

socialist

REVIEW

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Zaire

Imperialism's crude calculations

May 23: The last few days have been like a rerun of the early 1960s. The same screaming headlines about the slaughter of whites by black rebels, the same newsreel films of Western paratroopers moving in to save the whites, the same huddles of white refugees in airport lounges retailing stories of rape and murder by savage black hordes.

Only the names have changed---the Congo has been called Zaire since 1971. The mineral-rich province of Katanga was renamed Shaba at the same time. And some names have not changed---at the heart of the tangled Zaire crisis sits President Mobutu Sese Seko, who climbed to power with Western backing during the troubles in the 1960s.

Zaire is, with Nigeria, and South Africa, crucial to Western interests in Africa. Its vast mineral wealth concentrated in the southern province of Shaba accounts for eight per cent of world copper production and 67 per cent of the strategically vital mineral cobalt, used in the nuclear industry.

Until 1960, the Congo was a brutally exploited Belgian colony. Independence brought to the surface all the conflicts built into this huge central African country, a patchwork of different tribes carved into a unified state by its nineteenth century colonisers. These conflicts were encouraged by

different Western interests. The Union Minière du Haut-Katanga, the Belgian company owning the copper mines, encouraged Moïse Tshombe to secede and set up a separate Katangese state.



Patrice Lumumba

The rebellion was only crushed by the central government of Cyrille Adoula and Mobutu (then army chief of staff) with the backing of the US Central Intelligence Agency. The CIA had already intervened to connive at the overthrow and murder by Mobutu's forces of the left-wing nationalist prime minister of the Congo, Patrice Lumumba.

Since Mobutu took over all

power in 1965, his chief backer has been the United States. There is one billion dollars' worth of US investment in the mining industry alone.

When the world copper price was high in the late 1960s and early 1970s Mobutu felt safe enough to strike a radical pose. In 1967 the copper mines were nationalised. This was following in 1973-4 by a programme of 'Zaireanisation', which involved the nationalisation of a number of foreign (mainly Belgian) interests.

But a reckoning was soon to follow. The world crisis has involved a steep fall in the price of copper, with catastrophic effects on the Zairean economy, which depends on the mining industry for two thirds of its exports. Zaire is now literally bankrupt---unable to pay back the billions of dollars Mobutu borrowed from Western banks during the boom years.

In exchange for a rescue programme organised by a consortium of Zaire's creditors Mobutu offered to hand back nationalised enterprises to their foreign owners. A number of Belgian firms have taken up the offer. Meanwhile an austerity programme is being implemented.

The regime's economic difficulties have given its opponents an opportunity on which they have seized. The invasion of Shaba in May seems to have been timed to sabotage a

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meeting of Zaire's Western creditors scheduled to finalise the rescue programme.

The group mounting the invasion, the *Congolese National Liberation Front* (FNLC), appears to represent a diversity of interests. Its support is drawn from the predominantly Lunda people of Shaba (formerly Katanga). Many Lunda fled to neighbouring Angola after the defeat of the Katangese secessionist movement in 1963. They have now been joined by a new wave of refugees from the repression that followed the FNLC's first invasion attempt last year.

Notorious

Some of the FNLC's fighters may have served in Tshombe's forces in the early 1960s (the notorious Katangese gendarmes). Others, like their leader Nathaniel M'Bumba, former police chief of Kolwezi, fled from Mobutu's tyranny to serve beside the gendarmes in Portugal's colonial armies and then switched sides to support the victorious Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) during the 1975-6 Angolan war.

The struggle for Zaire has now been caught up in the wider conflict in Africa between the Western and Eastern blocs. Neither last year's invasion nor the present one could have taken place without the support of the MPLA regime in Angola and its Russian and Cuban allies. No doubt President Neto of Angola would welcome Mobutu's downfall, given the Zairean regime's support for the rival right-wing National Front for the Liberation of Angola.

Colin Legum writing in the *Observer* has suggested that the invasion was master-minded by the East Germans. Although Legum is a suspect source, with close links to Western intelligence services, this claim is given plausibility by the secret agreement revealed earlier this year under which Mobutu permitted the West German government to use a large portion of Shaba province for rocket tests. Moreover, East German military and security personnel have been active in aiding the Mengistu regime in Ethiopia.

Pleading

There may well be other calculations involved. The mines of Shaba are part of the same economic, geological and

ethnic complex as the Zairean Copperbelt. Zambia's President Kaunda has been touring Western capitals to plead for money to save the country's bankrupt economy (also hit by the fall in the world copper price). He has been hinting that unless the US and Britain take a tougher line over the Rhodesian 'internal settlement' he will call in Cuban forces to help win the guerilla war in Zimbabwe.

If Zaire, or even Shaba, were to fall to the rebels, the vision of a chain of Moscow aligned regimes stretching from Angola on the Atlantic to Mozambique on the Indian ocean, cutting Africa in half, might well float before the eyes of the Kremlin bureaucrats.

The calculations on the Western side are just as crude. When the FNLC first invaded Shaba in March 1977 Western troops were not used to rescue Mobutu—Moroccan soldiers flown in by French transports, with the tacit support of the US, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the Sudan and South Africa, were enough.

This time the rebels were much more successful—seizing the mining centre of Kolwezi almost immediately. The result was the intervention of a French and Belgian paratroop force, spearheaded by the French Foreign Legion and flown in by US fuelled transports.

The French force did not bother to pretend that they were there to save white lives—firing indiscriminately at any black

(including loyal Zairean soldiers) they cleared Kolwezi of the rebels, pursuing them into the surrounding bush. Mobutu has now requested that the French remain until the position is completely secure—which could mean an indefinite stay for the legionnaires.

The French intervention fits the new role that President Giscard d'Estaing is tailoring for his regime. Since the Soviet intervention in Africa began at the time of the Angola war, France has begun to project itself as a continental gendarme, protecting right-wing African regimes from the threat of overthrow or Russian interference. Already the last few months have seen French jets bombing the Polisario liberation movement in the Western Sahara and the Foreign Legion moving in (for the second time) to save the government of Tchad.

Courting

French capitalism has a special interest in Zaire. Giscard has been courting Mobutu for some years, paying the country a personal visit in 1975. His aim is a bigger share for France in trade and investment. This has brought France into conflict with Belgium, still Zaire's main trading partner and the biggest foreign investor after the US. This may help to explain the row between the French and Belgian governments over the timing of their respective in-

terventions.

Broader tactical differences are also involved. Brussels, like Washington and London, believes that it is a mistake to be seen to come out too openly in favour of Mobutu's corrupt and brutal regime. Hence the stress by the Belgians that their role was limited to protecting whites living in Kolwezi (although reports are beginning to filter out that Mobutu's troops began the killing of whites—in any case, no one seems very interested in the blacks who died as a result of the fighting). These differences should not be exaggerated—Giscard got Carter's approval over the transatlantic telephone before sending the troops in.

The inter-imperialist conflicts dividing France from Belgium, Russia from the US, should not obscure the main issue. The struggle for Zaire is bound up with the general crisis affecting southern and central Africa since the fall of Portuguese colonialism in 1974.

Mobutu's overthrow would be a powerful factor in further weakening the grip of Western imperialism on the region. But, as the examples of Ethiopia and the Portuguese colonies suggest, it will depend on the action of Zairean workers and peasants themselves whether such a victory leads to their genuine liberation or to the consolidation of another, more 'progressive', form of capitalist regime. *Alex Callinicos*



Mobutu and friends: those on right are from France and Belgium



Scanlon and (literally in the background) Wright



Duffy: campaigning advantages

AUEW: the worst still to come?

The disastrous defeat inflicted on the left in the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers has still to have its impact.

The Government is assured of official acceptance of a further stage of pay policy. Employers will be much more confident of tacit support for victimising militants. The prospect of a merger between the AUEW and the electricians on the EFT-PU's terms—is much closer. The Labour Party right wing can expect a comfortable victory over Tony Benn in any leadership stakes—even if the Tories win an election.

The questions that this catalogue of disaster raise for the left are numerous. But in particular some sort of explanation for the size of the defeat is vital. A clear majority of 50,000 for the right wing in the crucial Presidential election cannot be explained by gerrymandering; and Bob Wright's result was the best the left did nationally. Less well-known Laurie Smith, National Organiser, received an even bigger electoral rebuff. All but three of 22 local elections were won by the right.

Morale

The left's demoralisation is the first and most obvious cause for the fiasco. Bob Wright's recent plea not to 'personalise' the defeat and blame Hugh Scanlon's defection is unconvincing: after all Scanlon had no AUEW mandate to vote against supporting the firemen at last December's TUC meeting. Yet he did so, and the desertion of such a key figure in the broad left mythology seriously demoralised militants.

Far more important, though has been the left leadership's clear failure to win anything since Scanlon won the presidency in 1968.

After the debacle over the 1972 national claim (which ended in isolated defeat for the Manchester sit-ins) the leadership signed away national rises for three years with a £10 staged increase in skilled minimum rates, which left the top rate at £42 a week until recently.

And this year a two-day national strike was called (and then abandoned) in support of an obscure side issue of an insignificant claim.

Naturally this appalling national performance cannot all be laid at the left's door: but the membership undoubtedly saw it this way. Such contempt was probably increased when the left abandoned the national procedure agreement in 1972, only to agree without dissent to a new and worse one four years later.

Local performance was hardly better. The crucial Coventry Toolroom agreement, maintaining skilled workers' wages, was lost - £20 or £30 disparities between the same grade of worker in the same city have resulted.

Average earnings in engineering have declined relatively to other sectors. Significantly, electricians are now doing consistently better in a number of industries, often as a result of militant action.

Above all the broad left did not act according to the principles it had preached. Organised AUEW scabbing on an electricians' strike at Chrysler in 1973 was approved. That same year locked-out Perkins Engines workers were described as 'paid anarchists' by Bob Wright when they demanded guarantees before returning to work. Car industry members were bamboozled by left support for 'planning agreements', participation and, finally, redundancies.

In the last year the AUEW journal under John Boyd's right wing editorship has taken the unprecedented step of listing officially-backed disputes un-



Boyd: right wing editor

der the rather ironic title 'The Union That Fights'.

Whatever the real record in this respect, it is a sad fact that even this contrived militancy was never the tone adopted when the broad left was firmly in the saddle.

This accumulation of woe—coupled with the union's terrible arrears problem and general inefficiency—is a partial ex-

planation of the results. But it is only partial. After all, at the end of 1976 Bob Wright decisively defeated the darling of the 'moderates', John Weakley, by some 160,000 votes to 126,000. These were almost exactly the terms of his defeat this time by Terry Duffy.

Votes

A special factor was that Weakley had taken the union to court (a generally unpopular move!). But the newspaper lobby for the 'moderate candidate' was if anything stronger than for Duffy, from whom Fleet Street's labour correspondents have a universal contempt.

Was the Weakley result a freak, or have the 25 per cent of AUEW members who vote in the postal ballot swung massively rightwards... or are other factors in large part responsible?

Comparing AUEW voting this year and last produces some very interesting figures. First is the fact that the number of members registered and the numbers on the electoral roll both increased. A rise of 40,000 in those eligible to vote in a period of growing unemployment must indicate increased efficiency in registration.

And this increased efficiency appears above all in right-wing areas. Tiny rural districts such as Ipswich and South Suffolk both increased their registered membership considerably. The proportion registered to vote is now getting on for 90 per cent: way above normal levels.

This could easily cancel out the vote of the militant

Manchester district, even though the turnout from Manchester is consistently good.

Similar changes between 1977 and 1978 appear in the figures for predominantly right wing areas such as the southern counties and Devon and Cornwall.

The table shows some rather more important factors (1978 figures).

The now entirely right-wing Birmingham division completely overwhelms the best-organised left division. (It is larger than Manchester and Sheffield combined.) Branch involvement is relatively high in Manchester, but this commitment is almost certainly outweighed by the postal ballot.

The change in registration of members is also significant:

	1977	1978
Manchester	49,911	47,289
Birmingham	116,542	123,206
London North	54,977	53,518

The increase in registration in right-wing areas and decrease in left-wing areas is broadly the pattern across the union. And the North London figures are important for another reason: branch turnout is much lower than other left-wing areas within the union. Bob Wright may have suffered abnormally because of the appalling state of the left's organisation in their crucial south east strongholds.

So it looks as though the right's machine is far better than the left's—though still not very good. Added to this are other factors which improve the right's postal ballot performance.

Employers are more likely to give moderate candidates time-off with pay to campaign. Right-wing control of the national and local voting machinery means more efficiency for them hence probably the complaint from left areas of missing ballot papers. Re-organisation of the vital West Midlands districts means an increase in services to the members in moderate areas and, again, enhanced right-wing control of the local machine.

Campaigning

Lastly, the right have considerable campaigning advantages at the moment. 'Free collective bargaining' is not a slogan to fire the imagination—especially in the AUEW, whose record on wages is perhaps the

	members	registered Voters	Branch turnout*
Manchester	47,289	36,412	6.4 per cent
Birmingham	123,206	94,868	2.9 per cent

* those who voted in their branches than by post

worst of any significant union bar the GMWU and USDAW. In addition the right is not tied up with the broad left's formalism.

In the Black Country for example the broad left held outside meetings, while the right flooded factories with propaganda. Far left groupings such as *Engineers Charter* inside the union are unfortunately not yet in the same

league. In a sense Wright himself summed up his campaign with the recent remark 'If the election had been largely activist members, I would have walked it'. In 1968 Hugh Scanlon could, thanks to local activism, rely on one-third of his votes coming from a high branch ballot in Manchester. With the introduction of the postal ballot, that way has gone for ever.

The elections have brought an AUEW/EETPU merger much closer: an immediate threat is a walkover for the right, with the broad left whining about the electricians' policies. It looks as though a move for a democratic amalgamation could have some mileage, however, in view of developed rank-and-file activism in the EETPU. If the militants take a positive position at grass roots level, a real rank-and-file organisation could yet emerge from the creation of a single electrical/engineering union. *Dave Field*

Italian diary

Moro: paranoia and problems

22 April: One of the great themes for discussion here is the question of who is behind the Red Brigades. Nearly everyone agrees that the rank and file members of the Brigades have been recruited from the ranks of those disillusioned in the revolutionary groups and that, however mistakenly, most of the Red Brigades genuinely believe that their actions are the prelude to socialist revolution.

But there is also the widespread conviction that the Brigades are being financed, used and infiltrated by other forces who have quite different aims. Since Moro's kidnappers show little inclination to allow themselves to be caught by the Italian police, all the theories about who is really behind the Red Brigades remain pure speculation. Here are a few ideas.

The *KGB* is responsible. Angered by Berlinguer's persistent heresy, the Russians are creating the conditions in Italy (a sharp swing to the right) which will make the Communist-Christian Democrat alliance impossible, and which will drive the PCI back into opposition.

The present leadership will then be overthrown, to be replaced by one more favourable to Moscow's line.

These developments are to be seen in the context of the Yugoslav situation, where even Tito cannot be expected to live

indefinitely, and where the Russians are hoping to take over after his death. With the Red Army outside Trieste and a pro-Moscow PCI, the Russians will be able to exercise a decisive influence on Italian affairs.

Supporters of this thesis, and there are many of them, point out that the communiques of the Red Brigades have never once attacked Russia. The possibility of the KGB being behind the Red Brigades is reputed to have given Berlinguer more than one sleepless night.

Strauss and the Bavarian Christian Democrats. Disturbed by the Italian Christian Democrats' apparent willingness to share power with the Communists, Strauss has



Berlinguer: heretic

supported moves to get rid of the main architect of this policy, Aldo Moro.

The kidnapping of Moro greatly strengthens the hand of the right wing of the Christian Democrats and aids the creation in Italy of an authoritarian Catholic state on the lines that Strauss would like to see it in Germany.

The CIA is again at work. This was the thesis originally sustained by the PCI and certain sections of the socialist party.

The scenario is quite similar to the one above. In spite of Carter's clear warning to the DC (Christian Democrats) not to allow the PCI into the parliamentary majority, Moro went ahead nonetheless.

The Americans are sufficiently alarmed at the prospect of the PCI coming to power that they have decided to teach the 'progressive' wing of the DC a lesson.

Moro himself, in one of his letters from the BR's prison, has revealed that there was no love lost between himself and the Americans, and that on a previous occasion they had opposed his candidature for the Presidency of the Republic.

Lastly, the latest analysis of the PCI. The manipulators of the BR are not to be sought outside Italy, but amongst those powerful sections of the state bourgeoisie who, for one reason or another, have recently fallen into disgrace.

The PCI points the finger at those involved in the Lockheed scandal, the secret servicemen who were transferred after the fall from power of the fascist general Miceli in 1974, and shady figures from the world of banking and state owned industry who have been exposed

over the last two years. These are all elements which according to the PCI would be interested in seeking revenge and preventing the Communists' slow climb to power.

You are invited to take your pick. We will probably know the truth in not less than thirty years time.

23 April: The position of the revolutionary left (Democrazia Proletaria and Lotta Continua) is summed up in the slogan 'Neither with the Red Brigades nor with the State'. But this agreement over a slogan masks some important differences.

DP has continuously stressed the positive aspects of bourgeois democracy which revolutionaries should seek to defend in this situation. Freedom of assembly, freedom of the press, etc. are for DP liberties which are not to be thrown away lightly.

DP could be said to be against the state but for democracy. But the comrades of DP have taken few steps, in spite of their name, to distinguish between bourgeois and proletarian democracy.

At a time when everyone from the DC leftwards has been going on incessantly about the need to defend democracy, DP has not used the occasion to explain clearly to its sympathisers where and how its view of democracy differs radically from the other members of the 'democratic chorus'.

Lotta Continua has been much more sceptical about the degree of democracy which actually exists in Italy, and has concentrated more on showing how Moro's kidnapping will lead to a 'democratic

authoritarian regime' on West German lines.

Both organisations have unequivocally condemned the Red Brigades, but certain sections of Lotta Continua have persisted in continuing to define members of the BR as 'comrades who are mistaken'. This strange line, very popular a few years ago, has received strong reaffirmation in today's Lotta Continua from Guido Viale, one of the former leaders of the organisation.

Viale, referring to a wounded member of the Turin BR who has given himself up, says, 'Comrade Piancone has fallen into the hands of the police. Comrade Piancone has been a militant of the revolutionary left over the past nine years and was a founder member of Lotta Continua... Mistaken choices, which I do not agree with but which have their own internal coherence, have brought him to the point of risking his life in the ranks of the BR.'

Comrade

Apart from the absurdity of quarrelling over the etiquette 'comrade' one wonders how 'mistaken' a comrade has to be before Viale considers him no longer a comrade. Perhaps Stalin was just a 'mistaken comrade' in 1929.

25 April: Milan. Today is the anniversary of the liberation of northern Italy by the Resistance in 1945. There are 40,000 people in Piazza Duomo to commemorate the event.

The Christian Democrats are present in small numbers and their white flags are surrounded and, one senses, protected by the red banners of the PCI. Gian Carlo Pajetta, one of the old guard of the PCI, is the

main speaker.

Pajetta served a long prison sentence under the Fascists and was one of the most intransigent of the PCI leaders in the 40s' and 50s'. He was also one of the most hard line Stalinists in the party.

In his speech he pours scorn on the revolutionary left: 'Those who shout the slogan "Neither with the BR nor the State" are only different from the BR in one sense: they lack the courage of their convictions.'

Throughout the Moro crisis the PCI has been adamant in rejecting the idea of negotiating with the BR. It has also been in the forefront of the law and order brigade.

It was the PCI who suggested the institution of 'commissars' in the factories to keep under surveillance those suspected of sympathy with the BR. The party was forced to abandon the idea in the face of widespread opposition.

And it was the PCI who suggested that the free radios should be controlled to prevent them from transmitting broadcasts which might be sympathy with the BR. While talking endlessly about the need to defend democracy, the party seems all too slaphappy about proposing and approving measures which gravely menace civil liberties.

29 April: Turin. 5,000 workers have assembled in the industrial vehicles' section of Fiat to discuss the BR. The trade unions have put up a large banner which reads: 'Against all terrorism, to improve this State'.

But the reporter from *La Repubblica* (radical democrat) has to admit in his article that the workers who speak from the floor have something rather different to say from the official line. 'These institutions aren't worth our support', says one.

And another: 'For thirty years we've had to suffer terrorism in the factories, with fascist foremen, delays of months in paying out pensions, forced emigration abroad to find work... I refuse to condemn the Red Brigades, and I won't condemn anybody. I'm against terrorism, but I do know that we need reforms immediately.'

Another worker goes up to the microphone and says, 'Today's dramatic situation didn't happen overnight. It's the result of the lack of decent government, it's the result of the



BR members on trial: mistaken comrades?

deformities in this state. You can't let off Ordine Nuovo [a fascist group], and then say you want to defeat the Red Brigades'.

An older worker supports this last speech: 'The trial against Curcio must go on, but so must that at Catanzaro [against the fascists who planted bombs in Milan in 1969], that dealing with Lockheed and so many others that keep being put off. When the Christian Democrat representative come up to speak he is met with a chorus of whistles and jeering.'

The reactions at Fiat in Turin are similar to those in other big factories. At an earlier meeting at Pirelli in Milan a shop steward from Lotta Continua was warmly applauded when he asked, 'Is it worth defending the state?'

I say it isn't because it is not our State. The State can look after itself but it can't expect to have the support of the working class, to whom it has only offered bullets and repression in all these years.'

But the speech of trade unionist who sums up at the end of the assembly also gains wide consent: 'We're not talking about defending the State in abstract but about defending the democratic State, that which has given the police a trade union, and which allows organisations like the Democratic Magistrates Association.'

Striking

Terrorism is aiming to destroy this democratic State, which is the fruit of our struggles.'

4 May: One of the most striking things about the position of the revolutionary left in this situation has been their insistence that the State should negotiate with the BR to Save Moro's life. This position is explained not only on humanitarian grounds, but on political ones.



Meanwhile the workers shout 'The only reform is revolution'

Today DP issued a press statement which made their stand very clear: 'In our battle for the liberation of Moro, there is certainly respect for human life and our refusal of terrorism as a political weapon. But, in view of the cynical use that will be made of Moro's death for reactionary purposes, our position is based above all on the firm desire not to slacken in the fight against the bourgeois state.'

'We must not concede any space to those economic and political forces which are working to reinforce the control of the bourgeoisie in our society.'

Moro's death, argues DP, will mean a new wave of repression and a climate of fear and tension which will make it much easier for the line of

'sacrifices' and 'austerity' to pass in the factories.

9 May: News has just come through of Moro's killing. The worst has happened.

Quite apart from any other considerations, on a political level the Red Brigades have given the Christian Democrats their greatest boost since the Americans came up with the Marshall Plan over thirty years ago.

Paul Richards.

Editor's Note: In the local elections held shortly afterwards the Christian Democrats obtained 42.5 per cent of the vote, their highest share since 1948. The Communists saw their share of the vote fall from 35.6 per cent in the 1976 general election to 26.5 per cent.

Ward	average
Highview ward	
NF 93 votes	46.5
SU 220	110
Tollington	
NF 260	86.6
SU 176	88
Hillrise	
NF 118	39.3
SU 207	103.5

(SU ran two candidates in each ward, the NF two in Highview three in the other two)

The temptation is to rejoice in the fact that the NF are on the run. This should be resisted.

Three obvious factors stand out of the voting figures. First, that the NF vote is very unevenly spread: 3.7 per cent in Preston is about the sort of vote they have got in past parliamentary elections in other areas. Second, their base in London is much stronger than elsewhere: their average vote in London is much higher than for the rest of the country. Third, in London at least, they have more substantial support in working-class and lower middle-class areas, say Harringey, than in solid middle-class areas like Richmond or Bromley.

Indeed, if we were to take the figures at the ward level from some of the areas in which the NF are known to have support, for example the South Hackney area, we find that in Queensbridge and Haggerston, they have maintained a frightening 25 per cent of the vote.

The sense of glee that we might feel at the fact that the Nazis have taken a battering overall must be qualified by the recognition that they retain substantial bases of support in some working-class areas which we have not yet managed to shake. They are thus in a position to stage a come-back if the campaign against them is relaxed.

Explaining

The central question is: why has their vote dropped? After all, there has been no substantial change in the situation of misery that gave their solutions credibility in the past.

A large amount of the credit must go to the Anti-Nazi League. For the first time since

the NF appeared as a major force, there has been a sustained campaign against them involving thousands of people. The message that they are a Nazi party has been brought home to thousands of people who in the past simply viewed them as the most consistent racialists.

Another obvious factor is that the Tories new commitment to racial policies which look pretty much like those of the NF must have persuaded many voters that it is better to vote for a big racist party than for a small one. Thatcher's racist strategy must have been designed to win large numbers of Labour voters on this one issue. In this it does not seem to have been a sweeping success, but its side effect may well have been to cut away some NF support.

However, the fact that the NF has managed to sustain a base in some areas means that the pool of racialism is still very much present. It also means that while we may have managed to convince large numbers of people that the NF are Nazis, we are very far from having undermined the hold that they have established in a number of key areas.

Looking forward

There will undoubtedly be a temptation among some sections of the labour movement to down-grade anti-NF work in the future. This will be justified in terms of having beaten them. Nothing could be more disastrous. Not only is the pool of racialism still present, even if it is now voting Tory, but the anger and frustration which gives rise to the Nazis is very far from removed. We are in for a long, hard struggle.

It is, in my opinion, too early to say exactly what the response of the NF will be to this defeat.

NF and the local elections

Reading the entrails

Election results, particularly local election results, are a notoriously unreliable guide to the support that political parties really have. They do, though, have a certain value as an indicator of the way in which things are changing.

In the case of the National Front, this year's round of local elections have been particularly important. Their whole momentum over the last two years has been built on the expectation of a national 'breakthrough' in terms of voting support. All the evidence is that they have failed to sustain the growth they have experienced in the past.

The following table gives some idea of their percentage votes:

Bradford	2.1
Leeds	1.0
Manchester	0.5
Newcastle	0.1
Preston	3.7
Stockport	0.1
Wirral	0.2
Birmingham	0.2
Coventry	1.0
Dudley	1.8
Sandwell	2.1
London	
Brent	2.0
Bromley	0.7
Camden	1.1
Enfield	4.6

Hammersmith	1.2
Harringey	4.3
Hillingdon	0.7
Hounslow	1.7
Lambeth	0.8
Lewisham	2.2
Richmond	0.2
Waltham Forest	6.8
Wandsworth	1.6

An overall sample of the Nazis' share of the vote based largely on urban areas (25 towns selected), gives the following results:

1975	1976 votes
0.4	22,000 (1.0%)
1977 votes	1978 votes
35,000 (1.5%)	17,000 (0.8%)

The obvious conclusion is that they have suffered a major set-back. Their overall vote is very substantially down and in some areas they did very badly indeed.

In fact, in some areas it was comparable to the votes of the far left. If we take the London Borough of Islington, where the Nazis made a major push, and compare the NF vote with that of the Socialist Unity candidates, we get the following results:

Anti Nazi League

All we have at present is a first indication and it is quite possible that they can ride out this reverse by arguing with their members that local elections are no real indicator of support.

What undoubtedly has happened is that the more extreme racialists, whether organised by the NF or not, have moved sharply towards terrorism in the last few weeks. This can prove a very serious problem for the NF leadership. For some time they have been under pressure from their own 'right' to behave more openly as Nazis. They have been able to resist this by pointing to the success of the 'respectable' election strategy. This is now

much less credible.

Tyndall and Co will now face pressure to present themselves as more clearly a fascist alternative or risk losing some of their cadre to the more openly Nazi groups. The hardened Nazis in the NF have been able to resist the temptation to put on the jack-boots as long as they could get votes, but now that line seems to be petering out, they will need something to keep their spirits up.

Modified

Our response to this will have to be modified. In the first place, we will need to place more emphasis on the question of racialism as such in our

propaganda. We will also have to argue in the ANL for a more detailed type of work, concentrating on work-places and estates in order to win people away from racism and fascism rather than simply mobilising those who are already convinced. This will be much more demanding than the large-scale day trips like the Carnival.

Finally, it means that we have to begin to provide an alternative lead in those areas where the NF have some base. This entails both a commitment to socialist politics and an effort to relate them to the problems in one factory or on one housing estate.

Colin Sparks

was to be 'democratised' under the pact. In fact, the government is now pushing through a new 'anti-terrorist' law which will give these heavily armed thugs even more powers!

The PCE responded last December by launching, jointly with the main trade union organisation, the Workers' Commissions (CCOO), a campaign for the implementation of the Moncloa pact. Despite its electoral weakness the CP is a solid workers' party with far stronger roots in the labour movement and much greater mobilising ability than the PSOE.

In the recent workplace committee elections the CCOO, which the PCE controls, won about a million votes and over 50,000 delegates, while the Socialist UGT received 700,000 votes and about 40,000 delegates. The CCOO predominates in the industrial sector and in large factories, while the UGT is strongest among white-collar and professional groups.

However, at a factory level all activity has been kept within the limits of the pact. For example, 100,000 out of Madrid's 180,000 metalworkers are in the CCOO. They are currently involved in a wage claim. However, despite the great traditions of struggle among the metal-workers of Madrid, the PCE are confining the campaign to token actions in the interests of moderation. This contrasts sharply with the behaviour of the employers, who have victimised numerous militant during this dispute.

The debate leading up to the PCE congress did not, however, centre on the policies of class collaboration pursued by the party leadership. Instead, the

Madrid letter

Euro-comrades in control

The ninth congress of the Spanish Communist Party (PCE), which took place on 19-22 April, was an occasion of great importance. It was the first public and legal congress of the party in nearly 40 years. The PCE was virtually the only party to resist Franco from his victory in 1939 to his death in 1975. Moreover, the congress marked an important stage in the development of Eurocommunism - the transformation of the Western European CPs into social-democratic parties.

The roots of Eurocommunism in Spain go back to 1956, when the PCE adopted a policy of 'national reconciliation' based on the idea that Franco was supported only by a small isolated clique and that therefore sections of the bourgeoisie and formerly pro-nationalist population could be won over to an anti-Francoist position. But the process has been speeded up since the PCE's legalisation last year.

Frantic

Within two months of its legalisation, the PCE was thrown into frantic activity during the June 1977 general election. During that campaign the party dropped its traditional republican position and came out in favour of King Juan Carlos, Franco's hand-picked successor. The PCE concentrated its fire on the small neo-fascist Popular Alliance (AP)

while ignoring the eventual winners, the Democratic Centre Union (UCD) of the Prime minister, Adolfo Suarez. The party even declared that victory for Suarez, former boss of Franco's fascist Movimiento, would be 'good for democracy'.

The PCE's pursuit of the parliamentary road did not win it great dividends. It received 1,221,091 votes, compared to 5,282,580 for the Socialist Party (PSOE) and 6,309,517 for the UCD. There are only 20 CP deputies instead of the 35 expected.

Nonetheless the PCE has pressed ahead with its strategy of developing a consensus with the bourgeois parties in order to stabilise 'democracy' in Spain. It calls for a 'government of

national concentration' to include all the major parties from itself to the AP. The rationale for this strategy is that it is necessary to avoid upsetting the extreme right wing of the army.

Exchange

The main fruit of this sort of 'consensus politics' since the elections has been the Moncloa pact agreed last autumn a social contract Spanish style which, in exchange for wage control (a ceiling of 22 per cent while inflation is running at 30 per cent) and austerity measures, offered a list of basic democratic reforms.

However, these reforms have not in general been implemented. For example, Spain's notorious Armed Police



main theme was the dropping of the word 'Leninism' from the party statutes.

This move was proposed by the PCE secretary general, Santiago Carrillo, in an effort to prove (if further proof was needed) the party's independence from Moscow and social-democratic aspirations. The main opposition came from the Catalan wing of the party, the Catalan Unified Socialist Party (PSUC).

Divided

The PSUC, the most important single section of the Communist Party, is divided into four warring tendencies ranging from the 'Historical' or Stalinist faction to the 'White Flag' (so called because its leaders came from the revolutionary 'Red Flag' group, although they are now to the right of Carrillo). The dominant faction within the PSUC is, however, the 'Leninists', who control the Catalan Workers' Commissions and form a majority of the PSUC leadership.

Carrillo, therefore, did not have an easy time during the pre-congress discussions. The conference of the PSUC in April voted by 97 votes to 81 against any move to drop 'Leninism'. While most other regions went along with the central leadership's position, in the Asturias 113 delegates walked out of the regional conference after the chair prevented an oppositional member of the Central Committee from speaking.

This was the culmination of various undemocratic practices by the leadership, including the circulation of a blacklist of oppositionists through the local party machine. In Euskadi (the Basque country) a central committee member resigned in protest against the leadership's behaviour.

Much-heralded

The congress opened on 19 April in the hall of a five-star hotel draped with flags the monarchist national flag being given pride of place, of course.

The much-heralded debate on the change in the party statutes turned out to be a non-event. As the debate unfolded it became clear that it was nothing to do with Leninism as such. That had been abandoned long ago, when, during the Civil War, the Communist Party placed the defence of bourgeois

democracy before the social revolution that had developed in response to Franco's coup.

The real issue was the quickest road to electoral respectability. When the PSUC leader, Paco Frutas, warned that dropping 'Leninism' would endanger the 'class character of the party' he was not so much challenging the reformist road taken by the PCE than declaring a sentimental attachment to the party's past. The congress's decision, by 968 votes to 248, with 40 abstentions, to endorse Carrillo's proposal marked simply a desire to accelerate the process of Eurocommunism in the hope of catching up with the Italian and French CPs.

The congress also backed the leadership by voting, by 776 votes to 318, that 'the forces of labour and culture' and not the old-fashioned working-class provided the motor of social change in Spain. The US military bases in Spain and the UCD government were ignored, although the PCE's rivals in the workers' movement the PSOE and the parties of the far left received attacks in plenty.

Control

Overall, the congress left the CP leadership firmly in control. Carrillo's much vaunted 'democracy' does not extend to the Communist Party itself. As a letter by 23 PCE members in Malaga put it: 'The party apparatus serves its own interests, broadening its influence, dominating, reproducing itself and becoming more and more impregnable, fossilising the party, bureaucratising it, abandoning mass politics.... generalising a concept of discipline as servile and uncritical reverence towards the central leadership'.

The congress was also marked by the PCE's notorious sexism. When the famous singer Ana Belen was elected an honorary president she was greeted by wolf-whistles and sexist cries. There were only 100 women delegates out of the total of 1,300.

Carrillo's calculation in breaking openly with the past is that, although this may involve some members leaving the party, it is 'a small price for growing faster'. He may well succeed. A large proportion of the PCE's 240,000 members are both new and inactive. Moreover, loyalties built up over 40 years of clandestine struggle will not



Threat facing left: fascist salutes from right leader Pinar

be shaken by the removal of one word from the party statutes.

However, this does not mean that the situation of the revolutionary left is hopeless. The traditions of the anti-Franco struggle mean that there is a greater degree of unity on the left than in other European countries.

A considerable amount of joint work takes place on a daily basis, especially in those factories or neighbourhoods where the revolutionary left is strong. This is particularly true in Euskadi, where the PCE's 4,000 members are outweighed by the combined membership of the revolutionary groups.

In the workplace elections there nearly half the CCOO delegates supported revolutionary positions rather than the CCOO leadership, while at the regional congress of the Workers' Commissions a third of the delegates supported the revolutionary ICR-MC-OIC opposition.

The revolutionary left is, therefore, well placed to begin to challenge the PCE's hold on the Spanish working class, provided it can relate to the party's rank and file around concrete issues of united action.

Doug Andrews and Mary Reed

LABOUR NEWS

Not all Duffy

At the same time as the right's crushing victory in the AUEW, sharp turns to the left took place in two very different unions—civil servants' and journalists'.

The largest civil service union (CPSA) saw an electoral annihilation of the right when

mandated delegates produced a 22 to six left majority on the executive. The result was a decisive defeat for the right, which had failed to hammer the left during its short period of executive control.

The reasons for success are obvious—wages. Some 36,000 people are reported to have left the civil service recently: an extraordinarily high figure, considering the relative job and pension security enjoyed. Wages have again fallen behind comparable private sector rates.

The Government is threatening to tie civil service to the tightest of pay policies in the next round. Further, active campaigns by the far left have brought rewards: four executive members from the *Redder Tape* rank-and-file organisation out of the 22-strong left group.

But it looks as though the left is there on sufferance. The wage issue will be crucial on other more political questions, elections for officials and abolition of the Pay Research system, were heavily defeated. And affiliation to the Anti Nazi League was only narrowly carried.

NUJ

The left in the NUI has meanwhile been considerably reinforced—surprisingly so, in some ways, since hard-fought closed shop battles have been a heavy drain on union funds and have come in for big press attacks.

But the increased frustration of provincial journalists in England, Wales and Scotland and management showdowns resulted in a move left for the union's conference and high votes for militants in postal ballots. Three provincial newspaper activists in *Journalists Charter* the NUI's rank-and-file organisation, were elected on postal ballots and they join at least five other militants on the union's executive—plus leftwingers elected at conference as president and vice-president.

Dave Field.

• Red Ladder, a regionally based socialist theatre company run as a collective, requires an Administrator, with work ranging from office work to public speaking.

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Grunwick

The Grunwick strike is now receiving the last rites, after a catalogue of cowardice by the official trade union leadership which must have astonished the hardest cynics in the movement.

But the hardest truth is that the unofficial movement's weakness has also been shown up—most starkly in the strikers' back yard. At the strikers' 'requiem' conference on 14 May, leaders of Brent Trades Council took great exception to criticism, but their performance in winning local support (let alone in advising the strike committee) was often casual, usually sectarian and always patronising.

The Trades Council leaders—all Broad Left—declined to co-operate with the neighbouring Barnet Trades Council during the tough AUEW recognition dispute at Desoutter, which occurred at the height of the Grunwick picketing.

A joint strategy would certainly have led to a much greater chance of victory, and more important brought home the importance of the recognition issue to the engineers, the crucial element in winning local trade union support.

All rank and file attempts to move the almost moribund Broad Left controlled North London AUEW district committee were resisted by Brent Trades Council, which seemed to regard covering up for its friends as more important than trying to get mass support.

Finally the local leadership made no attempt to involve those few key local militants who were doing something. AUEW members at the Racal factory in Wembley went on strike to support the picket, the Trades Council did not even try to use the fact as a lever to move those giving paper support in other plants. Indeed they were embarrassed.

Tragedy

The tragedy is that it could have been different. There is a tremendous tradition of rank and file activity and unity in North West London. In 1974 for example a meeting of delegates from 19 workplaces on the giant Park Royal industrial estate pledged to take action if local nurses in dispute were victimised. Nurses spoke to mass meetings in several fac-

ories: nothing like this happened at any stage during the Grunwick dispute.

In 1973 a tiny sit-in over recognition at the Seiko Time workshop in Kilburn was supported within hours by donations and support from workplace collections. North West London engineers were probably the first to come out when their union was fined £45,000 by the courts over the Con-Mech case in 1974. And a number of local factories used to have a joint organisation for mutual support and exchange of information known mysteriously as The Syndicate.

Much of the area's muscle has naturally been whittled away in a period which saw, for exam-

ple, 180 workplaces close down or move away in just over a year. Most of the larger employers are in newer industries, with little tradition of union activism and a high labour turnover.

But the BCC plant which struck for Grunwick is the only one in the Racal group with union recognition. Local busworkers have an unequalled record for militancy. The Desoutter strikers, most in their teens or twenties, came out for recognition. Desoutters is a 'family firm' with a 90-year history of anti-unionism. Sections at General Motors and Smiths Industries were active in support of Grunwick and Desoutter. And the Cricklewood postmen led the

way . . .

The inevitable conclusion is that the traditional broad left base in the area could not support Grunwick. Instead of delegations there was one steward with a personal £5 note; instead of stoppages there were small delegations.

Sabotage by trade union leaders can in this case be a convenient excuse (and one used by Brent Trades Council). The dispute could of course have been won overnight with official backing for the Cricklewood UPW. But as damaging to the strikers' cause was for Yorkshire miners who had travelled all night to see the local factories working. *Dave Field.*

ECONOMIC BRIEFING

The Monetary Crisis

One of the most striking features of the world economic crisis has been the complete collapse of the old system of fixed exchange rates. From the 'Bretton Woods' agreement of 1946, right up until 1971, the major currencies remained fixed in value against one another. During that whole 25 year period there were only two significant readjustments of international exchange rates.

Since 1971, however, the relationships between currencies have been thrown into chaos, with realignments being forced so often that governments have had to give up the whole idea of each currency having a fixed value.

All the major currencies now 'float', with their values against one another altering *from day to day* under the action of market forces. Furthermore, all attempts to express the values of currencies in terms of *gold* have been completely dropped.

One of the main causes of this destabilisation of exchange rates has been the world wide take-off of inflation, which has 'amplified' the differences between countries. During the 1960s the difference between two economies might mean that one country had a rate of inflation of 2 per cent a year while another country had, so, 4 per cent inflation—a relatively small discrepancy.

In the 1970s, however, the same difference between two

economies can mean an inflation rate of 10 per cent for one compared with 20 per cent inflation for the other—a huge difference which soon leads to tremendous pressure for the exchange rate between the two currencies to be altered.

The other main cause of exchange rate instability has been the rise of the 'Eurodollar market'—that is to say, the growth of a huge volume of liquid funds, outside the control of any national government, which surges about the world's money markets seeking the highest rate of return.

During the 1971 exchange crises, for example, 12,000 million dollars of speculative money flowed into Germany in a single morning (that is four times the entire then foreign currency reserves of Britain).

At noon the West German authorities were obliged to close the exchange market and revalue the mark. It was repetitions of this kind of incident that eventually forced them to allow the mark to 'float'.

It is now common for a currency to alter its value, upwards or downwards, by as much as 25 per cent in a year. Faced with exchange rate fluctuations of this magnitude, long term planning becomes impossible and international trade and investment are severely disrupted. It also means that higher profits can be made in the international money markets than can be obtained from productive investment, which tends further to prolong the recession.

The huge new oil wealth of Saudi Arabia for example, has been used mainly to purchase

short-term bonds, rather than being invested in industry. Such increases in the volume of funds committed to the money markets can only serve in turn to further undermine the stability of exchange rates.

The monetary crisis described above is in one sense just a side-effect of the underlying 'real' crisis, the crisis of production. It seems clear that the old monetary system collapsed *because* the post war boom came to an end and not vice versa.

Nevertheless, the instability of exchange rates has become a major problem in its own right and is now one of the key factors preventing world economic recovery.

The Problem of the Dollar

Specifically, the key monetary problem just now is the plight of the dollar. The dollar has lost more than 25 per cent of its value against other major currencies in the last year and the downward slide shows no signs of halting.

This has implications which reach far beyond the U S because the dollar is used, much as gold used to be, as the international medium of exchange for the world as a whole—for example all oil prices are expressed in dollars.

This fall in the value of the dollar is partly because the U S now has a higher rate of inflation than its competitors (U S 6½ per cent West Germany 3 per cent) but mainly because the U S is running the biggest balance of payments deficit in history, consisting largely to the cost of imported oil.

Both these problems arise because the U S is the only

major sector of the world economy which is expanding. The improvement in world trade figures which took place last year was almost entirely due to a 5 per cent growth rate in the U.S.

External and internal difficulties block President Carter's attempts to deal with the dollar crisis. The world's two healthiest economies, both with a massive balance of payments surplus, are West Germany and Japan.

Carter has been trying to persuade the rulers of these countries to get their economies expanding and thus take the pressure off the dollar, but so far they have refused to cooperate. Because both these countries have economies which are almost entirely export-led, they have little to gain and much to lose from reflating at a time when world markets are still stagnating.

Of course the point can be made that unless *someone* starts reflating world economic recovery may never take place, but that sort of argument cuts no ice with national governments.

Internally, powerful vested interests in Congress have so far blocked Carter's attempts to have an energy bill passed which will curb America's voracious appetite for imported oil. Furthermore the Saudi government has made it clear that if Carter puts a tax on imported oil they will retaliate by raising the world price of oil (currently much reduced in real terms by the fall in the value of the dollar).

Mounting

Meanwhile, the U.S. balance of payments deficit continues to mount and with it, its mirror image, the huge volume of paper dollars held outside the U.S. It was a similar American balance of payments deficit in the 1960s which originally gave birth to the Eurodollar market and many economists believe it was this which fuelled the initial take-off of world inflation at the beginning of the seventies. The present situation could lead to a repetition of these events on a much larger scale.

If on the other hand Carter curbs the American balance of payments deficit in the only way left open to him, namely by putting the brakes on the American economy, the world will be pushed deeper into recession.

David Turner

POLITICAL NOTES

The Tory amendment to the top rates of tax has embarrassed the Government. Leading members of the Cabinet such as Harold Lever and Denis Healey were openly supporting the idea of more tax handouts to the rich - only to find that the cost to the system was about three times higher than expected, because the Tories amended all the higher rates instead of one.

The result is a really massive giveaway to the very high-earners: directors and executives.

If the top tax changes to remain intact, Denis 'squeeze the rich' Healey's 13th Budget will go down as the biggest bonanza for the well-heeled for many years.

For the take-home pay benefit to a low-paid worker (single person) is about £1.40 a week; for a typical production worker about £1.40 a week and at the average skilled level about £1.50. While at the top the single person earning £25,000 a year will be £22.92 a week richer.

The increase at this level is worth the same as a £7,000 rise in annual salary.

The government's tax defeats were due in the end to the decision of the Ulster Unionists to vote with the other opposition parties.

This was a blow to the government, who had been hoping to persuade the Unionists to back them once the Lib-Lab pact expires this summer. But the Unionists' price for such a deal is high: more seats for them in the Westminster Parliament and the restoration of Unionist control in the six counties.

The *Economist* had a cheerful thought following the vote: 'One of the worst governments for Britain might be a Conservative government that had to rely on Ulster Unionist support in Parliament.'

If the Tories get a swing of something under 4.3 per cent since 1974 at the next general election, they would be in power but would probably have to rely on some other party in parliament. In last week's English and Welsh local elections . . . the best estimate of the average

swing to the Conservatives since 1974 is hovering dangerously near that figure - between three per cent and five per cent.'

Meanwhile, Callaghan's attempts to out-Tory Margaret Thatcher have led to a new stress by Labour on the family. The last budget, with its increases in child benefit, is being presented as a 'Family Budget', while Callaghan told the House of Commons recently that a new-co-ordinated family policy is necessary 'if we are to preserve and enhance the family's dimensions and the family circle, which I believe to be a very precious asset in our national life.'

This shift is more than a mere election manoeuvre. It is linked to a general ideological offensive involving issues like race

and education which has been one of the keystones of Callaghan's administration. It is also connected with population experts' worries about the declining birthrate.

The main target of such a 'family policy' would probably be working mothers. Writing in his *Financial Times* 'Society Today' column Joe Rogaly quoted a study which estimated that 'more than a quarter of women with a child aged under five and at least half of those with the youngest child at primary school are now employed'. We can expect more talk about the virtues of motherhood, 'maternal deprivation', etc. all with the aim of forcing these women back into the home.

Alex Callinicos and Dave Field

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1900

Dear Comrade Editor,
Paul Cunningham's description of *1900* as a 'great socialist film' should not be allowed to pass unchallenged. It is indeed not often that a film-director claiming to be Marxist gets the resources to make a film as ambitious in its scope as *1900*. All the more reason for socialists to take a critical attitude to the claims of such a film.

Paul is quite right to see the film as being about the interrelation of individuals and political forces. A film is not a piece of historical analysis, and has to be judged in its own terms. But this film claims to be dealing with certain crucial events of 20th century history. Unfortunately it systematically distorts them and lies about them.

Just to list a few of the most obvious distortions: (1) The question of the First World War is completely fudged. It passes in a moment or two, without any serious account of what happened. Clearly Bertolucci cannot bring himself to condone the imperialist slaughter, yet dare not seem unpatriotic.

of course, it is true, as anyone who has been within lobbying distance of an NF demo can testify, that many fascists are departed individuals. But individual depravity does not explain fascism.

In short, Bertolucci's own personal 'historic compromise' with the millionaires of the film industry is a failure. If you want to see some trendy cinematic gimmicks, go and see *1900*; if you want to know about fascism in the Italian countryside, stay at home and read Silone's *Fontamara*.

Fraternally, Ian Birchall

Politics every day

Dear SR

Some more thoughts on 1968 and the 10 years since... It's a shame that of your writers only Dave Widgery seems to have feeling about Paris in 1968. For it is undeniable that the spirit of those weeks was incomparable. It is mostly that spirit that makes it real to talk of those days as if they might have been

politics—the linking of present practice with revolutionary ideals.

This concept is still alien to much of the left—IMG, SWP, as well as the CP (and this is true of similar groupings in other countries too), except in one area. And this is one of the most central both theoretically and in terms of political impact—the women's movement, or more broadly the sexual-political movement. No self-avowed leftist can ignore women's demands on an everyday level for equal treatment as full people. Both sexual politics and the working out of them in everyday practice have been and continue to be a major political driving force. The National Front and their fellow-travellers know that. Read Wilhelm Reich's *Mass Psychology of Fascism* is you want it all in a clear framework.

Finally in 1968—not just in France either—we came out and did it on the streets, we came out and lived our politics, we declared ourselves as implacable enemies of all that the present order stands for, and we started declaring by the way we are and the way we live what we are for

R K Bakerloo

Much ado...

If *Socialist Challenge* wants a theatre critic, David Edgar is the person. *Socialist Review* needs somebody quite different.

His articles are fine for the trendy lefties who find talking to each other (and acting plays out in front of each other) sufficient to their needs. For those of us trying to change the world they are a waste of time.

Edgar tells us 'It has been pointed out that socialist theatre has not built up a mass working-class audience. What it has done is to create substantial support among the socialist movement.' What a total waste of time! Edgar is a defeatist and in justifying his defeatism he totally misunderstands socialist theatre.

Anyone claiming the title of 'socialist' does so on the basis of fighting to win others, through argument, through activity or whatever. Socialist theatre is not and cannot be an exception. Of course he is right when he says that socialist theatre hasn't won itself a mass working-class

audience. What part of the socialist movement has?

Edgar's 'analysis' of socialist theatre is based firstly on ignoring those socialist theatre groups that are building a working class audience (North West Spanner, CAST) and secondly on making political masturbation a thing of value. He is right when he says 'sexual politics is an area of theory and practice on which socialists have tended to be at best woolly and at worst downright reactionary' and again when he says that the audience we need to get at is those 'directly involved in struggle against exploitation and oppression'. But to conclude as he does that plays dealing with sexual politics before predominantly non working-class audiences is the best that can be done is the political equivalent of throwing in the towel.

Socialist Theatre has a huge contribution to make to the socialist movement. As a movement we are terribly hidebound by the past, much of the time we are insufferably boring. The problem is however not insuperable. *Socialist Worker* has pioneered the non-boring socialist newspaper. The Carnival against the Nazis has shown that we can relate politically to tens of thousands through music. Socialist theatre remains a fountain of fresh ideas for putting our arguments over the the masses.

Will those who believe we are kidding ourselves kindly leave the stage,

fraternally, Geoff Brown

Editor's Note: While we think that the points of substance contained in Geoff Brown's letter are of note, we would like to disassociate ourselves most strongly from its extremely sectarian tone. The left needs more open and fraternal discussion and less point-scoring.

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(2) Bertolucci has, of course, every right to decide to make a film primarily about the countryside. But what happens in the countryside in modern society is quite inseparable from urban development. Yet apart from one holiday outing by peasants to the city, the working class is utterly absent from the film. The great factory occupations of 1920, absolutely central to an understanding of the rise of fascism, are never mentioned. (3) Bertolucci's peasants are incredibly romanticised—warm-hearted, lovable, pig-ignorant rustics. Much of the film is a patronising insult to a potentially revolutionary class. (4) Fascism, as embodied in the foreman Attila, is reduced to personal nastiness, with little sign of any explanation. Now,

the real thing. Not just in Paris, but in Marseilles and Grenobles and many other places the French people and state had the feel of the spark that must catch alight at some time in a revolution.

But the really important legacy is not the knowledge that our nostalgia (well, mine, anyway) refers to something genuine and important. It is the change in the nature of politics in the last ten years. The so-called New Left has had to attempt to redefine politics faced with two complementary challenges: firstly the failure of the old, economic left (the Communist Parties especially, but by no means solely) and their selling-out; and secondly the insertion into our awareness by the situationists and libertarians of the importance of everyday life and personal

ROCKING AGAINST RACISM

John Rose



Steel Pulse

Tom Robinson & Steel Pulse



Jimmy Pursey with Misty

I was standing beneath the giant stage when the CLASH rock band started playing. Several of us had been hurriedly deputised as stewards by a nervous Carnival organiser who wasn't entirely sure what was going to happen when the CLASH came on. The CLASH hadn't played in public for months. They are banned from every dance hall in London. The authorities think that they always leave a trail of riots behind them.

Facing the stage was a sea of tightly packed 14 year old kids with cropped heads. CLASH is one of their favourite bands. Some of them had been in the Park since dawn. The kids were fainting at the rate of about one a minute. Their mates picked them up and passed them to the stewards who in turn carried them to the ambulancemen waiting at the back of the stage. The kids tried to pogo when the CLASH started playing. Suddenly two girls started to fight with each other ferociously. One of the girls can't have been more than eleven. They stopped fighting just as suddenly.

There was a leading steward perched just above the crowd but beneath the stage. His job was to try and coax the crowd. There was a constant temptation to lunge forward at the stage which could have come tumbling down. The steward gently waved them back. He'd point out the kids who were fainting and urge the others to pass them forward. Then he'd notice dirty looking bottles that seemed to pass round the crowd. Another singer, Patrik Fitzgerald, had been hit by a can earlier on. The bottles made everyone nervous. They looked like left-over weapons from the battles at Grunwick and Lewisham last summer. The CLASH's most popular song is WHITE RIOT. The CLASH are known to favour the real thing when the time is right.

But this was most definitely not the right time. The steward had little difficulty coaxing the bottles forward. With superb self discipline the kids made sure that the

bottles were passed forward. 'WE WANNA RIOT' 'WE WANNA RIOT' screamed the CLASH. Yes, we all do. But this was not the time. This was time to do it theatrically. It was a rehearsal for the Future That Doesn't Work.

WHITE RIOT, by the way, was made after the riots at Notting Hill. For a while some skinheads who support the National Front and the more overtly Nazi British Movement believed that this was *their* song. They have been disappointed.

CLASH belongs to the same movement as ROCK AGAINST RACISM - RAR. WHITE RIOT says that white kids riot in solidarity with black kids - not against them.

Some of the white kids made space for their black brothers and sisters to come forward and see STEEL PULSE - the band that followed the CLASH. STEEL PULSE had been introduced as 'those black revolutionaries from Handsworth, Birmingham'. A description which STEEL PULSE certainly didn't object to. STEEL PULSE have been playing at left wing concerts 'gigs' is actually the correct description - for some years now. It is only in the last few months that they have been taken seriously commercially. They have had a record in the Rock Music charts. They have now been signed up by Island. Their songs are politically crystal clear like KU KLUX KLAN and ROCK AGAINST RACISM penned especially for RAR. They are very important because they are a Reggae Band progressively far more aware than most Reggae Bands which stop short in the Rastafarian culture of so many young blacks. Rastafarianism is totally pessimistic about the black mans' future in Britain. STEEL PULSE are decidedly optimistic.

So now is Tom Robinson who told the 90,000 strong crowd that his record about the WINTER of '79 when the National Front are big and strong and you can't find your

friends was a prediction which he no longer holds. The Carnival in fact has changed his mind as indeed it changed the mind of several thousand potential National Front voters in this year's local elections.

It was fascinating watching the reaction of the young punks when Tom Robinson came on Stage. Tom is not really their cup of tea. Tom, by his own definition, is a 'Middle Class Kiddy'. The rock n' roll revolutionary movement has made him 'Glad to be Gay' rather than proud of his class background - which of course is what it does for the working-class Punks. Nevertheless Tom had everyone singing 'Glad to be Gay' that afternoon - and that was a revolution for a lot of people in the crowd - whatever their class background.

When Tom put on his false upper class nose and told the crowd that they should all be ashamed of themselves - the punks didn't like it. He told the crowd that they were a bunch of perverts, long hairs, left-wing weirdies, rotten commies and trots, that they were a disgrace to the Society that had fostered them. What, demanded Tom, had happened to the 'old values'. The Punks booed and hissed. What was this nonsense? Then Tom rounded on them. They too were disgusting. Yobboes and louts of the first order. A good hiding for everyone in the crowd - Authoritarians everywhere would agree with that. The suspicious expressions on the faces of the young punks began to fade. So they too were part of this splendid display of self mockery. For a moment everyone in the Park was united in a determined Celebration against Racism and for Freedom. It was fantastic. The mood was quickly translated into song with all the singers on stage BLACK WHITE UNITED TONIGHT, BLACK WHITE UNITED TONIGHT.

Declining capitalism cannot unite black and white - only a revolution can do that. One of the Jesters of the day, Red Saunders



— acting as one of the CARNIVAL's Impressarios — had the thankless task of telling everyone that it was all over. He was flabbergasted at what had happened. He didn't know how to tell people to go. No-one wants to turn OFF that kind of massing Spontaneity.

I haven't mentioned Poly Styrene and X Ray Specs and Patrik Fitzgerald. They were all on stage as well. I wasn't there when they were. I cannot do justice to their contribution.

Yet and Yet...what does it all mean? Tom Robinson is the Year's Big News in the Music Business. He's contracted out to his record manager who may also hate Racism and love Music but he also hates the *Socialist Worker* and loves the *Daily Telegraph* as he made quite plain to Rock Against Racism supporters who took him a copy of *Socialist Worker* after the Carnival. Tom is legally bound to several more long playing records with this set-up. THE CLASH too may played against the NAZIS alright (which was front page lead in MELODY MAKER two weeks before the Carnival. This is an IPC weekly with an estimated readership of a cool two million....) — but the CLASH manager nailed his colours cynically to the mast when he told Melody Maker that 'swastikas weren't in this year'. A rumour went round after Carnival that EMI were going to bring out a Carnival Long Playing Record complete with one of those lovely colour photographs as an album sleeve displaying the crowd carrying the yellow Anti Nazi League lollypops blended against the pink *Socialist Worker* Against Immigration Controls placards. Some of the bandmen were furious. So the Carnival was just a Capitalist Hype after all. Actually the rumour is almost certainly untrue. — if only because some of the bands are not owned by EMI and hence EMI can be sued if they brought out this record. On the other hand should we complain too loudly if this temporary alliance with the Record Business

is going to deepen the youthful rebellion?

Of course EMI and CBS etc. etc., are going to pull back at some stage when their business and political interests conflict. However the same phenomenon is taking place in the Musical Press — New Musical Express, Melody Maker, Sounds Magazine and Record Mirror are both reflecting and generating the New Wave Market — which is now openly on the Left with Rock Against Racism as an organised force with its self consciously revolutionary finger tips close to the steering wheel. These papers are tied by Apron Strings to the most staid and conservative Top Business Men directing the country's leading publishing houses. Yet the papers have been startlingly firm in their anti racist anti fascist pro freedom drive.

Tony Parsons and Julie Birchill began it all with their unconditional support for the Socialist Workers Party intervention at Lewisham last year. They wrote their support into an article for New Musical Express — circulation 190,000. Quickly the other papers jumped on the bandwagon — vying with each to politicise and publicise the new wave musical cum cultural revolution. Honours for this to date must go to *SOUNDS Magazine* whose edition on March 5th must rank as one of the best pieces of Musical/Anti Racist journalism ever to appear in this country. Their front pictured 12 Rock Stars with DEPORTED notices written across their faces. (The Sounds front page has now been used as a highly successful leaflet produced by SKAN). The inside of them paper then carried no less than nine further pages including a spoof article written sometime in the 1980's with a National Front Government beginning to deport everyone's favourite rock stars. Interviews with anti racist rock stars and an amazing interview with Martin Webster denouncing all rock music as jungle music; hence confirming Rock Against Racism's case that Rock Music is certainly a music for the anti racist

movement if not for revolution itself.

We shouldn't get caught in the trap of worrying too much about our strange bedfellows who have openly capitalist aspirations. The Anti Nazi League and Rock Against Racism — and it should be clear by now that these two social forces couple perfectly — are United Fronts which will build and unbuild alliances between a vast range of people whose interests on other matters are completely incompatible. During the period of unity an irreversible radicalisation is taking place which can only benefit the development of a revolutionary movement. Providing that is that we learn how to operate in this new exciting sometimes exotic sometimes strange environment.

Rock Against Racism are learning quickly how to adapt. Bands like SHAM 69 had a young racist following promoted in part by the Young National Front. SHAM 69 is at this moment one of the most popular bands amongst working class kids. RAR intervened directly with SHAM and suggested they play on stage with a black band. SHAM agreed. They've alienated some followers but kept and helped changed the minds of others. RAR then is shifting the terms of argument currently raging in the schools.

Rock Music in an expanding economy is always incorporated. Rock Music followers who think that they cannot find work when they leave school in a deadening economy want to *sing and act*. One estimate is that no less than ONE MILLION school-kids can and will relate to the Anti Nazi League and Rock Against Racism.

Nevertheless the CLASH band manager could still be proved right. We've won the first round in the struggle to talk the language of the generation of unemployables. But this is going to be the most volatile generation ever. The Swastika Peddlers are going to come back and try again and again

WHEN THE MUSIC STOPS!

Alex Callinicos



NF: NO FUTURE



On 30 April the British left woke up to the fact that the Anti-Nazi League is more than just another campaign—it is a mass movement. There must have been many agonising re-appraisals that day, as socialists of all hues, from Tribune Group back-benchers to orthodox Trotskyist sectarians, saw that the Anti-Nazi League really could be, as the *Guardian* suggested a couple of months ago, the biggest thing since the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

The reasons for the League's success are diverse. In part, they reflect the nature of the period. The last eighteen months has seen a growing groundswell of anger which, denied expression in the workplaces by the sabotage of the Labour government's allies in the official trade union machine, has burst out into the streets in a series of violent confrontations, most notably at Grunwick and Lewisham last summer.

This radicalisation has affected chiefly young people—some of them students or unemployed, but most young workers, whether white-collar or manual. The Carnival showed that, unlike its predecessors—CND and the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign, the ANL's chief audience is working-class. It also provided powerful support for the organisers of Rock against Racism's claim that politics and popular music add up to an explosive mixture.

These different strands were brought together by a single issue—the fight against the Nazis. The rapid growth in popular support for the National Front and the other Nazi parties in the last two years produced a powerful counter-reaction which culminated in the great anti-fascist victory at Lewisham on 13 August 1977. In retrospect, Lewisham was a turning point. It showed the authorities that they could no longer guarantee their control over a situation in which the Nazis were allowed to march openly through black areas. The result has been the rash of bans of major NF marches.

Lewisham also produced a response among the many thousands of people who hated the Nazis but disapproved of the Socialist Workers Party's strategy of physically confronting them on the streets. It showed that the Nazis could be stopped.

The Anti-Nazi League was launched in the aftermath of Lewisham. Where numerous other anti-racist campaigns packed out with notables of all varieties has failed, it succeeded. What made the ANL so different?

The answer does not lie simply in the highly imaginative propaganda produced by the League. From the start its stress has been on organising *activity* against the Nazis. It has not devoted itself merely to denouncing the evils of racialism and fascism, or with preaching to small groups of the converted about the necessity of physically smashing Nazi marches. The ANL's message has been simple: The Nazis can be stopped if we organise against them—if you want to *do* something to help stop the Front, then join us.

Part and parcel of the effectiveness of this appeal has been the ANL's openness—anyone who agrees that the Nazis must be stopped, whatever his or her other political views, can become a supporter. From the start the League has been a genuine united front of revolutionaries and reformists. Its initial organising core comprised one member of the Socialist Workers Party, Paul Holborow, and two left-wing social democrats, Ernie Roberts and Peter Hain. The steering committee includes members of the Labour Party, the Communist Party and the SWP.

The combination has been important. The notables among the League's sponsors—the Labour MPs, showbiz celebrities, etc.—have helped to give the ANL its broad appeal by showing how widespread opposition to the Nazis is and so making it easier to stand out against them—if Brian Clough can join the ANL, then so can I. At the same time, much

of the driving force, especially at a local level, in building the ANL has come from the revolutionaries.

All the same, it would be a mistake to give way to post-Carnival euphoria. The drop in the Nazis' votes in the May local elections is, no doubt, partly an effect of the League's success in isolating them. But Tyndall, Webster and Co are far from dead. They feed off the crisis of British society and the racist and anti-working class policies which are both Tories and Labour's response to this crisis.

Whichever of the two main parties wins the next general election, the attacks on wages, jobs, and social services will continue, along with the attempts to scapegoat black people, and the Nazis will be there to exploit people's disillusionment and anger.

As part of the process of consolidating the ANL as an organisation, its first delegate conference will be held in the near future. The conference is likely to be subject to pressures from two sources.

The more powerful of these pressures will come from those of the ANL's sponsors drawn from the Parliamentary Labour Party and trade union officialdom. Their inclination will be to route the League along the safe channels of the official labour movement, to rely on resolutions and platform speeches rather than activity against the Nazis.

The other pressure will come from revolutionaries worried that the ANL's platform is too 'soggy', that the League is a 'popular front'. Their concern will be to make the basis of the ANL to all sorts of (in the abstract, perfectly correct) things like opposition to all immigration controls and no platform for fascists.

Both pressures must be resisted. The ANL's success lies in its stress on involving people in activity against the Nazis, whether it be handing out leaflets attacking NF candidates or taking to the streets in protest against a Nazi march.

At the same time, the Anti-Nazi League



YOU CAN LEAD A HORSE TO WATER

John Hoyly



can only succeed in involving people in activity if it remains open to those who do not subscribe to the full socialist programme. No doubt the overwhelming majority of those who went to the Carnival agree with some form of immigration controls and are worried about using violence against the Nazis. The most likely way that they will begin to change these ideas is if, for example, they go on an anti-fascist demonstration and see how the forces of the 'neutral' state defend the Nazis, and are exposed to revolutionaries' arguments about the racist character of *all* immigration controls.

This does not mean that revolutionaries should hide their politics within the Anti-Nazi League. On the contrary—they should argue that to fight racism and fascism effectively means opposing all immigration controls and being prepared to confront the Nazis on the streets. But to make acceptance of these arguments the basis of membership of the League would be to kill it stone dead.

The ANL conference must, therefore, be one of *activists*, with the bulk of delegates drawn from local supporters' groups. Its discussions must be devoted to, not stale platform rhetoric or doctrinal disputations, but the concrete tasks of building the League as a mass organisation.

One task in particular stands out. A network of workplace ANL groups needs to be built. There have recently been a number of official trade union decisions against the Nazis (see Dave Field's article in our last issue)

There is, however, a danger in relying on official resolutions of this sort to combat the Nazis in the trade unions. Very few full-time officials, however left-wing they may be, are likely to commit themselves wholeheartedly to kicking the Nazis out of the unions—certainly none will devote themselves to the thankless everyday job of challenging racist and fascist arguments on the shopfloor.

Only workplace anti-Nazi groups can take on this job. There will be very few places where an immediate call to expel the Nazis from the unions will win much support. What is possible is a series of little victories which can isolate the Nazis at work and lay the basis for their expulsion—like the recent case of the North London CPSA where a NF member was forced to apologise publicly for defacing a Carnival poster.

The conference must also address itself to the task of channelling the massive support from young people for the Carnival into organised activity. The impact of SKAN shows what can be done. So far the motor in building local SKAN groups has come from schoolstudents but the aim must be a movement embracing schoolleavers and young workers as well.

Of course, in building the Anti-Nazi League the revolutionaries must continually argue that the only way in which we can permanently defeat the Nazis is to destroy capitalism.

It is capitalism in crisis which produces the falling living standards and lengthening dole queues on which the Nazis breed. Racism is part and parcel of this same system and its use by 'respectable' politicians like James Callaghan, Margaret Thatcher and Enoch Powell to defend the existing order opens the door to the Nazis. Should Tyndall and the rest of his gang ever come to power it will be through the support of big business, concerned, as in the 1920s and 1930s, to restore the profitability of their capital by destroying working-class organisation. Our only real security against fascism is the socialist revolution.

The Anti-Nazi League can create a massive new audience for revolutionary socialism. It can offer a positive way of fighting the system to angry and cynical young people.

One essential precondition for all this is that we build the League *now*.



Eighteen months of Rock Against Racism and the work of the Anti-Nazi League culminated in eighty thousand in Victoria Park: punks, rastas, gays, trade unionists, the Left. A magnificent achievement whose success surprised even the organisers. But the staggering success of the day is to be forgotten on we need to understand what kind of political-cultural event it was, how potentially fragile the unity of the moment is beneath the surface were different constituencies with vastly differing views of why they were there. Almost in spite of itself the Left achieved a powerful union of music and politics. The task is to cement this union, for that we need to understand it.

The first point is that the event was political, but in a deep and particular sense. Many of those who were present were there to show their opposition to fascism but neither were they just there for a free concert. The kind of music, the kind of atmosphere—the drama of the march—all made more than a pop concert with slogans, made it appeal to the large numbers of working-class kids, especially the punks who re-emphasises, as if this were needed—the importance of the politics of culture. We need to build a culture of socialism.

Hitherto the Nazis have made gains inroads among working-class kids. But the Front has problems inherent in the culture of its politics in sustaining that following. The Nazis' appeal to the kids on the terrace—a bit of aggro in the streets—goes hand in hand with a law and order appeal to the parents; but when it comes to music the Front's puritanism gets in the way. The shortest playlist in the world, is that for all-Aryan disco.

However, despite the presence of Sade, Culture Pulse, Victoria Park attracted few young people, and the degree to which they were participating in the event is open to question.

One sign that may have gone unnoticed by many people was the presence of the singer of Sham 69, Jimmy Pursey, who

CAN HORSE TO WATER and Mike Flood Page

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joined the Clash for their final number, 'White Riot', and was prominent in the jam session that ended the day. His near fanatical hard-core following consist of skinheads whose political allegiance has hitherto been to the National Front and the British Movement. They import the aggressive solidarity of the football terraces to Sham's gigs, and their NF chants formed a disturbing counterpoint when Sham 69 played the Central London Poly for Rock Against Racism a couple of months back.

Pursey has hitherto refused to take a stand on his followers' politics. His stage persona is Cockney wide boy, his politics reflect the widespread suspicion of politicians of all stripes, combined with firm anti-racism. This has left him astride an uncomfortable contradiction. If Tom Robinson's set predictably provided the spark that unified the whole crowd, nonetheless the presence of Jimmy Pursey and his erstwhile young Front following on the march and at the gig could be the sign of something changing. Something it behoves the Left to pay close attention to.

Of course, it is possible Sham's fans were only there for the music. Just as many people wear ANL badges with no idea of the League's politics beyond the presence of Peter Hain as spokesperson, and some celebrity names associated with it. This is in the nature of this kind of single-issue campaign fought on a broad and popular front. Which once more points up the fragility behind the massive display of unity in the Park.

In the past the Left has either exploited popular music in the form of benefits; ignored it, as it nearly did with punk until almost too late; or enthused about it uncritically. What Victoria Park makes clear is the radical necessity of understanding it from the inside; or not understanding the reason for success, we will fail to repeat it. Until now this work has gone on under the aegis of Rock Against Racism whose rise

simultaneously with punk could not have been better timed. Punk was a music which was cheap, rough and ready, participatory, live, and breaking down several taboos, among them that on political content in popular song. It was a music which emphasised commitment, but unlike the music of the late 1960s, did so in a working-class milieu.

The past tense is deliberate: in the last two months one by one London's regular punk venues — the Roxy, the 100 Club sessions, the Vortex — have closed. What cohesion punk had is rapidly evaporating, and its internal contradictions are coming to the fore. The music scene it leaves behind does not at first glance seem a promising climate for the emergence of another Tom Robinson, or even the Clash. RAR can continue with discos, but although RAR began as a benefit organisation the politics of the music it presented (and this includes recent British reggae bands of the calibre of Steel Pulse) made it something more. Could Victoria Park, the launching pad for the Anti Nazi League become RAR's swansong?

There has in the past been a gap between two positions on the Left concerning the relationship of music to politics. RAR which began with benefits represented one end, Music For Socialism represented the other: that the music itself must first be political. The latter tended to produce music (traditional folk, free jazz) which most people could not understand or enjoy; the former fun music with no political connections beyond the private affiliations of the musicians.

Punk, and the climate it created, changed all that. The question becomes what will it leave in its wake? The answer does not rest on the shoulders of a few committed musicians like Tom Robinson alone. Without clear and solid links to the Left a figure like Robinson can only resolve the contradictions in his position by moving further toward the demands of EMU. This is

not his responsibility alone.

The Left is increasingly building a culture to respond to cultural attack. Rock Against Racism, and Spurs Against the Nazis could be among the more important political developments of recent years, alongside the theatre group movement, and even more modestly the small socialist social centres which are beginning to open up to give space for all of these.

They point the way to a synthesis of politics and culture which could have profound consequences if we follow them through seriously, instead of regarding them as some kind of unlooked for (and misunderstood) icing on the political cake. Introducing 'Winter of '79', a dark vision of a right-wing coup in the immediate future on 30 April, Tom Robinson said: 'This song is about what might happen in the Winter of '79... except after today it hasn't got a chance.' We have a responsibility to make sure that's true.

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SYLVIA PLATH

Every now and then, a generation or a class finds a spokesman in the work of a poet: usually these poets become cult figures. Yevtushenko and the Liverpool Poets in the late 60's reached a massive audience, and among women, although many men read her too, Sylvia Plath. These poets were not offering any direction, they did not take up the political implications of what they wrote, but what they did do was challenge accepted ideas, ask questions about what was going on and make people think about their situations.

Sylvia Plath's appeal in the late 1960's and early 1970's was that she talked about what it felt like to be a woman in a society that put women down, at a time when women were collectively beginning to fight back. Much of what she wrote was undoubtedly misunderstood—women saw in her work often what they wanted to see, and interpreted her ideas according to their own political perspective.

For many feminists at that time she appeared as a martyr figure, her personal suffering seen as a symbol for the situation of women generally. Her neuroses and psychological obsessions were 'misinterpreted as romanticism by adolescent girls' as Woody Allen scathingly puts it in *Annie Hall*.

Sylvia Plath was born in Boston, Mass. in 1932 of a Polish father and Austrian mother; her parents were academics and Sylvia was brought up in a middle-class environment going to high school and then on to college. Her first achievements at writing when she was 20, did not augur well for any future feminist work—she won a fiction competition in *Mademoiselle* magazine and

another in *Seventeen*. Her prize was the opportunity to write as a fashion columnist in New York.

In 1955 she got a scholarship to Newnham College, Cambridge, and it was at Cambridge that she met her husband Ted Hughes, whom she married in 1956. After a time spent teaching in America, she settled in England, living with her husband and two children. The majority of her work was done in the three years between 1960 and 1963.

Underneath this apparently placid domestic scene of life with her family, writing poetry, lies the reality of mental depression, paranoid obsession with illness and death and her final suicide. When she was 19 she had attempted and nearly succeeded in killing herself and at the age of 21 after another unsuccessful attempt she had been admitted for hospital treatment which included electric shock therapy.

Her poetry has always been approached with these facts in mind, and her ideas excused as symptomatic of her mental instability. What she says in her work has been taken as an individualistic expression of her own condition, rather than, as she herself felt, and as her wide readership among women indicates, about the experiences of many others too. Certainly, these facts cannot be ignored—throughout her work images of sickness abound: a bunch of red tulips reminds her of an operation scar.

'Their redness talks to my wound, it corresponds'
her body is described as
'The nose, the eye-puts, the full set of teeth?
The sour breath
Will vanish in a day'
and she expresses her mental condition in no uncertain terms
'Now I break up in pieces that fly about like clubs.
A wind of such violence
Will tolerate no bystanding: I must shriek.'

Nevertheless, Sylvia Plath believed that these feelings were common among women. In her novel *The Bell Jar*, she makes this point more explicitly. The central features of the first section of the book is the main character Esther's relationship with three other women, who in their occupations represent the choices of career open to her: a cover girl, a successful career woman, a sophisticated non-academic.

Esther wants more than these limited opportunities and she also rejects the prevailing concept of 'femininity' idea about which are epitomised in the mother of Esther's ex-boyfriend, Buddy. He is quoted as saying:

'What a man is is an arrow into the future and what a woman is is the place the arrow shoots off from.'

Esther refuses to accept this role, and later symbolically throws away all the expensive fashionable clothes she'd brought with her to New York, a scene reminiscent of many of the poems in which the woman appears naked, symbolically stripped of her identity.

Esther's problem, having refused to conform to the various female stereotypes enforced upon her and on other women by society, is to find an alternative. The same problem is posed in the poems.

Sylvia Plath does not want to reject her life as mother or homemaker, she writes of her children, of breastfeeding, of a miscarriage, there are references to her home and to cooking. But this domesticity is not portrayed as one of familiarity or security. She questions and attacks the assumptions made about women in this context, the romantic view of marriage is rejected:

'A ring of gold with the sun in it?
Lies.
Lies and a grief.'
and in her poem 'Eavesdropper'
'... a desert of cow-people
Trundling their udders home
To the electric milker, the wifey'

The role of women within the home is seen to be that of servicer and provider to the husband, the woman herself has no identity because isolated and economically dependent on the man, her role is protective, passive, non-assertive. For the women trying to break free, the lack of identity is even greater for they have rejected one way of life but cannot replace it with a new one, society itself has not changed correspondingly.

This lack of identity is similar to that of the patient in hospital and in a poem like 'Tulips' Plath's own experience of being ill in hospital becomes a metaphor for the experience of other women:

'I have given my name and my day-clothes
up to the nurses
And my history to the anaesthetist and my
body to the surgeons'
At other times she talks of herself as a statue or as a 'letter in a slot'. Her family restrict her preventing her from breaking free:
'My husband and child smiling out of the
family photo
Their smiles catch onto my skin like smiling
hooks'

and at the same time she feels guilty about not being satisfied as a wife and mother alone, upset by her apparent rejection of them.

She realises however that these experiences are shared by men too, and that society places different demands on them. In one of her best poems, *The Applicant*, the language is that of the salesman selling human relationships, assessing their monetary worth.

The *Applicant* of the title is seen as applying for a job and for marriage simultaneously because he or she is selling his labour in both cases. Throughout the poem human relationships are seen through the demands of capitalist society, the

opening addressed to the woman, checks that she conforms to the stereotype of the marriageable woman—above all, physically attractive.



Redrawn by Sylvia Plath



'First, are you our sort of person?
Do you wear
A glass eye, false teeth or a crutch,
A brace or a hook,
Rubber breasts or a rubber crotch,
Stitches to show something's missing?'

Having passed the initial test, the woman is shown to the man as a good business proposition, able to fulfill the demands of the job:

'... willing
To bring tea-cups tea cups and roll away
headaches
And do whatever you tell it'
Not only that, but unlike any other
employee, her worth will increase with time,
after 25 years she'll be 'silver', after 50 'gold'.
Parodying the Cliff Richard song of the
same time, the woman is summed up for the
man:

'A living doll, everywhere you look
It can sew, it can cook,
It can talk, talk talk.'

But the man, too, has to fulfill the role
demanded of him, he too is depersonalised,
reduced to a stereotype:

'How about this suit
Black and stiff but not a bad fit.
Will you marry it?'

A man is seen as a good insurance policy
to the woman with no economic freedom of
her own. He will provide her with a home,
with shelter:

'It is waterproof, shatterproof, proof
Against fire and bombs through the roof.'

The poem is a scathing attack on the
constraints people suffer within a capitalist
society; if the woman is totally dependent on
the man and reduced to a human puppet, the
man is forced to be strong and brave. The
two people of the poem are unable to break
out of their situations, it's their 'last resort'—
there's no alternative.

Sylvia Plath can never see that there is an
alternative to the situation she so lucidly
describes. In her poems and in her life she

struggles with the problem but the only
answer she sees is acceptance of death. Death
is the goal she looks toward, it is the
liberator. Finally on her third attempt she
succeeds in her suicide bid, and is found
dead, her head in the gas oven. Her failing
and tragedy, exacerbated by her mental
illness, was that she gave in, while feeling
that she had conquered.

In her best poems, however, she does
examine and define the position of women in
a way which led her readers to question their
situation and perhaps move on to more
positive ways of thinking. The growth of the
womens movement owes a lot to the
spreading of these ideas through the work of
Sylvia Plath.
Mel Evans

MARXISM 78

Marxism '77 set out, very
successfully, to smash two
very powerful myths. The first
was the myth that stresses
theory with a capital 'T': it's
the province of the theoretical
cadres with Gramsci's *Prison
Notebooks* at their
fingertips—experts only can
handle this theory, which
looks classy on the
bookshelves, but which is
apparently of little or no use in
coping with the problems of
everyday revolutionary
socialists in their workplaces.

The other myth,
popularised by the press, is
that which portrays us as
'brick-throwing cretins' with
all our brains in our boots.
According to this version we
organise against the Nazis as
an excuse for a good punch-
up and not for any political
reasons.

In fact, our ideas are
amongst our most powerful
weapons: Marxism provides
us with an understanding of
how society evolved into its
present shape, and this gives
us a head start over those who
see it simply as a mess, the
product of an unchanging
human nature, which can at
best be tidied up a bit around
the edges, and over the
conservatives who see it all as
their sacred heritage to be
defended against all the
threats of change.

Moreover, these ideas
are accessible to us all:
they are not the
property of a few 'high

priests' with the job of
watering them down for
lesser intellects. Or at least
they shouldn't be: the fact that
they've been mystified of late,
wrapped around in
incomprehensible jargon,
reflects our isolation in the
past. Since the war, Trotskyist
groups have tended to talk to
themselves, developing their
own private language. At first
this was out of necessity;
lately it's degenerated into a
bad habit, one that Marxism
'77 set out to break.

With Marxism '78 we hope
to continue the task of
repossessing our weapons
and showing that Marxist
ideas are not of use only to
theoreticians, or economists
or social scientists; they are of
vital use to us all, at all times.
Full details of the courses and
how to book will be available
soon. The draft programme is
as follows:

Marxism and Technology
with discussions on the
technology of political control,
nuclear power and the
objectivity of science.

Women and Socialism
women and the family,
women in the labour
movement, with workshops
ranging from Kollontai to
writing for women.

Introduction to Marxism the
dialectical method, historical
materialism and marxist
economics.

History of Great Revolutions
from the English Civil War to
Spain.

Marxism and idealism
Althusser and authors of that
stripe

**Problems of revolutionary
strategy** discussions on
social democracy, 'left'
governments, fascism and
how to fight it.

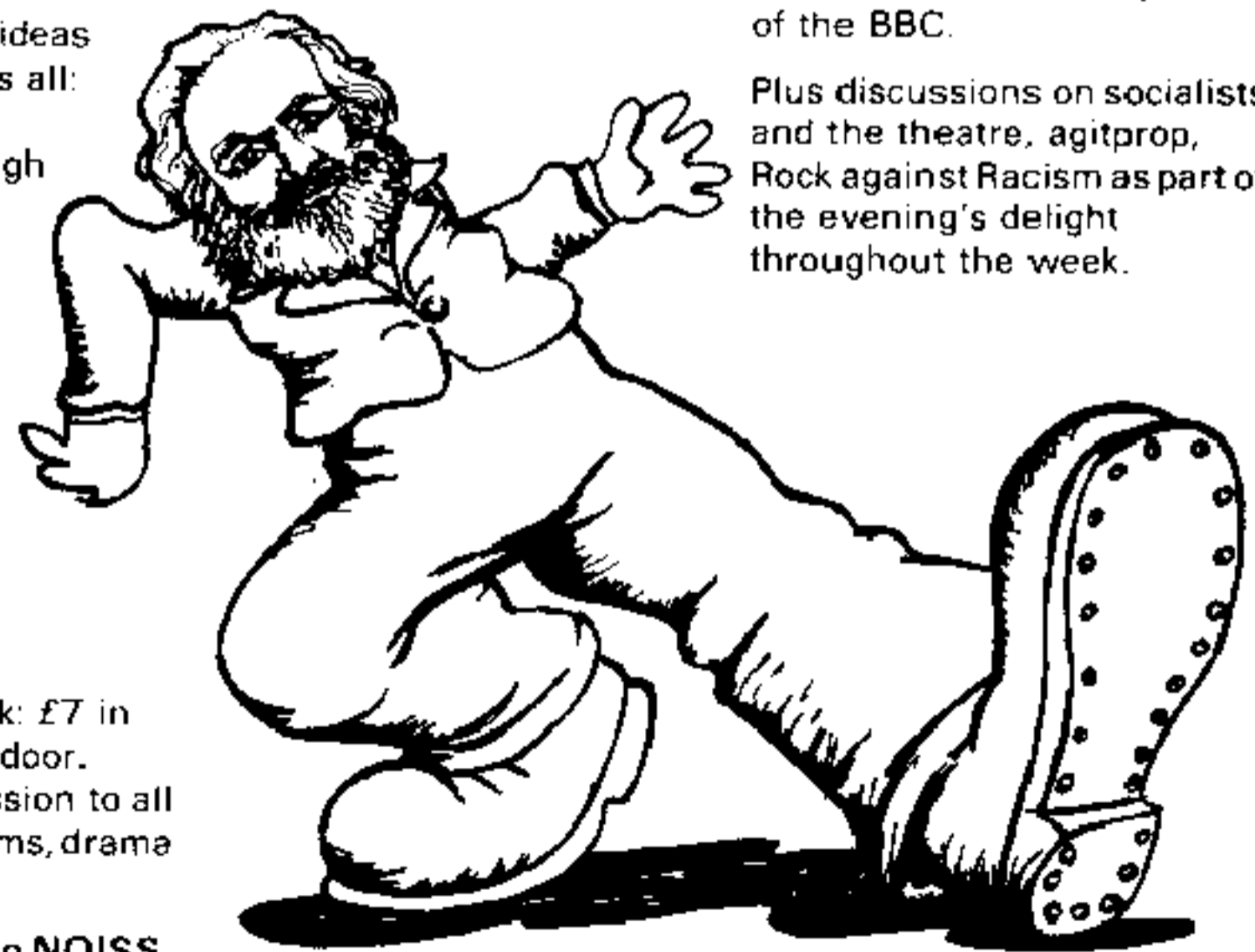
**International lectures and
workshops** on Euro-
communism, Africa,
Nationalism, The
International, the world
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guerilla struggles.

Literature the novel and
imperialism, socialist writers
of the twentieth century.

**The Post War British
working class.** The NUM
1960-78, white collar
workers, engineering
workers, the dockers and
UCATT 1972, the changing
nature of the trade union
bureaucracy.

The Politics of Television
how the news is made, the
coverage of industrial
disputes, the making of
television drama, the politics
of the BBC.

Plus discussions on socialists
and the theatre, agitprop,
Rock against Racism as part of
the evening's delight
throughout the week.



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advance, £8 at the door.
Ticket allows admission to all
events, including films, drama
and bops.

Send £7, payable to NOISS,
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P.O. Box 82, London E2.

June 30 - July 7 at the Polytechnic of North London

Harlan County USA

In 1974, the men who work the Duke Power mines, sunk beneath the wooded hills of East Kentucky, have left the company union and have been on strike for months, holding out for recognition of the UMWA (United Mineworkers of America) and a better contract. And just as in the 1930s, when the pitched battles between armed police and

strikers produced the song that turned Harlan County into a byword for militancy, so now the strikers face a cordon of state troopers as the company thugs, carrying baseball bats and openly armed, escort the blackleg convoys through their picket lines.

Harlan County USA is a film about a little portion of America that breaks surface through the fried legs of chicken, crushed coke cans and all the other flotsam bobbing about on top to reveal, alive and kicking, workers. The camera crew, not content at merely recording the blood and horrors of the picket line—the gun

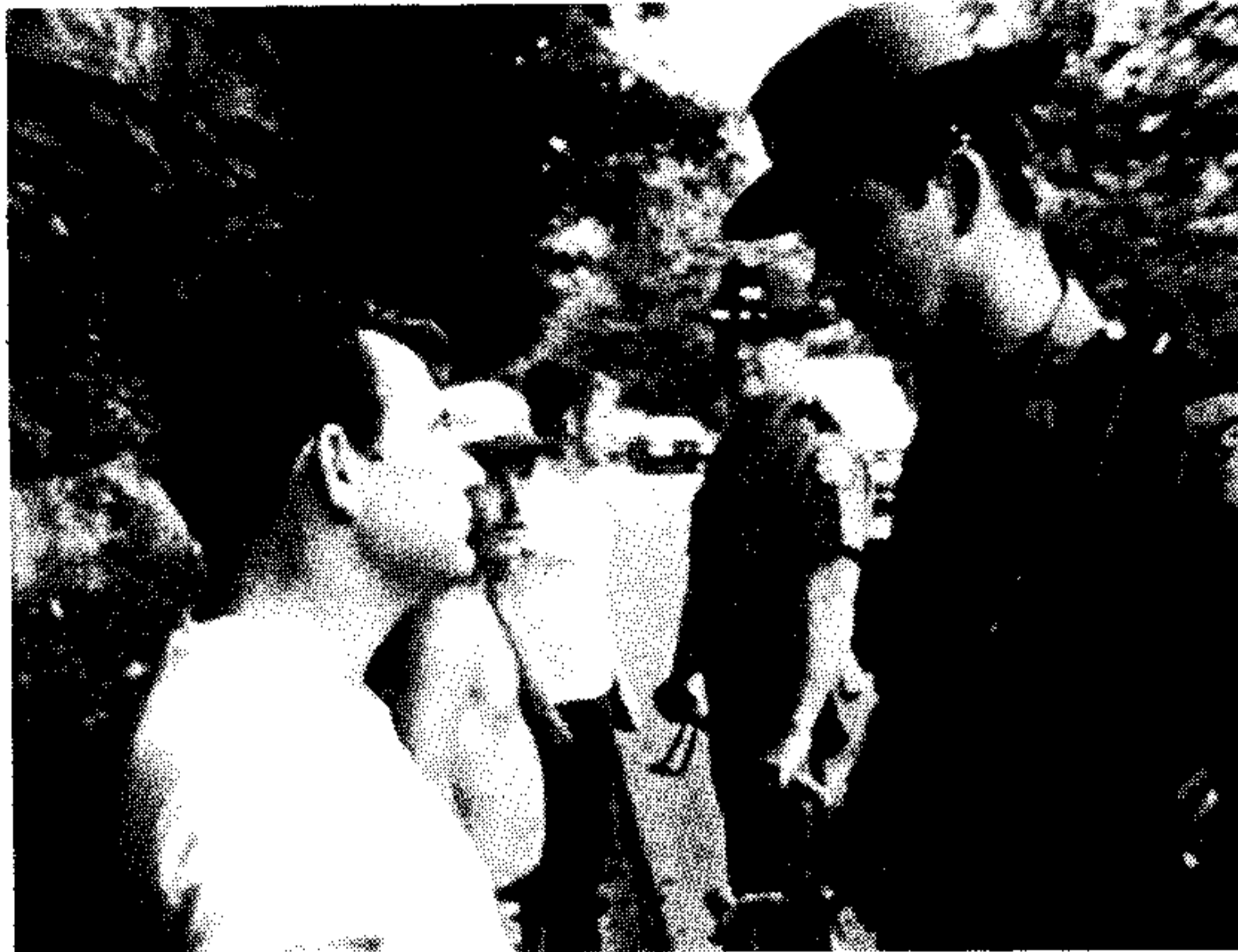
thugs' intimidation and the sherriff's complicity—get deep under the skin of the miners' community, showing how they harden and extend their organisation and how they publicise their struggle. Picket duty is tightened up. Duke Power's New York office is picketed. The women successfully turn back the blacklegs further up the road. The film goes further to show the links with the 1930s and the struggle for rank-and-file control of the UMWA. But, best of all, we see the meetings, the hard passionate arguments and particularly the energy and determination of the women.

Echoing this and underpinning the whole movie is the stunning country music, the songs sung by and about the people Harlan County driven on by the searing bluegrass fiddles and banos. There could be no better way of crucifying the rhinestone sentimentality of the Nashville country machine than showing the music alive at its source and in touch with an active working-class community.

In every sense, this film is celebration of rank and file organisation and of workers' power—our culture and our strength. It needs and deserves as wide a showing as we can make possible.

If you are in London, *Harlan County USA* opens on June 1st at the Scala cinema, 25 Tottenham Street, London W1 for a limited run. It is available for hire from the Other Cinema, 12 Little Newport Street, London WC2 (01-734-8508)

Mike Barton



The Turning Point

At the end of *The Turning Point* it's easy to feel that you've been watching three different films. Explored within the setting of the ballet company are the relationships of the two old friends, Emma and DeeDee and the growing up of DeeDee's daughter Emilia.

Emma and DeeDee meet after a long separation—the former as a prima ballerina, the latter as a settled wife and mother, having 'chosen' that when she could have followed her friend's rise to fame. On Emma's urging, Emilia auditions for the company, and gains a place at the summer school. Accompanying her to New York, DeeDee finds her buried jealousies of Emma too strong to ignore.

Relationships between the three women deteriorate when Emilia, taken up and dropped by Yuri, the company stud, turns to Emma as her confidante. This comes to a head after the company's Gala performance, culminating in a cathartic cat fight between the two old friends. The personal ghosts of the past now laid, Emmas' professional career comes to a half expected end and Emilias' begins, ironically in *The Sleeping Beauty*, one of Emmas' greatest performances.

The Turning Point is a film of very definite highs and lows. There's the women's relationships, the extended ballet commercials and the young love of Emilia and Uri. The latter provides the worst moments, coming over as a sort of visual Barbara Cartland,

complete with the inevitable soft-focus symphonic first fuck scene. Balanced against this is the excellence of many of the DeeDee—Emma exchanges; although sometimes simplistic, they score on many occasions.

Throughout there is a realisation of the lack of choice open to women. Discussing old times, DeeDee says wistfully 'You got 19 curtain calls' to which Emma replies 'You got pregnant'. Other themes intertwine:— the contrasts between fading ballerina and rising star, mother and daughter, youth and age, art and commerce. The rather twee resolving of the ending may take some of the sting out of the earlier scenes, but overall, *The Turning Point* has enough in it to warrant a view.

Elaine Fraser.

And...

This month brings the second anniversary of the Soweto uprising. A new edition, brought up to date, of Alex Callinicos and John Rogers *Southern Africa After Soweto* will be published by Pluto at £2.50. Counter Information Services are publishing a new report on South Africa, price 90p. More details next month. New Left Books have just published a paperback edition of Mandel's *Late Capitalism* (£5.00) which will be reviewed at length in the first issue of *International Socialism* quarterly, out in July.

A new Red Notes pamphlet *Italy 1977-8* (95p) was published recently providing a useful antidote to the endless justifications of eurocommunism that have appeared over the last year. Linda Gordon *Women's Bodies, Women's Rights* (Penguin £1.50) is now out. It gives a detailed history of women's oppression in the USA, focussing on the birth control movement. Gwyn Williams new work *The Merthyr Rising* tells the story of the workers insurrection of 1831 in Merthyr Tydfil. It is in hardback only at £7.95, published by Croom Helm, so get it in a library. Tony Cliff's *Lenin Volume 3* will be reviewed in our next issue.

Alastair Hatchett

Carrying the future

Sheila Rowbotham's books have been a formative influence on socialist feminists in Britain and elsewhere. In the following interview, she talked to Elana Dallas and Alastair Hatchett about the past and future of the modern women's movement.



How did you become a feminist?

I'd felt things about the position of women for a long time, but I didn't identify them as feminism. I think I felt most strongly about sexual indignity in my teens. People would put you down if you said you liked sex, and yet at the same time there was the pressure for people to be sexy. I saw the beat movement of the 1960s as an alternative because it seemed there was more possibility in that of being treated as a person by men.

In fact, though, there were lots of reactionary ideas within the beat movement, which became clearer at the time of the hippies, to do with creating a kind of ideal woman as a 'natural being'—women cooking large meals, idyllically happy surrounded by loads of children in communal settings... But at the time it seemed more honest.

Later, as I became a socialist, that gave me ways of thinking about people in groups, rather than just seeing myself as an individual. When I came to Hackney, just looking around in laundrettes and things, I began to notice what most women's lives were like and how different mine was.

The impact of the black movement, and the kind of political ideas were beginning talk about everyday life and personal identity. That was a way of thinking about my situation, which wasn't the same as that of an industrial worker, and didn't seem to fit into the terms of Marxism which centred on industrial workers.

The impact of the student movement meant that for the first time there were lots of

women radicalised, and though I wasn't part of that movement, it made it easier to see that there was a common situation.

Also the student movement was attacking formal hierarchy, but in practice, with its great big meetings it was very difficult for women to participate equally. It was difficult for quite a few men, but it was difficult for nearly all women.

When there were sit-ins too, this communalised the private situation of men and women in the home. Although the women were supposed to be equal, the men often made suggestions that the women should do the domestic tasks, and that aroused quite a lot of antagonism.

I think that kind of thing also came up later in workers' sit-ins. When you get a large number of people together in action of that kind it makes things very clear which can otherwise just be seen as private, personal decisions.

How did these small groups of feminists become the start of a movement?

It was such a gradual process, that at the time we weren't really aware that we were participating in the growth of a movement. Over five hundred people came to the first conference in Oxford in 1970—many more than we expected.

I would say the women who came were mostly from lower middle class and working class families, but who'd been removed from their backgrounds by higher education. I

think that was an amazingly important factor, not only in the women's movement but in lots of areas of the left.

Since the second world war there's a new group of people around who don't fit into the old categories of manual workers, or employing type of middle class or the old professional middle class.

After that first conference people began setting up groups, including quite a lot of women who were in IS. Other groups started as equal rights groups, as part of the agitation after the 1968 Ford women's strike. These turned into women's liberation groups.

Not only was there a strand of women's rights that came through the trade union movement at the time, there were also quite a lot of things happening in the middle class, like the growth of play groups, and abortion and gay rights pressure groups. This changing climate in the middle class made an important contribution.

It was a time when, because of '68, it seemed as though anything could happen. In the early 1960s it had been as though America could never move, that there could never be change in America, and then suddenly you kept hearing about the race riots and student sit-ins and goodness knows what. And then there was May '68 in France. People had said workers can't do anything, and then suddenly, in an advanced capitalist country, you could see the possibility that workers could do all sorts of things.

I think that those moments in history are



very important because they give people fantastic confidence so that they don't question what they're doing. Probably they act foolishly and without due thought, but it also gives them this amazing energy. So we weren't surprised in some ways—we expected things to change very quickly.

It seemed such an amazing thing to have this different consciousness, and have that consciousness confirmed in lots of groups, it seemed as though the world must just fall open. What's evident now is that it takes longer.

What has the women's movement achieved over the last ten years?

I think the development of socialist feminist ideas, through Women and Socialism conferences, *Red Rag*, and now through a network of groups and the newsletter *Scarlet Woman*, is really important.

Around 1972 women who were socialists reacted against the pamphlet that Selma James wrote called *Women, Trade Unions and Work*. In arguing against it, we were forced to think about a whole lot of things like the nature of domestic work, and the relationship to trade unions, which we hadn't really concentrated on. Although there was already theoretical discussion going on about domestic labour and the position of women in the home, the political intervention of the Wages for Housework group meant that we had to respond in a very direct way. This developed into an attempt to understand the *relationship* between the family and work outside the home.

Then the campaigns have been important, although they haven't achieved things at the sort of speed that people hoped. What's happened is that people have become radicalised in the last ten years, but in terms of actual gains, well, people won more gains in the mid-1960s. It was possible to grant reforms then. You could have a liberal pressure group that would be very effective in getting a particular reform.

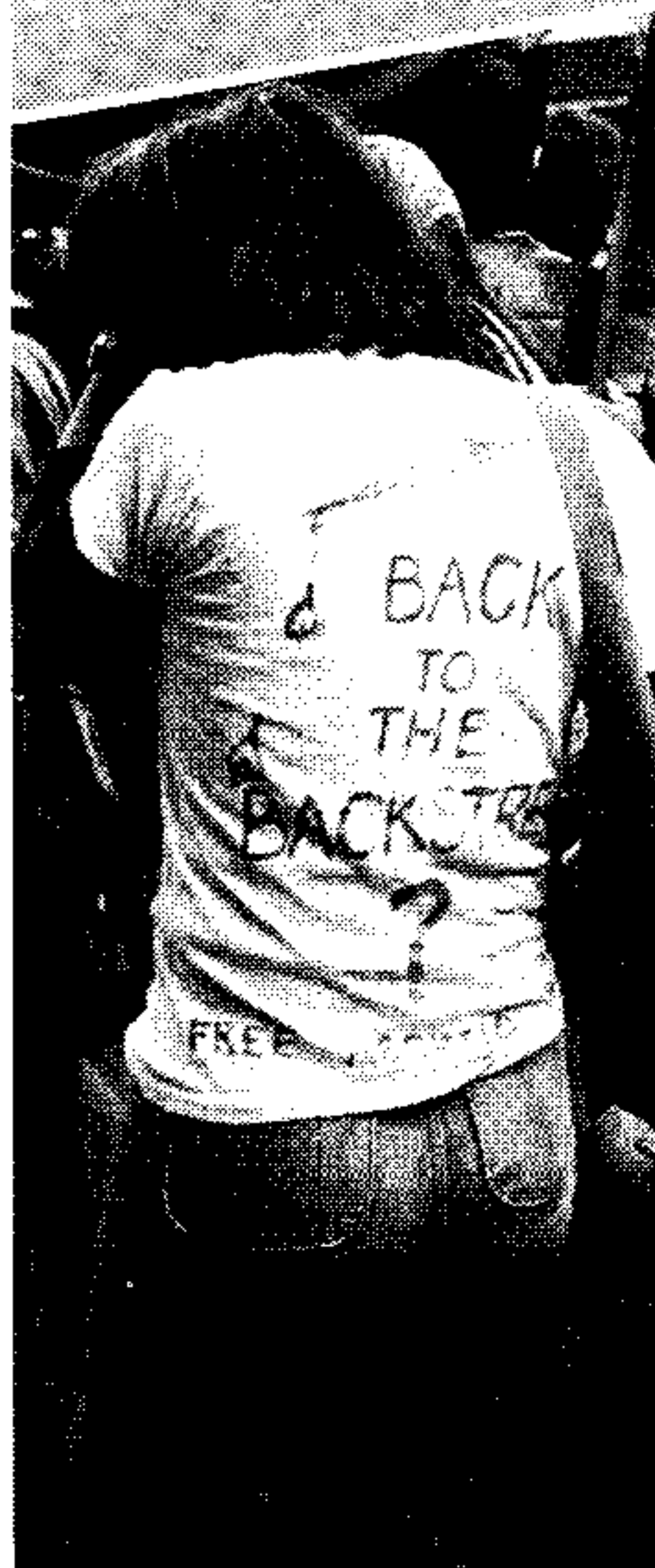
Now it's very difficult to get anything at all, even of a very basic kind, and so it's harder to talk about all the wider issues to do with control and the quality of life, although it's still important to raise them.

The abortion campaign has not only meant that a lot of women have come into the movement who weren't in it before, but also that its influence has been felt in places like the Labour Party and the TUC. Abortion has also been a way in which people could raise ideas about control of women's bodies and sexuality and things like that in everyday trade union contexts.

But one of the difficulties with the abortion campaign for the women's movement has been that, because it was trying to do something public, the strength that came out of consciousness-raising groups tended to get lost. That strength lay in finding ways in which women could express feelings about their own sexuality on a much wider scale.

The legalities of a parliamentary campaign and that kind of politics have made a lot of people fall away from the abortion campaign because they found it boring and

Photo: Far Goudon



alienating. I think you have to be a consciously political kind of person to think in those kinds of campaigning terms, whereas a lot of people like to talk about their own feelings about sexuality, women's health, contraception, having babies, etc. Unfortunately, there wasn't enough confidence to assert that form of organising with women in the abortion campaign.

I get the feeling that the campaigns are not as strong as they were a few years ago. Working Women's Charter was just getting going when the time for reforms was getting really difficult. Also it had so many demands people had to concentrate on a particular aspect.

The Abortion Campaign seems to be more dug in locally. In Hackney for example, the NAC group can mobilise quite a lot of people on specific issues like trying to get a Day Care Abortion Centre.

I think the new forms of organising, like consciousness raising, women's centres, Women's Aid and the Rape Crisis Centre are touching on areas which socialists hadn't thought about—areas like women's health, domestic violence and sexual control of men over women in society.

There is a creativity in these ways of organising which means that in the very process of organising we are finding some



Sex Discrimination Act 1975

LONDON
MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE

ways of changing things. There's also the cultural challenge in art and music, films, theatre and writing which *Spare Rib* reflects. The socialist feminist movement within the women's movement has been affected by these.

In terms of people's attitudes generally, we've had more influence than the organised left, but we're not a mass movement. It's certain that quite a lot of working-class women are aware that there's something vaguely different in the air. A woman said, when I asked her to sign a petition, for example, 'Yes, I'm not a doormat'. I haven't found much hostility when campaigning for abortion or family allowances much. But working-class women don't join women's groups in large numbers, and those that do join often feel quite uncomfortable. Then that's that's a problem that's faced everyone on the left, not just the women's movement.

I do think the ideas have influenced people. Women feel that they have not to be taken into consideration, but they don't identify that as connected with any particular political movement. There has been much more militancy among women workers in the last ten years, but it's very difficult to know what it is that gets people moving. There are the particular complicated combinations of something being in the air, of the effect of the Equal Pay legislation, of the fact that there are a few more trade union officials who are sympathetic to women now, all sorts of things could just make action more possible, but you can't actually measure them.

You have written on the problem of organising, and you've been critical of Leninism—the concept of a centralised revolutionary party based in the workplaces. What do you feel should be the form of organising and tactics at the moment?

There has been some discussion among gay socialists and socialist feminists in the last year about ideas of organising. A general criticism with which I agree is that left organisations place too much emphasis on



Women's TUC at Scarborough, 1978; unanimous vote on the abortion amendment.

economics, and on power at the point of production.

I know this is not specifically Leninist but arose partly out of the traditions of the English working class. It's also become an issue now because of the period when the SWP was trying to base itself inside workers' experience and changing its class base, which caused great pain, and some distortion.

Within Leninism though there wasn't a basis to assert the significance of personal life. For example, it didn't make sense for someone to say being gay is to do with politics. For most people on the left sexuality could be dismissed. So the women's movement has been saying that personal experience, everyday life, is something political.

What I do think is important is that the form of organising should carry something of the future. Not in the utopian sense, because we're not saying we carry the whole of the future like the anarchists, but because the circumstances of organising in modern capitalism mean that part of the struggle is for people to be able to feel and see an alternative.

If you organise in ways that stress the fact that you have to rely on people who are good at certain things, or have ideas that you can grade people's consciousness, that seems to be totally opposed to trying to uproot those things which capitalism has put into people. Leninism denies the crucial significance of these prefigurative struggles.

Connected to this idea of carrying an alternative must be the notion that you have ways of demolishing authority, and that this is expressed in how you organise. I'm not saying that the women's movement doesn't have other problems, because when you don't have a formal hierarchy you tend to get people manipulating, even terrorising people in informal ways.

I recognise that there's a problem too if you want to act all together at the same time,

about who takes that decision at particular times.

But I don't agree with with the idea of political organisations as permanent vanguards. The notion that because the Party is able to collect all these different people together it can overcome the particularities of each section doesn't really work in practice. The revolutionary tradition in Britain has been basically skilled male working class with a particular kind of consciousness, and the interests of women, as housewives and unskilled workers, have never really been politically expressed equally.

The concept of the vanguard also assumes that there's one kind of higher political consciousness that knows what's going on within a party, but I think there are lots of partial ideas about what's wrong and what could be possible within left groups and parties and outside them.

Socialist feminists don't have all the same ideas about left organisations. There are those who've been affected by sexual politics but who believe that you should work inside the existing left groups, and try and influence them.

They do have criticisms of how these groups are organised, but they think that you can have most influence within them. And then there are the people who feel either that the whole basis of the organised left is wrong, or that they just can't work with them personally.

If you're a person in a left group you spend a lot of time learning words like 'democratic centralism', whereas in the women's movement people didn't really discuss in those terms. People just said, we like small groups, we don't like big groups — they weren't versed in the Leninist terms of organising. They went from their own experience.

Similarly with theories about reform.

So when women came in from left groups, partly through campaigns, they brought a language of politics which a lot of women in the movement found very alienating. Not having the terms to deal with this language, they tended to react by dismissing it as 'men's politics', because men were involved in the left groups and in campaigns. I think it's a red herring to dismiss Leninism as male. You can point to conflicts between men and women anarchists, for example. The argument is about the politics of organising.

I think that there are things that you can learn from how people have organised in the past, including the Leninist tradition, but I don't think it fits the situation now. Reverting to this tradition actually makes it harder to think about what the real problems are now, and what to do about them.

I think it's important we have groups of socialists now in Britain who have experienced a non-Leninist kind of practice, and who are thinking about organising. But it feels very faltering in comparison to the left groups.

It is very difficult when socialist feminists say, as they have in South London, we don't want to have women from left groups involved. All my left training says it's wrong to deny access to people because it's a general movement, but on the other hand my feelings are very much that I would like some opportunities to discuss with other socialist feminists who are actually searching for an alternative to Leninist forms of organising. I see the women's movement as part of a long-term attempt to find an alternative practice for the left as a whole.

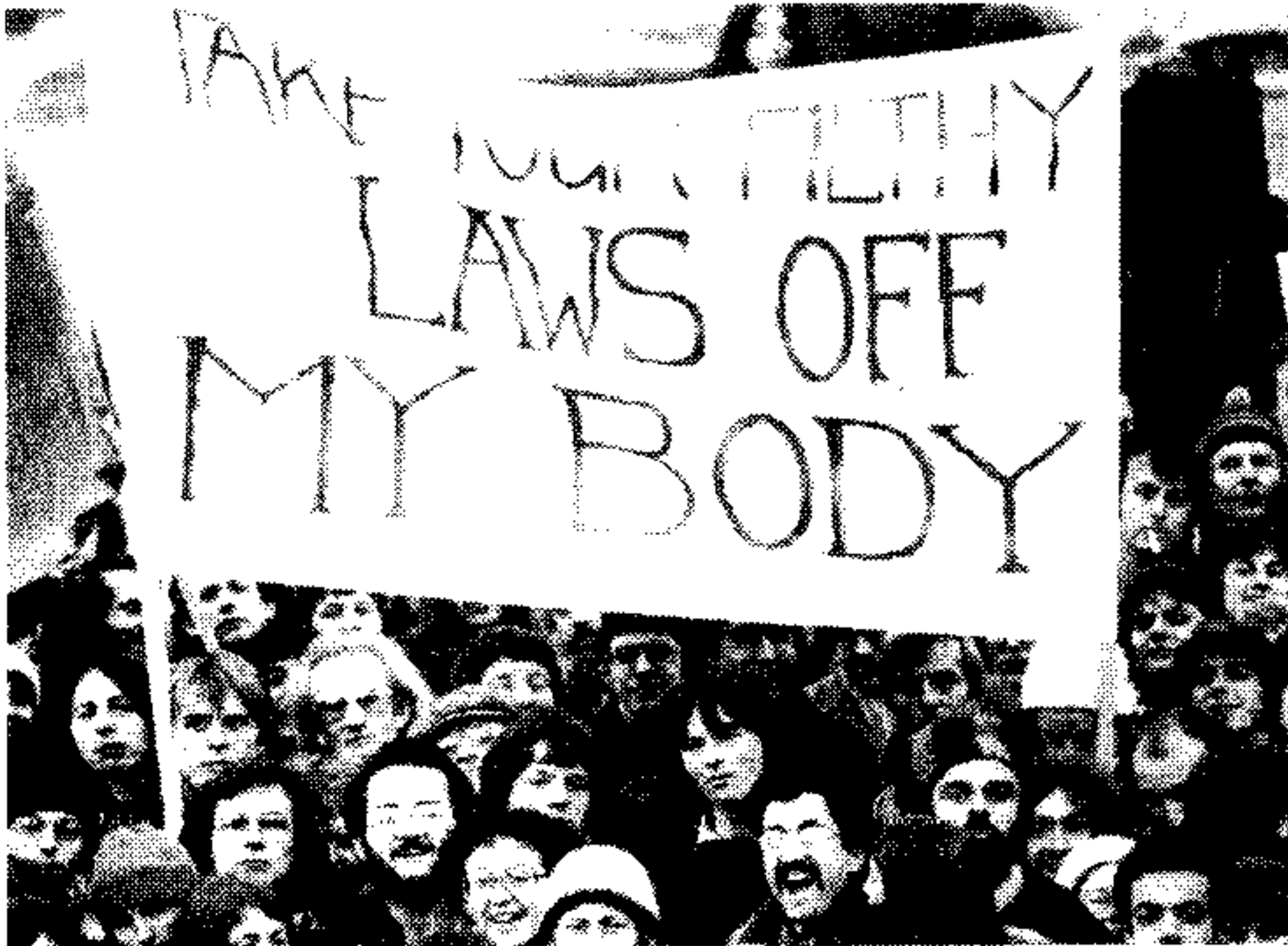
Those of us who are socialists, and who were involved in the women's movement right from the beginning, are now being told by the new generation of women that our lot were far too defensive and compromising, because we were always trying to convince blokes on the left.

It's true there were fantastic attempts to stay within the left, amongst women who were socialists. I still think it's important to be connected to things that are going on on the left, even if you disagree, but it did take an awfully long time to shift very basic resistances. I assumed, as a socialist, that these ideas would obviously spread among the left first, but it really is extraordinary — the Tories had a gay rights group before the SWP!

Since the Birmingham national women's conference, the internal organisation of the women's movement has been called into question. Where are your feelings on this?

It's always been tricky for anybody to say what's going on in the women's movement because it's always been very decentralised, so that there have been wide differences between different parts of the movement. Probably if you work on journals like *Spare Rib* you have quite a lot of knowledge of what goes on, because a lot of information goes in and out, also if you're involved in WIRES (the Women's Information newsletter), or *Scarlet Woman* (the Socialist Feminist newsletter).

We haven't got any formal way in which



Gay demonstration in February of this year

information goes outward from one official source which is formally elected in any way. And people are fairly unwilling to be self-appointed. Women don't want to take on a leading role very much, because usually that role is taken on by men, but also because it's a pretty hot seat. Anybody, like me, who ever says anything in public, is liable to have a lot of people fairly pissed off with them.

I think people have avoided becoming permanently seen as spokespersons or leaders for that reason. We've always been aware that individuals can be isolated. Leadership of the movement has been very dispersed, with quite different groups taking the initiative at different times.

Informally, though, socialist feminists have always had a lot of influence. We tended to have our own networks right from the beginnings and to know how to set up papers and things like that. We had a disproportionate impact on the emergence of ideas. I think some of the suspicion now is a result of this.

I think our openness about structure is very important. I'm not saying it's ideal, because the national conferences are awful when a small group of people can dominate, like Wages for Housework, or, at the last one, revolutionary feminists, and they frighten people and get people very upset. But they are held in check by the very strong feeling that small groups shouldn't dominate, and our need to stay together.

Within the last year, the divisions within the women's movement have become much more stark. There are those loosely defined as socialist feminists, some of whom are inside socialist groups and some of whom aren't and the separatist feminists, cultural feminists and revolutionary feminists.

Many of the separatist and cultural feminists are not particularly interested in arguing with anybody, but get on with leading their separate lives and setting up cultural and social networks.

With the emergence of the revolutionary feminists, however, there is a theoretical

position opposed to the socialist feminists. You never used to be able to have a debate between socialist feminists and separatists because the separatists tended not to formulate their beliefs theoretically. There were organisational disputes to do with the control of the London centre which were very emotional, but they didn't tend to get theorised much from the other side. They were expressed as feelings.

The revolutionary feminists do have a theory. I think they express half-truths, very clear and forcefully. They emphasise the biological differences between men and women, which socialists have ignored. Then they say that sex is the same thing as class, that women are an exploited class. They ignore how class divides women as a sex. They deny complexities and want to sweep them aside.

What do you see in the immediate future?

A new right could go onto the attack based on people's fears that society is dis-integrating. People are frightened, cut off from one another. There is violence in the home and in the big cities. Relationships break up, and people don't rely on marriage lasting for ever anymore. Obviously, these are changes that are taking place in capitalism anyway, but people can identify them as being caused by radical movements.

So the right could reassert the significance of the family, like they did round the Queen's Jubilee, royalty as a symbol of the nation's family. But there are limits on how much of that people will actually take—things go wrong, like Princess Margaret!

My main concern about the women's movement is that we must remain very outgoing, talking in straightforward language that makes sense to people. We mustn't close in on ourselves and become sectarian, with ideas that there are certain 'pure' kinds of

feminism, and if you don't fit into them you're no good, or become too academically theoretical.

There's always been both these tendencies within the women's movement, and the danger is that as times get harder they could become stronger. But there's a strong countervailing pressure because most feminists are in situations where they're mixing with people who aren't feminists, so they have to keep arguing in terms that make sense to people who don't agree with them.

For socialist feminists particularly, I think it's really important that we don't lose touch with people's actual feelings. If the economic situation is hard, people will turn in on the family and want to guard their personal relationships and not open up in any kind of way. I think you have to recognise this and be very careful how you approach people. I don't mean that you shouldn't say what you believe, but you have to respect what they are feeling.

So when you are talking about abortion, I think it's very important to place it in relation to general choice over fertility for women. You have to be particularly clear about not just asserting one demand but putting it in the context of women's lives as a whole.

It's also important to recognise what is valid in personal relationships. I find it disturbing that when we were originally thinking about the family, we emphasised the economic labour labour that women do in the home.

This work was invisible, it was always missed out by both the sociologists and the left. So we stressed it. But labour isn't the only thing that happens to people in families. We also have to assert the positive things that people experience in the family and stress that we want to extend the possibility of choice. If we don't, if we are negative about peoples' feelings, I think the right will move in with their version, and people will see the left as presenting a false picture.

The positive aspects of family life like love and play and mutual support are potentially about how you would imagine socialism. In our society they exist only in confined spaces and are partial and distorted. We shouldn't deny them but assert how things could be better.

I think there's always a problem of how to give value to the experience of oppressed people without idealising them. When white people say blacks have natural rhythm, it's very insulting, but things like the Blues have been an assertion by black people of their oppressed spirit. Women have been out of the area of economic competition; although they've had to work, they haven't had to carry the sole responsibility for the survival of the family. Because of this, I think they have been able to develop particular ways of seeing and feeling that are really important for men as well. I see feminism as continuing these perceptions and struggling to make these become part of the left.

In 1968 the TUC celebrated its centenary, an event marked by a commemorative postage stamp: clear testimony to the unions' established place among the institutions of the state. Yet at the same time, the venom of bourgeois press and politicians poured out against the workplace representatives of trade unionism, the shop stewards. A much quoted statistic was that 95 per cent of British strikes were 'unofficial': this proved, it was alleged, that stewards were mindless militants, responsible for the central ills of the economy.

Though the conclusions were different, the analysis often drawn on the revolutionary left was in some respects similar. The official union hierarchies were dominated by an ossified bureaucracy, without roots in the working class. The shop steward movement was by contrast the authentic expression of rank-and-file experience and aspirations. Shop-floor struggles, although often sectional and limited in objectives, contained a potential for a genuine challenge — under socialist leadership — to the social and economic institutions of capitalism.

Also in 1968, the contrast between national and workplace trade unionism was the main theme of the Royal Commission under Lord Donovan. Its report argued that there were two systems of industrial relations in Britain. In many industries, national negotiations with employers and their associations were largely irrelevant; the main decisions on wages and conditions were taken in fragmented and autonomous bargaining at the point of production. Unofficial strikes, 'wage drift', and the proliferation of 'custom and practice' rules restricting managerial prerogative, stemmed naturally from these informal and decentralised bargaining arrangements.

Much has altered in the following ten years. Some of the trends are evident in the table below. Union membership, which had stagnated for two decades, rose substantially to a record level (both absolutely and in proportion to the workforce). Growth was particularly rapid among women and in non-manual occupations. But the number of unions continued to decline, mainly through mergers.

The proportion of trade unionists represented at the TUC also increased, with several important teaching and civil service unions following into Nalگو into membership. The uneven pattern of union growth has shifted the movement's centre of gravity. Of the fourteen TUC unions with over 200,000 members in 1977, seven were outside the traditional sphere of private sector manual employment; together they accounted for a quarter of total TUC membership. On average the seven unions (Nalگو, Nupe, ASTMS, NUT, CPSA, UPW and Cohse) had doubled in size since 1968; for the most part the more established TUC unions grew little over the decade, and some indeed declined.

Strike statistics are at best a partial indicator of the state of class struggle, but the record since 1968 is nevertheless interesting. The figures have proved more volatile than in any other period since the war. The number of stoppages rose to almost double the post-war average in 1970, declined erratically to a low point in 1976, then revived. Strike-days in the early 1970s reached their highest level since the General Strike of 1926, and in most years have remained well above the post-war average of three million.

The rise in the number of strikes was due largely to workers' struggles to break through the pay restraints of the 1964-70 Labour government and its Tory successor; most of the increase involved pay disputes. The subsequent decline reflects the impact of the wage controls agreed by the TUC and the government in the summer of 1975; most trade unionists lacked the will to challenge the limits, particularly in a period of growing mass unemployment. Significantly, for most of the decade a rise in the number of strikes has been associated with increased real earnings, falling strike numbers with a decline.

Movements in strike-days are linked to an increase in the average size and (particularly) length of stoppages. There are two main reasons: the centralisation of bargaining within firms has restricted the scope for the traditional small, short, sectional dispute; and there has been a revival of official national strikes. The most ▶

RICHARD HYMAN

THE BRITISH LABOUR MOVEMENT SINCE 1968

obvious example is the miners, whose struggles of 1972 and 1974 dominated the statistics; but on a smaller scale there have been a large number of similar disputes, particularly in the public sector.

Less obvious, but no less significant, have been the changes in the nature of shop steward organisation in those areas of industry where its strength was traditionally greatest. Put simply, the Donovan strategy of formalising and centralising plant bargaining, and tightening the links between the workplace and the official union hierarchy, has been far more effective than is normally recognised. In many areas of manufacturing industry the development of productive bargaining, measured day work and similar payment systems, and new company bargaining procedures has sharply reduced the scope for negotiations by ordinary stewards at section level.

At the same time, there has been a considerable growth in the number, power and status of full-time convenors and senior stewards (there are probably more of them in Britain today than ordinary full-time union officials). This stratum of workplace leadership has become increasingly integrated into the official union machinery; in the past ten years, many union rulebooks have for the first time tried to define the rights and responsibilities of convenors. In the two largest unions, the 'left' platform on which Hugh Scanlon and Jack Jones were elected (in 1967 and 1968 respectively) involved raising key convenors to national negotiating and decision-making bodies; and many workplace leaders, so elevated, have maintained their support for the policies of Jones and Scanlon even after these have veered sharply to the right.

In the last ten years there has also been a considerable spread of shop steward organisation to industries and occupations with no tradition of workplace struggle; but almost invariably this has occurred by the agreement and under the control of union and management hierarchies. The success of the TUC/government wage curbs since 1975 must be seen in the light of the new ability of national union leaders to win the backing of major convenors, and of these in turn to enforce the acquiescence of their own workplace organisations.

Given these developments, any analysis of British trade unionism in terms of a contrast between 'bureaucracy' and 'rank and file' is increasingly inadequate and misleading. The internal differentiations within union organisation today are far more complex: there is a wide range of positions of greater and lesser authority and influence, ranging from the section steward or minor branch officer to the national leadership, and linked together in an elaborate (though at times contradictory) pattern of interrelationships. The accommodative tendencies sometimes identified simplistically with the 'union bureaucracy' occur in different forms and to different degrees at all levels in the complicated representational structure of trade union organisation.

The ability of union leaders to contain, control and manipulate the ordinary membership depends crucially on their success in binding together these different layers in an articulated fashion (as well, of course, as on the actual consciousness of the membership: a point taken up below). Conversely, any serious move by revolutionaries to inspire and sustain different priorities must involve winning over or replacing key elements of what could perhaps be called the

'... the deep-seated reluctance of most trade unionists to use industrial militancy for political ends has been partially abandoned ...'

'rank-and-file bureaucracy'. It scarcely needs emphasising that in recent years this has proved a remarkably difficult task.

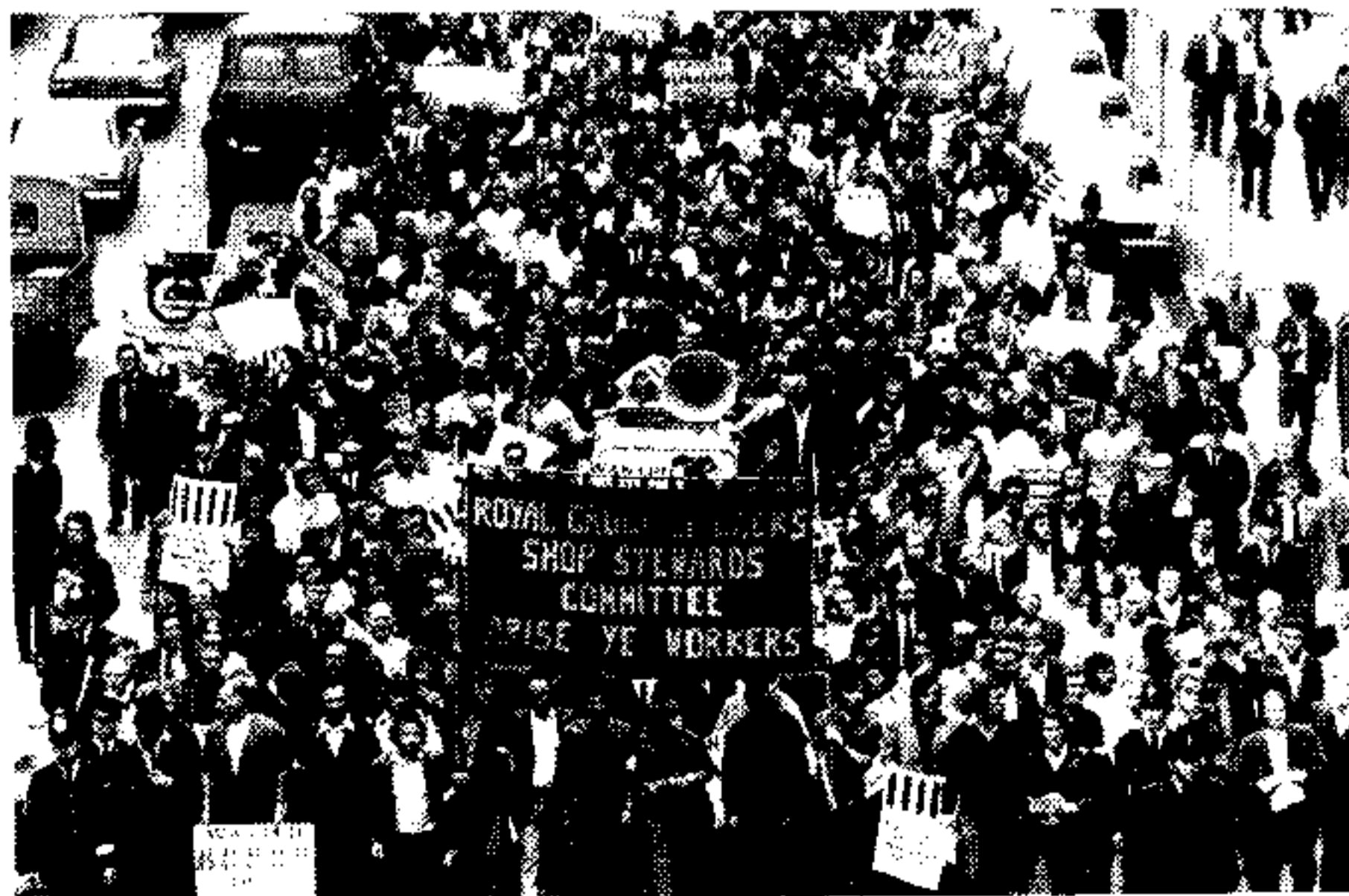
Other aspects of struggle in the past decade deserve emphasis. Forms of action have extended to include occupations and work-ins: most often to resist plant closure, but on occasion — as in the Manchester engineering workers' campaign of 1972 — in support of claims for improved wages and conditions. The traditional work-to-rule has been given new and imaginative character, especially by white-collar groups like draughtsmen. And the deep-seated reluctance of most trade unionists to use industrial militancy for 'political' ends has been partially abandoned with the strikes against the Industrial Relations Act in 1971, the eruption against the gaoling of the Pentonville dockers in the following year, and the explicit challenge to the Heath government presented by the miners in 1974.

Working-class women organise

There have been other progressive features. 1968 saw the strike of women sewing-machinists at Ford against discriminatory gradings and pay rates. Their (partial) victory signalled growing organisation and struggle among working-class women, often in the face of apathy or even opposition from male trade unionists, for equal conditions and opportunities in employment and for unions to take seriously such issues as maternity leave and payment, creche provision, and abortion rights.

The last ten years have also seen increased readiness on the part of black workers to fight racist employment practices (often tolerated or even established by white trade unionists — as at Mansfield Hosiery and Imperial Typewriters). The legislation of the 1970s (Equal Pay Act, Sex Discrimination Act, Race Relations Act), and the largely token gestures of official union policy, reflect the need for at least a nominal response to the developing self-confidence and self-assertiveness of female and black trade unionists.

In the early 1970s it was common to exaggerate and idealise the advances in the level and character of working-class struggle, to diagnose a radical break with many of the routines and traditions of previous decades. Those who interpreted the short-term escalation of militancy in these terms have at times been disoriented and demoralised by the setbacks of the past two or three years.



In the remainder of this article I attempt to place both the upsurge in struggle and the later retreats in a broader context. For this purpose it is necessary to outline some of the crucial changes in recent industrial relations which have important implications for revolutionary analysis but have received too little attention in discussions on the left. What is essential is to understand the alterations taking place in collective action at the workplace, in forms of state intervention in industrial relations, and in the contradictory mediating role of trade unions.

The changing position of the state is one of the most obvious features of the past decade or so. Its traditional 'abstentionist' orientation to industrial relations reflected an epoch when British capital was hostile to government economic intervention in general (the ideology of laissez-faire) and was confident of its own ability to contain trade unionism within manageable bounds. But since the war there has been a general trend towards an active governmental role in the economy — a response to the growing inability of British capital to grapple with its own internal contradictions — and this has extended naturally to industrial relations. The Industrial Relations Act of 1971 was in some respects a crude and unworkable episode, unsuited to the needs of major sections of British capital at that time. But since the early 1960s a body of legislation has been steadily accumulating, bringing many areas of employment issues (such as redundancy and dismissals) within judicial procedures and tending to inhibit collective worker action. At the same time, 'incomes policies' (in other words, programmes of wage restraint) have become a normal feature of economic life; since 1964, there have been at most two years when such policies have not explicitly or implicitly operated.

Closely related to these trends has been the growing importance of the state, directly or indirectly, as an employer. Over half the trade unionists in Britain today are employed in national and local government, nationalised industries, and various quasi-state institutions; many others work for firms heavily dependent on government subsidies or contracts. As the state as paymaster has sought to impose ceilings to wage negotiations, or to establish specific targets for production and employment, the political dimension to normal collective bargaining has become increasingly overt. The term 'free

'The form "free collective bargaining", always misleading has today become largely meaningless'

While 'left' leaders like Jack Jones succumbed to the Big Sleep, many groups of workers took the struggle into new dimensions, like the dockers at Pentonville in 1972 (opposite), and black workers at Imperial Typewriters and Mansfield Hostery (below right)

collective bargaining', always misleading, has today become largely meaningless.

While the mid-1970s have been largely unsuccessful for revolutionaries (and the left more generally) in the major unions in private industry, there has been a greater impact during the past decade in a number of white-collar (and in particular public sector) unions such as NALGO, CPSA and NUT. Here the lack of a tradition of workplace bargaining provided opportunities but also dangers for political activists.

Opportunities because, against the background of government pay curbs and budgetary restraints, it was comparatively easy to relate members' grievances to national union policies; militants could campaign successfully against weak and compromising national leadership, and win positions in the official decision-making structures. The danger was that such positions could be won on the basis of short-term membership discontent, without any continuing organic link with the mass of union members. In such circumstances, engagement with national politics could at times act as a substitute for serious efforts to build workplace organisation and struggle — an option simply not open in unions where shop-floor activity was firmly established.

In both types of union context, the problems confronting revolutionary initiative have to be viewed against the background of the reformist traditions of British trade unionism. It is of vital significance that many of the central institutions, practices and assumptions of unionism in this country were consolidated in the period of nineteenth-century capitalist and imperialist expansion. The relative prosperity of British capitalism allowed a margin for concessions to the organised sections (for most of the time a small minority) of the working class. In this context, strategies of fragmented struggle and an accommodating relationship with employers became firmly implanted, precisely because they appeared successful in maintaining and improving the conditions of organised workers.

Paradoxical consequences

Such traditions proved deep-rooted even when material circumstances altered. Between the wars, with organisational strength and workers' conditions battered by mass unemployment, official union policies failed to move beyond the principles of sectionalism and reformism. In the post-war period, the consequences of these traditions have been paradoxical. The general



'The aim must be . . . action within the workplace . . . struggles among such sections as women, blacks, youth and the unemployed.'

competitive weakness and regular acute crises of British capitalism set sharp limits to the gains which could safely be conceded to the working class; indeed, capital required both an intensification of the labour process and a shift of incomes away from workers. Yet strongly established union organisation succeeded in raising wages and salaries, often through 'leapfrogging' piecemeal struggles; and at the same time resisted encroachments on traditional job controls and practices which helped keep labour productivity in Britain well below that in most other advanced capitalist nations.

Objectively, trade union action greatly accentuated the developing crisis of British capitalism; yet this was achieved by a trade union movement which genuinely disavowed any intention to overturn capitalism. There was, in other words, a gap between activity and consciousness: the cumulative effect of a mass of limited sectional struggles was to contribute significantly to grave instability at the level of the economy as a whole.

Lack of resistance

Arguably, such a gap between activity and consciousness could not persist indefinitely; and the 1970s have seen, at least temporarily, its closure. Official trade policy has rapidly adjusted to the realities of capitalist crisis, restricting its objectives and strategies in line with the efforts of governments and employers to re-stabilise the economy. Just as the Labour Party responded to the economic climate of the 1960s by abandoning any serious commitment to reformism, so the official trade union movement in the 1970s has followed suit. 'Responsible' trade unionism, it is now accepted, means acquiescing in falling living standards, mounting unemployment, and intensified work pressure for those whose jobs remain.

Again, it would be far too simple to interpret such developments just in terms of a sell-out by the 'bureaucracy'. (Though an important feature of the past decade has been a centralisation of official union power within the TUC, its Economic Committee, and the 'NEDC Six' who participate directly in government policy formulation.) For although there have been a few important challenges to the TUC line (such as the seamen, the Leyland toolmakers, the firemen), what has been notable is the lack of persistent and widespread resistance. There is little evidence that the mass of trade union membership are receptive to more radical analyses or strategies than those embraced by the national leadership; rather, the mood since 1975 has been predominantly one of often demoralised acquiescence.

The firemen in 1977: a notable exception to the lack of persistent resistance to the TUC line.

The political parallels are again relevant. For the past ten years the more class-conscious sections of the working class have maintained a tenuous commitment to the Labour Party, not primarily because of deep-rooted delusions in parliamentary reformism but because Heath or Thatcher seemed even worse, and because they could see no other realistic alternative.

In the same way, even committed trade unionists have in the main tacitly endorsed recent TUC policy because, within the perspectives of conventional trade union action, no other course appeared credible. The erratic industrial strategies of the Communist Party in the last decade, and its virtual silence over the anti-working class character of the 'social contract', illustrates this well. It is not simply that the Party's commitment to a 'Broad Left' electoral strategy in the unions prevents it from criticising betrayals by 'left' leaders; more crucially, its persistent inability to provide a political rationale for the industrial militants among its membership has left it totally unable to intervene in a crisis which admits no purely trade union solution.

The unfolding contradiction of trade union action in the past decade has thus in part involved a problem of consciousness: a problem compounded by the fact that a growing proportion of the organised working class lacks either strong trade union traditions or simple proletarian reflexes. (Revolutionaries working among such sections may find this lack at one and the same time a handicap and an opportunity.) In combatting this problem, it is not enough to 'expose' the deterioration in working-class conditions which stem from the movement's official policies; rather it is to convince workers that there genuinely exists a realistic, revolutionary alternative.

It need scarcely be said that to relate this lesson to the actual practice of the industrial struggle is an immensely difficult task, in which revolutionaries all too often resort to unbalanced strategies. In the past, it was common to exaggerate the central role of shop steward militancy, and to place excessive stress on the revolutionary potential of industrial struggle.

Today there are signs in some quarters of an equally one-sided reaction: overstating the degree to which workplace leadership has become compromised and failing to appreciate the many contradictions in its position, exaggerating the revolutionary potential in their own right of struggles outside the sphere of trade union action altogether.

It is more than ever necessary that revolutionaries appreciate the complex interlocking contradictions of contemporary British capitalism, and locate their analysis of the industrial struggle within this appreciation. The immediate aim must be to integrate, on both the material and ideological levels, action within the workplace and within the broader trade union movement, and struggles among such sections as women, blacks, youth and the unemployed who traditionally have been neglected or excluded by trade unionism; and to develop the traditional sectional focus of union action on wages and day-to-day conditions of employment into pressure over broader social and class issues.

Given adequate analysis and strategy, the bankruptcy of traditional trade union priorities which has become manifest in the past decade offers great potential for revolutionary intervention.



Harry McShane & Joan Smith
Pluto £2.95.

Harry McShane has been an active socialist for more than 70 years. Most of that time he spent in Glasgow as a member of the Independent Labour Party, the British Socialist Party, and, for more than 30 years, the Communist Party.

Nowadays, with his 87th birthday in May, hearing him talking at meetings and making fighting speeches from a revolutionary standpoint on the Communist Party controlled Glasgow Trades Council, the vitality, sense of humour, and commitment of the man seem as strong as ever.

Coming from an Irish Catholic background in Glasgow, by his early teens Harry's inquiring mind had found a focus in the debates on Glasgow Green between the catholics, protestants, freethinkers and socialists. Here he heard Hilaire Belloc, John Wheatley, G.W. Foote and 'Scientific' Brown (who challenged Christians to demonstrate that 'faith could move mountains' by drinking from a bottle of poison).

Harry became the first catholic apprentice at James Howden's engineering works in the south-side. (Having got the bullet from the place myself a few years ago, I can vouch for the continuation of the management's masonic, anti-trade union traditions). While working there he joined the Independent Labour Party and remained a member for two years, until 1911, when he became a founding member of the British Socialist Party's Kingston branch in Glasgow.

Harry's description of the strategy of the BSP, and of the battles between revolutionaries like John McLean and Victor Grayson, and the reformists led by H. M. Hyndman, should finally put paid to any notion that there was some kind of simon-pure, crystal-clear, socialist approach to the struggle at that time.

With the seamen's, dockers' and railwaymen's strikes of 1911, not only did syndicalist ideas find a wider audience (with the aid of Tom Mann, Willie Gallacher and James Connolly), so too did the socialist parties; especially, in Glasgow, the Socialist Labour Party.

The SLP's main planks were the need for workplace organisation and a knowledge of Marxist economics. Harry tells the story of how an SLP member, coming across a BSP street speaker, asked him 'What is surplus value?'. To which he got the reply 'That you don't get. Next question.' Also, well in advance of the other Marxists, the SLP took up the question of the role and nature of the state.

But concurrent with the SLP's industrial work were John McLean's economics classes, attracting hundreds of people every Sunday afternoon. These two elements, and their wartimes fusion in the shop stewards' movement, were the main ingredient in the subsequent legend of Red Clydeside.

However, the litmus test for socialists came with the outbreak of the first world war. Harry, like all those with a principled anti-war position, was shocked at the action of every section of the Second International in

supporting their 'own' country. In addition, he found himself in a minority along with McLean, in the BSP).

In 1915, a wage claim at Weir's factory, supported by an all-out engineering strike on Clydeside, led to the emergence of the shop stewards and the formation of what was to become the Clyde Workers Committee. While the leaders of the CWC were ILP, SLP or BSP members and against the war, for most of the war they avoided the question in the factories and concentrated on issues (albeit important ones) like dilution, bonus schemes, shop stewards' rights etc.

However, the advent of the Russian Revolution raised hopes of a quick end to the war, while the extension of conscription to skilled men provoked wider spread

No mean fighter



opposition. By January 1918, the CWC had moved to an open anti-war stance.

In November of that year, when the war ended, Harry describes the scene in his factory: 'I threw down my hammer, everybody looked at the others, nobody said anything, and we all walked out. We went and joined the celebrations in the streets.'

For the Glasgow working class movement, the celebrations of November 1918 soon gave way to the tremendous struggle of January 1911—the fight for the 40-hour week.

When the strike took place the standard working week was 54 hours. Local committees sprang up, bulletins were produced, and three times a week there were mass meetings in the centre of Glasgow.

After a pitched battle with the police, troops were brought in. Harry was amongst those who tried to dissuade them from being used against the strikers. 'They were raw recruits with no experience, and they were

very aggressive; they had no knowledge of the labour movement or anything else and were quite prepared to use their weapons.'

There were machine guns on top of the post office and hotels, a howitzer in the city chambers, and soldiers patrolling the streets. Leading stewards and socialists were arrested.

Apart from Scotland, only Belfast, Newcastle, and to a lesser extent London, supported the strike. There was no strike pay, and after two weeks the strikers went back—but to a 47 hour working week.

Socialists regarded the 40-hour strike not as a revolution, but as a beginning. Other things would follow.'

With the post-war rise in unemployment, Harry became involved in organising the unemployed—an activity which became his main task over the next 20 years.

It was in 1922, during a spell in prison for fighting an eviction, that Harry decided to join the Communist Party. For the previous two years, he, along with John McLean and a few others 'had done hundreds of factory-gate meetings and other meetings, and organised countless demonstrations.

'But although we had conducted the best propaganda and agitation in the West of Scotland, we had left no organisation behind us.' This decision meant breaking with McLean who had been arguing for a separate Scottish CP—justifying this in terms of the Glasgow workers' militancy and level of political consciousness.

Organising the unemployed was an activity that allowed Harry's inventive mind full rein. Fighting for increased benefits and against high rents and evictions.

Demonstrations whenever royalty appeared, or outside banquets and the churches of the rich. Marches, deputations, standing as the unemployed candidate in elections—all tied to socialist propaganda and aimed at mobilising the jobless to fight back.

Having been forced to leave Glasgow several times in order to get a job, when he returned from the Yukon in 1930, Harry was shocked at two developments. The unemployed movement had collapsed.

At the same time the adulation of J.V. Stalin and the characterisation of the Labour Party as 'social-fascist' has been pushed to the front of everything the CP did. Clearly the two were related.

Like some other CP members, Harry continued working with whoever they could, including Labour Party members. He played a leading role in reactivating the unemployed movement—to such an extent that over 50,000 took part in a Glasgow demonstration in October 1931.

In 1932, Harry was sent by the national body of the National Unemployed Workers' Movement on a delegation to Russia. He tells how delighted the delegates were to be assured by Kalinin, the President, that there were no labour camps in Russia.

No doubt many CPers felt like Harry—'I couldn't imagine that the man could be such a blatant liar as to give such an emphatic assurance to all of us if it wasn't true.'

Despite some misgivings about things he'd heard and seen, Harry honestly says 'One of the beliefs that carried us through the '30s

was the existence of the revolution in Russia and our role in defending it. We were still thinking in terms of a world-wide revolution led by Russia, and we welcomed the Five Year Plans and any development that strengthened Russia.'

Harry provides an almost unique recollection of how 'Stalin worship' was introduced (mainly by CP members who had been to the Lenin School in Moscow) and attitudes at the time of the 'third period' policy, especially with regard to Germany.

Like Wal Hannington, he was leading mass struggles and was allowed to be 'heretical' on some questions. Hannington, indeed, opposed the Party Executive on the 'social-fascist' policy and kept his seat—an almost unheard of event.

Throwing himself fully into the battle against unemployment, Harry led the Scottish contingent on the 1932 Hunger March. Despite repression by the authorities, battles with the police, infiltration by Government spies and informers, the marchers' spirits remained high.

Whenever they were banned from using a particular street, their response was to march up and down it twice!

The 'change in line' in 1935 from describing social-democrats as 'social fascists' to the policy of subordinating independent politics to accommodate people like the Liberals to the right of the 'social-fascists' made part of the unemployed movement's work a bit easier. But 'once the line had changed, nobody ever mentioned the old policy.

'It was never explained. To quietly forget it was an unprincipled thing to do, but that became typical of many decisions made inside the Communist Party over a number of years.'

The 'popular front' policy had other effects. 'Once it was accepted that communists should work for the unity of all classes, the next step was to start arguing for self-government for the Scottish people.

'Further support for this came from the fact that the personnel of the party was changing—during the Popular Front period many more intellectuals and middle-class people came to the fore.' The outbreak of war put paid to the plans for a Scottish Convention.

The start of the war produced some amazing performances from the CP leadership. As a member of the Scottish Committee, Harry was able to witness at first hand the effects of the Russian-German non-aggression pact, the Moscow-dictated anti-war line in 1939, and Hitler's subsequent attack on the Soviet Union—resulting in policy (and personnel) changes on a regular basis.

By 1941, Harry was on the *Daily Worker*, and when Russia entered the war, all became clear again. The task of communists was to call for the Allies to open a Second Front, and to support increased production in the factories.

Party members carried Union Jacks on demonstrations, and denounced Trotskyist-influenced strikers as saboteurs of the war effort. 'A lot of new members were recruited, but they had no education in Marxism and the whole character of the party changed . . .

Our problem too



The present membership of the Communist Party is largely made up of those people who joined it when it was very easy to do so—during the second world war and afterwards.'

By 1945, of course, the CP was demanding a National Government including Churchill and Eden!

This policy was continued with the publication of *Looking Ahead* which called for increased production and an export drive in order to get Britain back on its feet. As Harry says 'It was a complete departure from the idea of the class struggle, of all workers against all bosses. It was a plan for British bosses and British workers together.'

His disagreements with Party policy continued over demands for a Five-Power Peace Pact and Gorbals branch refused to collect signatures. On top of that, in 1951, came the CP's discovery 'of a new road to revolution: parliament! *The British Road to Socialism* was published, and overnight we all became democratic and amazingly interested in Acts of Parliament.' The idea was even floated of dissolving the CP!

In 1953, after 31 years membership of the Communist Party, member of the Scottish Committee for 23 years, *Daily Worker* reporter, parliamentary and municipal candidate, leader of the unemployed, Harry

McShane was told by the leadership to change his attitude 'or else'. He resigned and was joined by a number of active Glasgow members.

At the age of 62 Harry went back to the shipyards as an engineer. Politically he rejected joining the Labour Party or the Trotskyists. He read extensively and reaffirmed his belief in the working class smashing capitalism as the only way to achieve power. Russia, he concluded was state capitalist, not socialist.

At the same time he continued his activities as an AEU member and trades council delegate.

The re-emergence of Marxist ideas and the growth of the revolutionary left in the last few years has served to underline Harry's importance—not only as a present day speaker and writer, but also as a link with the great struggles of the past. Joan Smith, who taped Harry over a three year period, has done the working-class movement a service in getting his story into print.

Harry's story is the story of the Clydeside workers. It's the story of the British revolutionary movement. For anyone from Clydeside or anyone wanting to know what it was like to be an active revolutionary over the last 70 years, this book is absolutely indispensable. *Peter Bain*

How Long Will South Africa Survive?

R. W. Johnson
Macmillan £3.95

South Africa has long presented a problem to the western capitalist democracies which feed on its economic system while claiming to deplore the moral unacceptability of apartheid. Western powers have so far confined themselves to mouthing pious nonsense about human dignity and peaceful transition while deriving enormous profits from the system designed to protect the interests of the Afrikaner business class

Initially the displaced English speakers were horrified that the dullards of the veldt had assumed such a dominant role but given the benefits they have enjoyed since 1948 they have been content to make their peace with the National Party. It is clear they will see their lot increasingly in supporting the Nationalists in defending the laager.

R. W. Johnson has provided a superbly written and convincing account of the circumstances in which that laager might be threatened. In the process he has explained the crucial way in which South Africa is integrated into the Western capitalist economies and demolished a number of myths used by the Right to justify support for Pretoria

Books

After all since Sharpeville in 1960 and the assassination of the chief theoretician Verwoerd in 1966 the regime has survived the collapse of Portuguese colonialism, the Afro-Arab rapprochement after the 1973 Middle East war, the rise in oil prices and the abortive involvement in Angola. The implications of all these events for the regime may not have been fully assessed but its response has been flexible and devious.

Johnson explains with the tension usually reserved for a thriller, the means South Africa has adopted to preserve herself—attempted detente with some conservative black African states, intervention in Angola to protect French, American and her own capital, the advantages of high world gold prices and the consequent leverage Kissinger and the US Treasury could exert by manipulating the markets.

Johnson envisages that South Africa will eventually become involved in another war on her northern frontier—having postponed such intervention for as long as possible. Foreign war would compromise the domestic repression which will be increasingly imperative by partly politicising and partly eliminating the armed forces.

The ever widening and deepening maelstrom of domestic repression will further distort the economy and make it a bad investment. It will provide a self-perpetuating mythology of isolation and withdrawal for the Verkramptes on Vorster's right, sustained as they are by a belief in racial superiority and a dogma of a chosen people.

It is a paradox, but no accident that Pretoria has an ally in Tel Aviv—which is one of the fascinating details to emerge from this study. Read it to find out about the Israel/South Africa axis, the mysterious assassination of the Congolese President Ngouabi and for a new perspective on the 1976 US presidential election.

If ever there was proof of the intimate relationship between South Africa and the west, of capitalism as an international system, it is here. South Africa is an extreme and depraved example of class and racial oppression and is thus a reflection of the system under which we live ourselves. The problem will not go away, is not remote and is bound to embroil us all. *Paul Neesom*

For 'inexperienced militant'



From Class Society to Communism: An Introduction to Marxism

Ernest Mandel
Inklings £1.95 paperback

Ernest Mandel tells us that he aims to present 'the basic elements of the theory of historical materialism, of Marxist economic theory, of the history of the workers' movement and the problems of strategy and tactics for the workers' movement in our time.'

That is a very tall order indeed for a book of under 200 pages. Drastic simplification is inevitable, however talented the author. Bald statements necessarily have, to a great extent, to take the place of reasoned discussion of ideas and facts.

Therefore, though there is scarcely a page in this book which does not contain something I would want to modify or quarrel with, I will pass over all but the most unavoidable criticisms.

We are told that, since the late 1940s, there has been 'a new rise in the world revolution, at first confined to equally underdeveloped countries (Yugoslavia, China, Vietnam, Cuba), extending into the West since 1968.'

What does this mean? Certainly there have been enormous changes in the world in the period Mandel specifies. It saw the end of the colonial empires

It also saw the most prolonged boom in the history of capitalism, the emergence of two super-powers armed to the teeth with nuclear weapons and much else besides; and these facts are not unconnected

'The victory of the third Chinese revolution in 1949' he says 'was the most important gain for the world revolution since the victory of the October socialist revolution. It broke the capitalist encirclement of the USSR, greatly stimulated the process of permanent revolution in Africa, Asia and Latin America...' (p 118).

This raises quite a few problems. Are we to understand that, since China is now basically aligned with the USA, the 'capitalist encirclement of the USSR' has been restored?

And the theory of permanent revolution, as Mandel well knows stated that only the *working class* in the colonial (or underdeveloped) countries could lead a successful struggle for *national independence* and 'socialist revolution.

But The Chinese revolution, we are told was a socialist revolution. Is China, then, a socialist society?

The nearest the 'inexperienced militant' will find to an answer is that it is 'a regime of bureaucratic command which is very similar to that existing in the USSR' So is the USSR socialist?

The USSR is not socialist 'in the traditional sense of the term employed by Marx, Engels and Lenin himself.' Mandel is quite explicit.

He speaks of: '*The stage of socialism*, whose construction completes and is characterised by the disappearance of social classes. And the 'Soviet Union is a long way from this situation' (p 113).

It is reasonable to assume that, for Mandel, the same argument applies not only to China but also to the German Democratic Republic, the People's Republic of Korea and the People's Democratic of the Yemen; not to mention Romania, Mozambique, Mongolia, Angola, Cambodia, Somalia, Laos, Poland, Ethiopia, Bulgaria, Vietnam, Cuba and the rest of them. So there are no socialist countries in Mandel's opinion.

This is to his credit. Here at least, he restates the Marxist position and firmly differentiates himself from stalinists, Eurocommunists, social-democrats and the innumerable shades of bourgeois opinion.

These regimes have in common, in spite of enormous differences, a number of features, of which, for a *Marxist*,

the most important by far is that the *working class* is not only not in power but is deprived, so far as the regimes can enforce it, of the most elementary rights. The workers are deprived, as Mandel puts it in another connection, of 'all forms of collective organisation and resistance of the workers, including the trade unions and the most elementary forms of strikes.' (p 96)

Actually Mandel is referring to fascism. But doesn't it apply equally to the USSR etc? Was Trotsky not right when he wrote, in that famous 'Transitional Programme', that the *political* regime in the USSR does not differ from fascism 'save in more unbridled savagery'?

Actually, if pressed, Mandel will answer yes to all these questions. He will not even dispute that the working class has greater possibilities of self-organisation in Belgium or Britain today than in China or Czechoslovakia, that the workers are today, in a strictly *Marxist* sense, *freer* in the former countries than in the latter.

Yes as Mandel will surely agree, the working class is an oppressed and exploited class in the 'western capitalist' countries. And in China and Czechoslovakia?

No, Mandel tells us. The workers of, say, China may be oppressed but they are not *exploited*. Why not? Because, you see, China is a *workers' state*. There are no capitalists. Therefore there is no exploitation.

People's China is a part (indeed 'the most important gain') of the 'new rise in the world revolution' even if its rulers are on the friendliest of terms with President Carter, ex-President Nixon, the EEC Commission and the Shah of Iran.

The Chinese workers are paid money wages which represent only a part of the price of what they produce (a smaller part than in Belgium? A larger? The same?) but,

Learning the hard way

Mandel says, the difference between what they get and what they produce is not *surplus value*.

It is only *surplus product* and that, you see, makes all the difference, even if the Chinese workers are subjected to a barracks discipline similar to that which workers in Belgium and Britain were subjected to in the first half of the nineteenth century and which Marx and Engels so eloquently denounced.

How can Mandel get into such an absurd position? The answer, in a word, is adaption. Adaption to force that appeared, at different times, to offer quicker and easier ways to change the world than proletarian revolution.

First of all, there was adaption to the expansion of Stalinism after the second world war. Conquest by the armies of the conqueror in most of Eastern Europe.

Stalinism seemed to be the wave of the future. So, Mandel and his associates eventually decided that a 'socialist revolution from above' had occurred. Although Mandel himself had earlier written that such a theory 'is a complete petty-bourgeois revision of the Marxist-Leninist concept both of the state and of the proletarian revolution... what we have here is a capitulation under the pressure of Stalinism' (*The Soviet Union after the War*), the establishment of the Russian empire in Eastern Europe soon became part of the 'new rise of world revolution'.

Secondly, there was adaption to 'Third Worldism' during the subsequent years of the long boom. Mandel and the other leaders of the 'Fourth International' decided that 'the epicentre of world revolution' had shifted to the Third World. The Chinese revolution became (in retrospect) the model, along with Castro's Cuba.

'However, this victorious revolution was bureaucratically deformed from the outset. The independent action of the proletariat was strictly limited, if not prevented, by the Maoist leadership. The workers state which was established was in no way based on democratically elected workers' and peasants' soviets.' (p 118)

So we have workers' states, established without or against the working class, in which the workers do not now hold power and never have held power.

One further point must be made. Mandel is above all an impressionist, a man who responds to events (a virtue in itself) but who lacks any guiding thread, any coherent theoretical basis.

He is now, while still carrying the lumber from his past deviations, moving in the direction of an exaggerated worship of an abstract 'democracy' in the workers' movement (see, particularly, pp 97-98) in response to the rediscovery of the working class that the events of the last decade have forced on his tendency.

This may pass as progress but it may also, alas, represent a new adaption, an adaption to the labour bureaucracies in the West. Some of Mandel's co-thinkers (*not* Mandel himself) justified their support of the principal agency of the counter-revolution in Portugal (the Socialist Party) as 'defence of democracy'. We shall see. At any rate, this book cannot honestly be recommended to the 'inexperienced militant'. *Duncan Hallas*

Socialism, I feel, is deep within the soul of the working class today. The capitalist system sees to it that it remains deep.

When workers arise in struggle in an industrial strike, the capitalist machine swings into full action, like in the firemen's strike. The mass media were suddenly full of tragic deaths in fires, of firemen sabotaging equipment, of the poor soldiers working in terrible conditions, enduring long hours.

Yet in spite of this, day after day, money, food and drink, wood for the firemen's fires, was given gladly by the public, because they cared about the firemen. Unions donated money, but money was not enough to win. Only if they had showed their industrial strength by striking in support would they have won it for the firemen.

Here again is the capitalist system keeping the workers in line and stopping that socialism developing. Workers were stopped from striking in support of other workers by their union leaders, who are all part and parcel of this corrupt system. They develop the feeling in workers that it isn't your union involved - so don't strike, a donation will do.

Money is important in a dispute, but industrial action by other workers is what would have won the firemen's strike, or even Grunwicks, and is what will stop the closures that are happening in my area of Merseyside at present.

During disputes even the most reactionary person can change for it is an eye-opener to them when they try claiming social security benefits and find how difficult it is to get their rights, the degrading form-filling, the fuel bills unpaid that they thought social security paid, but find they don't. The union leaders they looked to are trying to sell them out at every turn, while the people they always regarded as nutty lefties are the only ones helping them. It makes them think.

Tooth and nail

We must never forget, people learn quickly through struggle. That's how I learned. Up until I had a handicapped child, I believed in the Labour Party and the welfare state. But I found that the only way I could get my son educated, or equipment to make his life easier and mine, was to fight for it tooth and nail. It took three years to get a stairlift from the same local council that spent £8,000 on a new car for the mayor. The Labour Party gave its full blessing, and it calls itself a socialist party.

When we were in dispute last year for more hours in school meals, and to protect our hours, the Labour councillors wore their management hats and offered us one per cent more. They then spent over £12,000 on the Queen's jubilee, mostly on decorating the

town hall and a sumptuous meal, as the queen was visiting.

All this and more taught me one thing. Fighting for individual things like stairlifts, people's welfare rights or better working conditions is alright in the short term, but in longer terms a new society is needed. A socialist one, where all these things are part of its structure. I joined the Socialist Workers Party as it is the only party that is fighting for this change.

Press lies

The capitalist press tells us that people are greedy and selfish, that no-one cares any more, but day after day I see this demonstrated as untrue. Through my husband I have been involved in quite a few industrial strikes over the past seventeen years. The worst lasted six weeks out, then one week back, followed by thirteen weeks out. During this time we had our lights cut off, in spite of having a disabled child, no coal, even our TV was taken away. A man who owns a local supermarket offered to pay our electric bill, and sent round 2lb of rump steak to keep our strength up, he said. Neighbours rallied round and helped us by sending in food and so on. All this help, yet the newspapers were urging the strikes to go back, saying how irresponsible they all were.

As socialists we must constantly debate with people, make them see through the capitalist system that causes so much misery in their lives, show the way to fight for a socialist society. I honestly believe people care enough to fight for it, we must convince them it is possible.



WHY I AM A SOCIALIST BY SADIE BLOOD