (Sphere £1.50) which is rather superficial and journalistic. Out in late January is Fred Halliday and Maxine Molyneux *The Ethiopian Revolution* (Verso £5.95).

On Latin America there is the excellent Jenny Pearce *Under the Eagle* (Latin America Bureau £2.50) about US intervention in Central America and the Caribbean. Books on Nicaragua include French Trotskyist Henri Weber *Nicaragua: The Sandinista Revolution* (Verso £2.95) and George Black *Triumph of the People* (Zed £5.50), these are augmented by the superb collection of colour photos in Susan Meiselas *Nicaragua* (Writers and Readers £6.95).

On the influence of imperialism nearer home, there is a new edition of Phillip Agee and Louis Wolf (eds) *Dirty Work: The CIA in Western Europe* (Zed £5.50).

To complement Mark George's article elsewhere in this issue, is Roy Lewis and Bob Simpson *Striking a Balance?* (Martin Robinson £4.95) which puts the 1980 Employment Act into the context of previous legislation.

Volume Two of Neil Harding *Lenin's Political Theory* (Macmillan £15.00) has recently come out and clinched the Issac Deutscher Memorial Prize for the whole work.

It demonstrates at rather unnecessary length, that Lenin was not just a pragmatist but theorised very consistently what he was up to. If you ever want proof of this against academic muddle heads then cite Harding, but if you think its obvious then read Tony Cliff's far more rounded and lively four volumes on Lenin.

Two related titles soon to be reviewed in *International Socialism* are Christine Buci-Glucksmann *Gramsci and the State* (Lawrence and Wishart £5.95) and Joseph V Femia *Gramsci's Political Thought* (Oxford University Press £17.50).

With the new Nationality Act a timely publication is Remi Kapo *A Savage Culture: Racism — A Black British View* (Quartet £2.50).

Paul Wilkinson *The New Fascists* (Grant McIntyre £7.95) is a reasonable factual account of European fascist groups but lacks on overall analysis of its roots or how to fight it.

Meghand Desai *Testing Monetarism* (Frances Pinter £15.00) is a useful, but extremely technical guide to the theories of monetarism — for economic specialists only.

Also out is an interesting account of the political art of Conrad Atkinson *Picturing the System* (Pluto £3.95). For anyone interested in reading more about the Greek Civil War after Pete Gillard's piece in our last issue, there is S Sarafis *ELAS Greek Resistance Army* (Merlin £12.50). The new *Socialist Register 1981* (Merlin £4.50) edited by Ralph Miliband and John Saville, is rather disappointing.

Andy Durgan

Distortion?

Lindsey German's review of my book, *Girls, Wives, Factory Lives*, (SR November) is a complete distortion.

She attacks me for not looking at a factory where women and men work together. Anyone remotely familiar with the figures knows that women-only jobs, workplaces and even industries are typical not exceptional features of women's employment.

Moreover, she misses entirely the dynamic of the book, which is about the contradictory nature of consciousness, the unevenness of the movement, indeed, the double-edged nature of much so-called 'backwardness'.

Throughout her review, Lindsey misrepresents me and misquotes me. Nowhere do I use 'patriarchal analysis'. I make it very clear that the roots of female oppression lie with class society, and that I follow the tradition of Engels—not noted for his radical feminism.

My book is about the relationship between class and gender. Lindsey asserts I 'reduce working class ideas to men's consciousness and women's consciousness'. Utterly untrue. What I in fact do, is look at the *common* experience of class and wage labour for men and women—especially the need for rank and file control—and also, what is distinctive for women. She concludes, 'The implication seems to be that women workers are conditioned by the outside world, particularly their role as wives and mothers, but male workers are not'. Nonsense. For women, I emphasise the complex relationships between family and workplace; but I make it clear that all wage labour is a deprivation, and that the family affects men in that it ties them to exploitation as breadwinners. Because Lindsey sees class and gender in watertight compartments, she is unable to understand the *relationship* between them that my book attempts to describe.

What I *do* argue in the book, is that it *does* make a significant difference to your life whether you happen to be a working class *man* or a working class *woman* — something

I always thought so obvious, it seemed hardly worth writing a book about.

Throughout, I stress the struggle for rank and file control at work; but I also bring out the *particular* ideological and practical difficulties women face and also their particular potential strengths. In fighting for rank and file control, in spreading class struggle, we have to face up to the realities of differences in experience and consciousness, and to the roots of divisions within the class.

Anna Pollert

Reply

Anna seems remarkably upset by a review which described her book as 'a refreshing change from most sociological studies'. I seem somehow to have touched a raw nerve.

The point is that you cannot draw conclusions about the special features of 'working women's consciousness' unless you compare women workers with male workers in *similar* grades and jobs, even if a lot of women work in women only jobs and workplaces (and, of course, it is quite 'typical' for women in catering, the clerical grades of the civil service, banking, teaching, etc, etc, to work in mixed grades and jobs).

If you don't do so, you can easily fall into the trap of seeing gender as equally important in determining consciousness as class. From there it is only a short journey to the 'separate struggles' approach of both radical and socialist feminists, with women of all classes being able to unite in the struggle against oppression regardless of what happens in the other, class, struggle.

In the real world, the consciousness particular workers have is a product of a whole range of factors, of which gender is only one — and not necessarily the most important. A male steel worker can have a lot more in common with a female textile worker does — and a female cleaner can have a lot more in common with a male car worker than a male school teacher does. None of Anna's talk about it 'making a difference if you are a man or a woman' alters that.

Lindsey German

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The politics of the golden mean

Leninism and Western Socialism

Roy Medvedev

Verso £4.95

Russian Marxist dissident, 'scrupulous socialist critic of his native Russia ... turns his attention abroad to consider the prospects for socialism in the West.' He is 'concerned that the lessons of the Russian experience be understood by socialists abroad.' Thus the blurb. Sounds exciting, doesn't it? Unfortunately, it isn't, in fact it's extremely unexciting.

The main reason for this is Roy Medvedev's politics. Personally he is, no doubt, very courageous—anyone who speaks out in Russia needs plenty of guts—but politically he is exceptionally timid. He is a dissident, yes, but a very moderate and cautious dissident. He believes that the Soviet Union is fundamentally socialist, despite its undemocratic superstructure, and that all that is necessary and/or possible is a process of reform in which the ruling bureaucracy gradually democratizes itself. Moreover he believes that a process is taking place at the moment and that it has

been proceeding 'steadily over the last twenty six years' (p.193).

Normally it would be necessary to refute this perspective by detailed political analysis and argument. Today however we need only point to the streets of Poland where the incompatibility of Stalinist state capitalism and democratic reform is being written in the blood of Polish trade unionists. Poland is Eastern Europe's Chile—a decisive test of the reformist project adhered to by Medvedev.

On the basis of this perspective what Medvedev has produced is simply a blanket endorsement of Eurocommunism, particularly in its moderate rightist form. One of the striking things about this book is that politically it adds absolutely nothing to what has been said by Santiago Carillo, Enrico Berlinguer and the rest: communists must stop talking about the dictatorship of the proletariat, soviets were fine in 1917 but things are different now, now we must commit ourselves to parliamentary democracy, pluralism and rapprochement with Social Democracy, and so on. Seven or eight years ago it would have been

just as wrong but it might at least have sounded new, today it's all very old hat.

In fact it is not only its politics but also its structure that makes this book so disappointing. Medvedev is a historian and his approach is to give a potted history of each of the main disputed questions: the dictatorship of the proletariat, soviets, majority and minority revolution, socialism in one country, and the Communist/Social Democratic divide. The result is an unhappy compromise, neither good history nor good political analysis. In fact given the title and length of the book it is remarkable how little concrete analysis of contemporary western Europe it contains. Nothing on the current crisis of capitalism, nothing on any of the major class battles in Europe (France 1968, Italy 1969, Portugal 1974-5 etc.) just abstract generalisations and quotations from Social Democratic and Communist leaders. On the question of Communist/Socialist unity—the principle 'message' of the book—Medvedev sees this as a matter of constructing an ideological compromise formula somewhere between the two traditions; the Social Democrats move a little to the left, the Communists a little to the right and they meet in the middle.

It is this which illustrates Med-

vedev's basic weakness. Fundamentally he is a believer in the politics of the golden mean—the truth lies somewhere between the extremes—the ultimate credo of the 'moderate'. On the one hand there are those who deny that Russia is socialist at all, on the other hand there are those who say it is complete socialism—solution: it is a little bit socialist and a little bit non-socialist. On the one hand we have the internationalist Trotsky who was for world revolution, on the other hand we have the nationalist Stalin who was for socialism in one country—solution: well there's Lenin who was for world revolution and for socialism in one country (according to Medvedev). On the one hand we have the communists, on the other hand we have the Social Democrats—solution: 'a union of Communists with a new political face and Socialists with more radical, more decisive bodies.' The only trouble is that it is the logic of the class struggle to undermine and destroy this middle ground so patiently constructed by Medvedev.

With most Russian dissidents one feels that it is because they are from Russia that they are not Marxists, they are rebelling against the orthodoxy of the society. With Medvedev it is the reverse. It is only because he is Russian that he claims to be a Marxist. In Britain, one feels he would be at best a Labour MP. In short, not worth a fiver, unless a specialist interest requires you to read it.

John Molyneux.

Third world capitalism

Class, State and Power in the Third World

James Petras et al

Zed Press, 1981. £16.50

A new book by James Petras usually merits attention. Petras is a North American Marxist specializing in Latin America. He is a prolific writer and his work, often offers interesting analytical insights on class struggle in the region and the role of imperialism. After the Nicaraguan revolution he published one of the few critical assessments of the revolution in *Monthly Review*, predicting that the petty bourgeois Sandinista leadership was likely to subordinate 'the mass struggle to the diplomatic needs of "reconstruction"'.

But this latest volume, half of which is devoted to socialist revolutions in the Third World and their class components with examples drawn mostly from Latin America, is disappointing. Petras' main concern is to reassess the role of the working class in third world revolutionary movements. But his commendable faith in the working class seems to deflect him from a serious analysis of why their participation in these movements has not led to the emergence of workers states eg. Petras offers no convincing assessment of the relationship of the working class to the petty bourgeois nationalist movements that have led most of the revolutionary upheavals and nowhere puts forward the need for a revolutionary

worker's party.

Thus on Nicaragua he optimistically suggests that the mere existence of factory defense committees, the civil defense committees and the militias could ensure 'that the revolution continues uninterrupted'. Strangely missing is the bite of the previous piece. On Cuba, Petras puts forward the hotly contested (see debates in *ISJ* Spring and Summer 1980) thesis that the working class were responsible for the radicalization of the revolution with no assessment of the present relationship between the state and the working class.

The first half of the book which deals with the international economy, the role of the US imperial state and new forms of economic and political domination in the Third World is of more interest. Petras in collaboration with other authors provides useful data on the role of MNCs and multinational banks, particularly in Latin America today. He relates the emergence of what he calls 'neo-fascist' states in Latin America to the needs of the 'imperial state' ie. international capital. This part of the book looks particularly at the role of the advanced, semi-industrialized third world states: South Africa, Brazil and Iran before the revolution. Petras analyses the contradictions created by the pattern of industrialization 'from above and outside' and the way these have resulted in a sharpening of the class struggle in the countries concerned.

Jenny Pearce

Conspiracy to repress

Conspiracy Law, Class and Society

Robert Spicer

Lawrence & Wishart £7.50

This book sets conspiracy law in an historical context and aims to develop an understanding of sources of present law. Traditional legal categorisation is abandoned. Instead the two periods when conspiracy law was most activated—pre 1920s and post 1960s are examined by reference to the three involved groups—the Irish cases, English dissidents and trade unions.

This enables for example the Angry Brigade and Persons Unknown trials to be compared with those of nineteenth century radicals.

It reveals that the accepted proposition in the Shrewsbury Three trial—that to be found guilty of conspiracy the building workers did not even have to know each other—originated from the irrelevant reminiscence of the Judge in Parnell's Irish case of 1881.

The overall conclusions are predictably as follows. That there are no trials of employers for combining to profiteer etc., nor could there be under capitalism.

That the growth of conspiracy law is directly referable to its being one tool of the state in its reaction to

situations which threaten it. 'It shows a consistent use of that law as a weapon of class struggle.'

The last sentence of the book is the question whether conspiracy law 'is merely an isolated example of class justice in an otherwise neutral and beneficent system'.

The answer is clear to those of us who accept Engels' quoted statement that 'the working man knows ... that the law is a rod which the bourgeois has prepared for him.'

Unfortunately Spicer does not identify fully with this maxim and so does not develop certain points made elsewhere in his text. Namely that 'in the affair of the Pentonville Five more was achieved by striking dockers in one week ... or after examining the Labour government's Criminal Law Act 1977 that those with faith in the English system of gradual reform ... must now reflect that five years of discussion have resulted in a more complex and potentially more repressive conspiracy law. ...'

Such development would greatly strengthen the value of his actual conclusions. Nevertheless the aim was to provide a historical context for conspiracy and this is achieved in an interesting and well written way.

Frances Smyth.

JANUARY 1919

All Europe seemed on the verge of revolution at the beginning of 1919. There were general strikes in Glasgow and Belfast, a guerrilla war was growing in the southern and western counties of Ireland, protesting soldiers were marching through Whitehall, the French navy was in mutiny, the factories of Turin and Milan were in ferment, demobilised peasant troops were organising land seizures in southern Italy, in a newly independent Hungary a weak bourgeois government was about to hand power to an imprisoned Communist, in Austria a left-socialist government depended for its survival on a militia of armed workers, and in the lands of the former Russian Empire, Bolshevik-led soviets held state power.

But the centre of the revolutionary ferment lay in Germany, the world's second industrial power. The Kaiser's rule had collapsed early in November 1918, and workers' and soldiers' councils held power in every town and city from the Belgian border in the west to what is now the Russian town of Kaliningrad in the east. In Berlin, Hamburg, Bremen, Dusseldorf, Munich, Stuttgart, Frankfurt, Danzig, Chemnitz, Halle, there were repeated demonstrations by soldiers and armed workers protesting at hunger, unemployment and attempts to enforce military discipline.

In Berlin, the capital city, a revolutionary socialist, Emil Eichhorn, ran the police force, half staffed by revolutionary volunteers.

Yet all was not finished for the German ruling class. For, presiding over this revolutionary upsurge was a 'Council of People's Commissars' dominated by right-wing socialists who, as their leader Ebert put it, 'hated revolution like sin'. They had worked with the Kaiser's generals to support the World War, and now were secretly working with them again to destroy the soldiers' and workers' councils. Together they began to build a new mercenary army, the *Frei Korps*, made up of officers from the old one.

In the first flush of the revolution, the

right-wing socialists did not dare be open in their desire to turn the clock back. They knew they could only do as they wished if they got the support of the majority of workers and soldiers as well as of the generals. And so also in the government alongside of them were representatives of the left wing anti-war break away party, the Independent Socialists. This gave the whole government a leftist appearance and enabled it to persuade a national conference of workers and soldiers councils in mid-December to agree to the right socialists call to hand over power to a parliament to be elected a month later.



Now the right socialists and the generals felt powerful enough to turn against their own supporters. After fighting between right-wing and left-wing soldiers in Berlin on Christmas Day, the right socialists forced the left-wingers to leave the government. And a week later they told the revolutionary police chief Eichhorn that he was sacked.

The news caused bitter anger among the capital's working class. On 5 January the biggest protest demonstration the city had ever seen took place — and it was an armed demonstration. It seemed to many people that a repetition of the November revolution of two months before was at hand.

This, for instance, was how many of the Independent Socialists, including the veteran parliamentarian, Georg Ledebour saw it. They had been enthusiastic a couple of weeks before for participation in the government because they thought in that way they could get a short cut to socialism. Now they thought they could do the same thing by using the revolutionary workers to replace the right wingers in the government by themselves.

The most experienced revolutionary in Berlin, Rosa Luxemburg, did not agree. She had argued repeatedly in the previous

month that a new revolution could not be successful until the mass of workers understood the need for it, not only in Berlin but throughout the country. She warned that the Independent Socialist leaders, with their dream of instant power, were not to be trusted.

The trouble was that Rosa did not have a powerful revolutionary party to argue her position.

Her organisation, the Spartakus League, was only 3000 strong, with no presence in most of the Berlin factories. What was worse it had no tradition of a common discipline. This was shown on 6 January when its best known member beside Rosa, Karl Liebknecht, put his name alongside Ledebour's on a leaflet calling for an uprising to overthrow the government.

The right socialists and the generals were overjoyed. They allowed the left-wing workers and soldiers to seize a few buildings in centre of the city, proclaimed that the Spartakists were out to establish a blood-thirsty dictatorship and moved their own forces in to the kill.

A tragic and unnecessary defeat followed. The mass of factory workers in the city were quite bemused by what was happening. They still wanted unity between the right and left socialists and did not understand the need for fighting. The left socialist parliamentarians, having called for the uprising changed their mind and, right in the middle of it, tried to negotiate a truce with the government they had declared overthrown. If any of the government's troops had thought of changing sides, this would have convinced them otherwise, for it meant the old officers were to continue to be in charge.

The only people to take the organisation of the fighting seriously were the Spartakist leaders, who had opposed the whole thing. They felt, as Rosa Luxemburg explained, that they could not turn their back on the most militant section of workers, even when these made a mistake.

But the small forces of the Spartakus League could not possibly sustain an armed struggle when the Independent Socialists — nearly a hundred times their size — were abandoning the armed workers to their fate. The government's forces were not large — perhaps five or six thousand strong. But they were able to crush all resistance.

A reign of terror followed for the working class activists of Berlin. People were dragged from their beds, thrown into prison, hauled before makeshift court martials. Among the many shot on sight was Karl Liebknecht. And Rosa Luxemburg, one of the greatest leaders in working class history, was clubbed to death with a rifle butt and thrown into a canal.

The German revolution was not over. There were to be many more months of civil war, from one end of the country to another. And a mere eight weeks later there was to be fighting on an even larger scale in Berlin.

But lacking a revolutionary party, the class had gone into battle in January before it was ready and paid the price by losing many of the leaders who could have ensured it victory later on. The whole world was to pay the price eventually, when instead of socialist revolution Germany suffered Nazi counter-revolution.