

*socialist*  
**REVIEW**

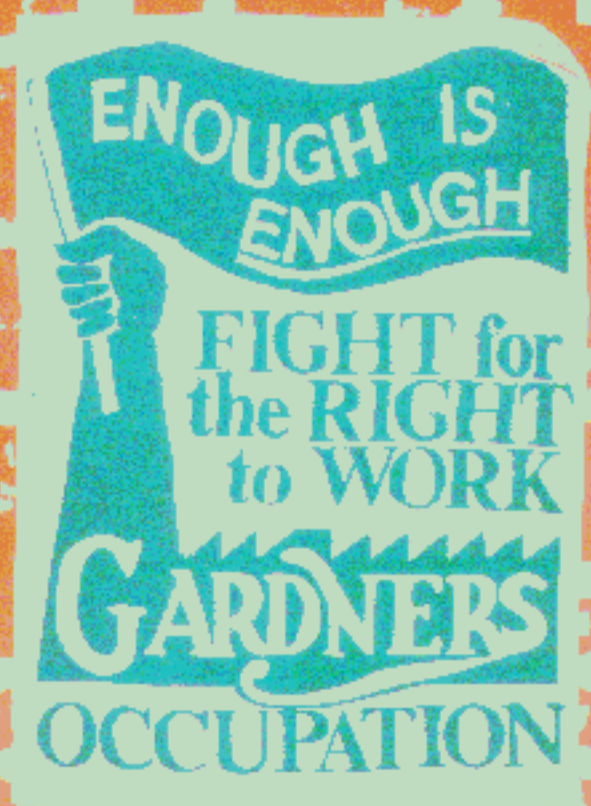
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# Losing Their heads?

'Is there any incident to which you would draw my attention?'

'To the curious incident of the dog in the night-time.'

'The dog did nothing in the night-time.'

'That was the curious incident.'

*(The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes)*

And the really curious incident about the Labour Party leadership issue is also a quite obvious non-occurrence, whose significance so far seems to have got lost. Tony Benn is not going to win the leadership of the Labour Party after the special party conference in January.

It should be obvious. But just in case it isn't let me spell out the arithmetic.

Take what is the most favourable leadership election system to Benn so far proposed (and it is likely that the January conference will decide on a less favourable one). In it Labour MPs have a third of the votes, constituency parties a third, and trade unions a third. The votes of the MPs and the constituency parties would more or less cancel each other out, because the MPs would vote overwhelmingly against Benn and the constituency parties overwhelmingly for him. The decisive vote would therefore be that of the unions.

But half of the union votes are held by unions with a right wing leadership who would not be seen dead voting for Tony Benn. So to win Benn would have to pull together the votes of *all* the 'left' and 'leftish' unions. This he will not do. Far from it, Jenkins, Evans, etc may have voted for a change in the method of leadership election, and may well prefer a Shore, a Foot or even a Silkin to a Healey. But Benn is altogether too risky. Benn will therefore get only a small minority of the union votes. He will therefore lose.

Obvious. But why so significant?

Well, that can be explained best in a slightly roundabout way.

Just, for a moment, forget that Tony Benn will not be elected leader in January and imagine that he is. That would make a qualitative difference to

the way the Labour Party appeared to tens of thousands of militants. It would make it appear that the next Labour government would be quite different to the last one. It would, I am willing to bet, at least double the active membership of the party in a year.

Not of course that everything would be plain left-wing sailing for a Benn-led Labour Party. The bridges would be built to the overwhelming bulk of the right and centre parliamentarians who would stay in such a party. The 'responsibilities' of leadership would soon have their taming effects. And even an enormously expanded and refreshed Labour Party machine would still retain its electoralist priorities.

Nevertheless, a Labour Party led by Benn would be a very different animal from the Labour Party we know today. And it would demand some pretty smart tactical rethinking from revolutionaries.

Contrast this with a Labour Party led by any other of the recent aspirants. A party led by Dennis Healey would not, of course, give the impression that it would form a government fundamentally different from those of Wilson or Callaghan.

But nor would a party led by Michael Foot, Peter Shore or even John Silkin. All, like Callaghan before them, could make some profit out of a Thatcher government. All could preside over a slow pickup of Labour Party membership. But none could make that qualitative change of appearance which really would tap the enthusiasms of a whole new layer of militants.

All this should be obvious but apparently isn't. In the past few months heads are being lost all over the place when it comes to the Labour Party.

That is not too surprising when the heads being lost are those of bourgeois journalists, who after all have long had a professional interest in portraying the most trivial events in the Labour party as being crucial episodes in a cataclysmic drama.

Nor is it too surprising to find brains of the Labour left freely splattered

across the political terrain. Such sacrifices are a permanent precondition for their hopes.

But when it spreads to the far left, then we are talking about a positive epidemic of self-decapitation.

And it is spreading. Take the following passage by Geoff Bell in *Socialist Challenge* introducing his report on the Labour Party conference. It is a representative, if particularly lyrical, example.

'There will be history books written about what happened at the Labour Party conference last week. Exciting books they will make. The conference was so dramatic, important, and in the end so exhilarating, that it was a political occasion which dwarfs any gathering that the British labour movement has held for many, many years.'

This would be going over the top even if it was a response to Tony Benn seizing the leadership. But in the light of the fact that he has not a snowball's chance in hell of getting it even under the new system then the remarks are mind boggling.

And, as I said, they are not unrepresentative. They are part of a collective madness.

The Labour left has undoubtedly strengthened its position in the constituencies over the past couple of years. And, in a rather inward looking response to the disasters of previous Labour governments it has concentrated its efforts on constitutional issues.

With the aid of some rather less starry-eyed union votes it won on two of these issues at the last conference, including the principle of extending the franchise for the leader.

It is not surprising that after such a hard fight on these issues many people should be rather obsessed with constitutional principles. After the rather unexpected victory at the last conference they believe that the constitutional millennium has arrived.

There is however one problem with this belief. Constitutional principles only count if they deliver the goods. In this particular case that means Tony Benn as leader. But the constitutional principles aren't going to deliver that.

But might they not do so one day? Yes. So also might the old system. Labour MPs have not been at all averse in the past to picking their leaders from left of centre. And a lot of water can run under the bridge of Tony Benn's radicalism before that day. That however is all long term speculation.

The important thing is that 'one day' is a very different thing from 'next January'. And working for the 'one day' is a distinctly less appealing prospect than jumping into a party already under Benn's command.

It may also be the case that working for the 'one day' will become an even less appealing prospect after the constitutional elephant has given birth to a leadership mouse in January.

A good number of heads better be stitched back on fairly quickly, or the blood will clot.

Pete Goodwin

## Socialist Workers Party

**FOR WORKERS  
POWER AND  
INTERNATIONAL  
SOCIALISM**

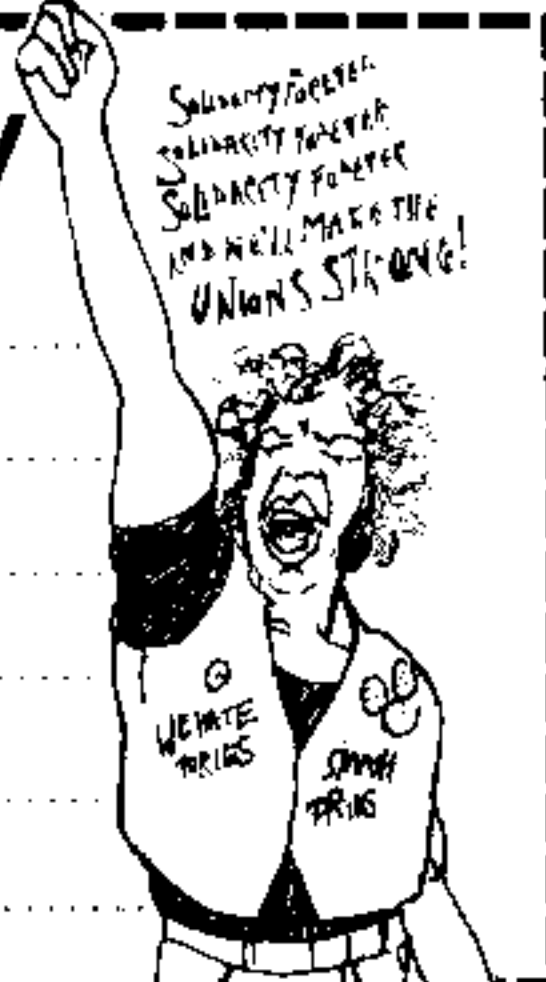
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# The Right to Work

socialist  
**REVIEW**



## A new stage?

We can compare three periods in the fight for the right to work. In the 1920s and 1930s the main emphasis of the movement was about conditions of the unemployed. The fight against the Means Test, for better dole payments, etc. Although they had formal demands for jobs, people in practice took it for granted that you could not fight unemployment. A good example of that is the story of the Slough Soviet at the start of Wal Hannington's book, *Unemployed Struggles*. 5000 engineers got the sack when their factory in Slough was closed. The level of political consciousness was very high. They declared themselves a Soviet, made a big wooden elephant, wrote 'Capitalism' on it and buried it. Then they went to London to demonstrate.

The remarkable thing is that they never decided to occupy the factory to prevent the sackings. In fact the idea of factory occupations does not appear either in Hannington's book or in MacShane's account, *No Mean Fighter*. Even the relationship between the employed and the unemployed was very loose. There were very, very few cases of the unemployed walking into factories. Even more significant, there is hardly any mention of collecting money at the factory gates. The reason is that after the lock-out of the engineers in 1921, shop steward organisation was smashed, workers were really frightened and felt that to stop outside the factory to give money openly to the unemployed was too risky. After the defeat of the General Strike, this tendency was strengthened.

Therefore, while there was massive sympathy for the unemployed, there was no readiness on the part of the employed to take risks to help the unemployed.

At the same time the movement of the unemployed was of a massive scale. When the marchers came to London, they would be met by 100,000 or more workers — some employed, some unemployed.

In the second period, 1971 and the two years or so following the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders occupation in defence of jobs, there were something like 200 factory occupations. The majority of them were in defence of jobs. Practically all of them were victorious. At the same time, the struggle was much more internalised to the factory. The workers had much more confidence in their ability to fight back. But the movement was much less political than before. If you read the literature from the 1920s, there was always a statement about socialism and even, in one or two of the leaflets, about the need for the dictatorship of the proletariat. That was not a feature of the early seventies.

The third period began with the massive rise of unemployment under the Labour Government of Wilson and Callaghan. This time the fight was on a much smaller scale. The number of workers involved was incomparably smaller than in the 1920s and 1930s. At the same time, workers were far less confident than they were in the 1971-3 period.

There are a number of reasons for this. The scale of unemployment now is not that much different from the 1930s. There are two million officially unemployed, plus about a million unregistered — women without enough stamps, people over 55 who have given up all hope of ever getting work, the partially-disabled, etc — making about three million in all.

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## FIGHTING BACK AGAINST THE SACK

But there are important differences in the nature of unemployment today. First of all the standard of living of the unemployed is higher than it was before the war. Secondly there were then many hundreds of thousands who had been unemployed for many years and were in desperate need of basics like blankets. Today — so far at least — unemployment is much more short term. Very few are unemployed for more than one year.

Again, the unemployed before the war were more visible. We did not have the telly then, so the unemployed were on the streets more often. Workers used to have to sign on once and sometimes twice a day; now they sign on once a fortnight. Therefore unemployment is more hidden and that makes for less collective feeling on the part of the unemployed themselves.

Another very important difference is that, between the wars, unemployment benefit was very much determined by local officials. Therefore there were always a mass of personal grievances you could organise around. What made for permanent organisation of the unemployed was, by and large, the fight over those day-to-day issues. Today dole levels are mainly determined by the government nationally and local struggles are much more difficult.

A further very important factor was that the Communist Party was much better rooted in the working class movement than anyone is today. Even though the overwhelming number of their recruits in the 1930s came from the unemployed movement, they were still a very influential force in the labour movement as a whole.

But the unemployed movement today has many advantages over that between the wars. For a start, workers today are incomparably more confident. Therefore relations between employed and unemployed are very much closer than they were. The fact is that money has been collected openly for the Right to Work Marches in trade union branches and in factories right from the start.

Secondly, even in the downturn, there have been factory occupations against unemployment. It is true that many of them ended in defeat, unlike 1971-73, but still workers had enough confidence to fight inside the factory.

The fact that the Right to Work Campaign organised marches reflects the downturn in the class struggle. The truth of the matter is that we would have much preferred to occupy factories. Basically, to get 200 youngsters to march from Port Talbot to Brighton was a propaganda

exercise against unemployment.

Now, in 1980, there is another aspect of the downturn. While workers are giving money to the Right to Work, they are feeling unemployment as a disciplining factor over wages struggles. This is a completely new factor in the period since the war.

When we say that there is a downturn, it does not mean that every body gives up to the pressure. When you look at the attitude of the mass of the workers to unemployment, there has been a change in the last year.

Unemployment went up and up under Labour, but there was a feeling that there was a limit. Now, with the Tories, the feeling is that the sky's the limit. In the last few months, the Gallup polls show that the vast majority of people are now very worried about unemployment. After all, when you think you might have a job and a wage packet, inflation is the most important thing. But when you think that you might lose your job then you think more about unemployment.

There is a feeling that enough is enough, and this is very important to deciding whether individual workers are ready to fight.

The march from Port Talbot was very much bigger than we had expected. So was the lobby on 10 October. And the anger was much more focussed on unemployment than we expected. There was also a clear focus on the Tory government as the enemy. The fact is that 8,000 people would come to Brighton to attack the Tory government but they would not have gone to the TUC. Unemployment is the focus for a growing generalised attack on the Tories.

What I have said up to now does not point to any turning point in the immediate future. But I believe that there will be a turning point. I am not speaking about a big bang — 200 factories occupied in the next months. I am not speaking about the miners taking on the government and winning. I am speaking about something very different. A set of circumstances are combining which create a situation in which there is a possibility that a minority can fight back and win.

It would be rash to predict what the outcome of Gardners will be. Let us assume the best: after a few months the workers win. Even then, it will not be a UCS. The downturn has been too long and too deep for other workers to take up the example in the same way as they did then. This time it will be a much slower process. We need a number of successes if we are to have the same result.

If we assume the worst, and Gardners are beaten after a few months, even then it will help the fightback. It will help because the last few years have seen too many defeats without any fight-back at all. Gardners is a big factory in a strategic industry in a strategic area, and any fightback there will have an impact.

**Tony Cliff**

The unemployed in the 1930s were more visible: marching across Westminster Bridge 1933.



# Organising for occupation

The occupation of Gardners diesel engine factory in Manchester — part of the giant Hawker Siddeley group — has received little national publicity in the media. But increasing numbers of trade union activists are seeing it as an immensely important struggle. A group of workers have at last taken a stand against the wave of closures and redundancies that are destroying two or three thousand jobs every day. It is not the first occupation under the present government — there were the occupations at Meccano's and Massey Ferguson in Liverpool for example — but it is by far the biggest.

Its impact can already be seen by the excellent response delegations from the factory are receiving from one end of the country to another. The Manchester districts of the engineering union are making a rare move to levy all of their 100,000 members weekly in support of the occupation. And

the Sheffield district is taking the unprecedented step of pressing for a levy of its members in support of a struggle outside the district.

The Labour Party has called a national demonstration against unemployment in Liverpool for 29 November, which we urge all our readers to support. No doubt the presence of a contingent from Gardners there will show there is an alternative of fighting sackings to waiting three or four years for a Labour government!

But what is the background to the Gardner's occupation? Why did the workers react differently from so many others who have accepted redundancy or closure? And how is the occupation organised?

Mick Brightman, an SWP member who has worked in the factory for four years and a member of its works committee talked to *Socialist Review* about these things.

Mick explained that the decision to occupy the factory was a result of the coming together of a number of different factors.

First there was the attitude of Hawker Siddeley, who took over the factory a couple of years ago. Since then management had been pushing for a worsening of conditions in the factory through a new piece work structure which the stewards rejected. When the stewards put in a claim for a 20% pay rise this summer, the reply was a refusal to accept any points in our claim unless we accepted 700 redundancies — a quarter of the factory.

And that was not all. 'In the end we did get a reply to the wage claim — five per cent. They wanted to bring in the piece work structure we'd rejected. And to restrict the stewards' and safety committee representatives duties.'

'Our position as a stewards' committee was opposition to redundancy and, as an alternative, work sharing, ie no job loss at all. Now, voluntary redundancy had been talked about, particularly by the staff unions. There were approximately 300 people that were of retirement age within a few years and early retirement may have been a way of avoiding a confrontation. It's very difficult to stop people volunteering for redundancy if the money is right.'

'But the severance pay management was offering for early retirement was minimal. And so the works committee put a position of opposition to redundancy per se to mass meetings.'

Faced with the attack on wages and conditions and jobs and union organisation the workforce voted, narrowly, to give the stewards a mandate to organise industrial action. The occupation began next day.

The generalised management offensive took place in a factory which has built up a

very good level of organisation in recent years.

'The factory has a very, very good tradition. There are hundreds of people who recognise that they've got a good union shop. That's really been built up since the victory of 1973, when they had a 13 week sit in. Until then the factory was one of the worst organised and worst paid factories in Manchester. Sackings were common. 1973 sorted a lot of that out and built the union in the factory. A lot of people in the factory remember that. Since then there's been consistent strong organisation.'

'It's a piece work factory, under the Manchester piecework agreement. There is continually what the management calls "guerrilla warfare" on the shop floor — fights about piece work times. They're normally settled by management conceding increases. That's created a lot of wage drift since 1973 — £20 over and above domestic settlements. So Gardners' wages are some of the highest in the Manchester district.'

'On top of that the factory has a reputation for never sending away anyone who wants support for their own dispute. We raised a thousand pounds for the firemen's strike — from the shop stewards' fund, shop floor collections, factory gate collections. There was seven hundred pounds raised for the bakers' strike, and well over a thousand pounds for Adamson Containers. The steel workers collected on the gate two or three times.'

'Another example of good organisation there was the Anti-Nazi League. ANL leaflets were distributed on the gates by the stewards. I think we were the only factory in the country that did that. The argument was that it would be quite clear to the members where the stewards stood on racism in the factory.'

According to Mick this tradition of



Photo: Neil Martinson

strong organisation was helped, when it came to the redundancies, by the attitude of the local officials.

'John Tocher, AUEW divisional organiser, made his name in the Roberts Arundel strike 12 years ago. He was very well involved in the Automat dispute over union recognition three years ago. That was a marginal victory. Then there was Adamson Containers last year, over the victimisation of stewards and the convenor — total victory after a 21 week strike.'

'He's had more successes over the last ten years than almost any official in the country.'

'The attitude of the officials has helped a hell of a lot. A lot of people rely on the officials, and the fact that the officials have taken a strong position all the way through, have advised us to fight and have supported our argument to fight, that has been very important.'

Strong organisation and sympathetic officials have existed in other places, but the arguments for a fightback have been lost. A significant factor at Gardners is that this is not the case of the closure of a loss-making factory in a nearly bankrupt combine, but of management trying to increase their profits through rationalisation in a very healthy concern. This has meant that workers have not felt that there is no chance of making the company back down.

'The economic arguments have been very strong for us. Hawker Siddeley is a very rich multinational. It has been increasing its profits — with on top of that the £100m it received when the aero side was nationalised.'

'Gardners is considered to be the Rolls Royce of diesel engines. Hawker Siddeley are installing £17m of new machinery in the factory. And so the economic arguments have been very strong for saying to the workforce that Hawker Siddeley can afford

it, that the commodity is very good and that there is no reason for redundancy.'

The combination of good organisation and the feeling that the company can afford to give in has been aided by yet another factor — the way in which the socialist argument has been pushed in the factory for a number of years.

'There's always been IS or SWP influence. The local IS did a lot of work around the 1973 occupation. They recruited some people at that time, and one or two of them are still in the factory. Although they are not members now, they are quite close. The factory for the last seven years has had an IS/SWP tradition. There's always been a political argument in the factory. The Communist Party has never really had a hold, although they've a number of members there, including the convenor.'

'Since I've been there — in the last four years — we've consistently put in bulletins. Sometimes we've not been very good about it — even before the strike we'd only put in one in six months. But normally we put in about one every month.'

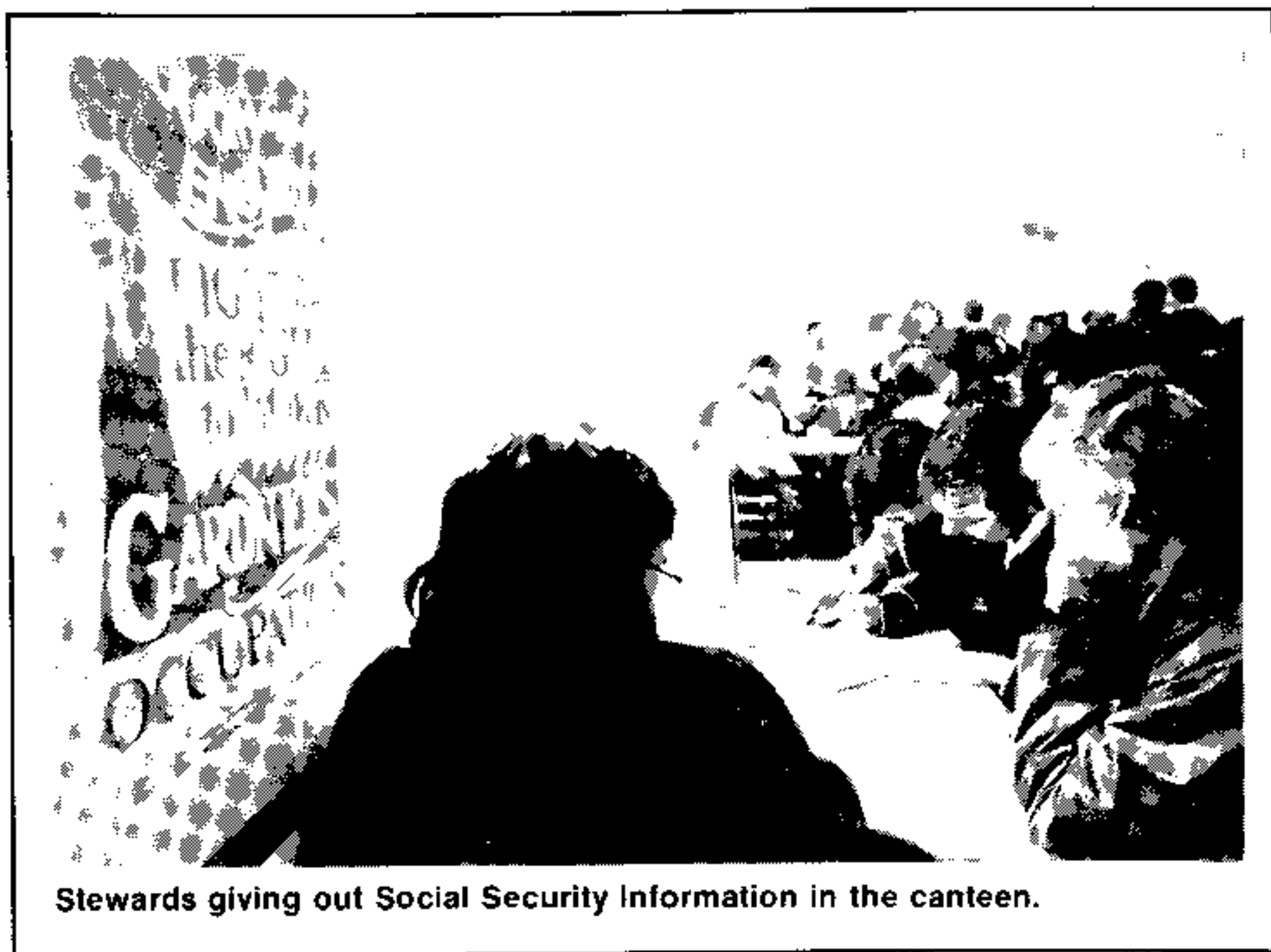
We managed to recruit some people, and we've been very influential on the shop stewards' committee in winning ideas — on solidarity, of course, and wage claims. We took opposition to the management's wage offers last year and the year before to mass meetings, and although we didn't win we argued the case very hard as a left alternative. I've been able to get on the seven-strong works committee on an SWP platform. Everyone knows I'm in the SWP. There was a big argument about whether I should go on the works committee, but I won the election.'

Finally, Mick believes, a shift in feeling nationally has made the occupation possible.

'I really believe the factory slogan "Enough is enough" sums everything up. There's definitely a mood around the country — you can feel it up in Manchester but I felt it as well in Birmingham when I was there getting support. People are starting to say enough is enough, although they don't feel that they can fight in a whole number of situations.'

It was this combination of different factors that made the occupation possible. 'Some people have said that the reason we got a strike at Gardners was because of the SWP. It's not that. Some people have said because of rank and file organisation. It's not that. Some people have said because of the officials. It's not that. It's an accumulation of things, it's all the lot together.'

'A strong position was put at the mass meeting. Tocher spoke very well and very hard. The convenor spoke well and hard. The management attempted to pack the front of the meeting with supervision. They had about two or three hundred at the front of the meeting. But it wasn't enough for them to win the vote.'



If there is a golden rule about occupations it is just this: don't sit tight in your own individual factory, but get out and press for support from other places immediately.

Gardners took note of this rule from the beginning.

'Traditionally it takes six or eight weeks to get a dispute made official in the AUEW. The majority of disputes in the AUEW have been made official after they've finished. So we sent two delegations down to the union executive before the dispute even began. A third delegation went down when the dispute had been on for a week. Their instructions from the rank and file in factory were that if the dispute was not made official that day there would be two sit-ins — one in Eccles and the other in the union headquarters in Peckham Road.'

'But the executive made it official.'

'Since then we've circulated all the national officials and all the district committees and we've asked them to circulate their convenors and branch secretaries. And all the reports coming in say they are doing that, because it's a nationally official confed strike.'

But the workers have not simply waited for officials to do the job for them. Delegations have been sent out to all the major areas so far. 'The number of delegates we've had out so far suggests that although a lot of convenors have got problems of their own with short-time working etc, they will support us in one way or another.'

'We must have had at least ten delegations out in the last ten days — Huddersfield, Liverpool, Birmingham, Leeds, Bolton. London is being done next week. Speakers are going to meetings and getting standing ovations for what we are doing before they speak, which is very unusual. What we're asking people to do is not just have a collection, but go on the shop floor, take collection sheets around, do a bulletin in your own factory saying what's going on. We think that will help a hell of a lot of other people.'

'We're saying, "Use our dispute to help build the union in your own work place, to get confidence back in your own workers." The other thing we are asking is, "keep in mind that we may have to call on you for Grunwick style mass pickets if they try to throw us out with injunctions."'

Inside the factory things seem to be going very well, with quite a high level of participation in the occupation.

'Because the vote for industrial action was a split vote, in the first week there was a claim of foul from some of the workers, saying "we don't want a hand vote, we want a secret ballot". For a few days people were coming in and arguing. But we soon succeeded in calming the thing down, and now there's a general recognition that the dispute is on, that it's a nationally official strike. You get in the region of 500 people sitting in at one time. We estimate that we're probably getting a thousand people a day coming into the factory.'

'We have a hard core of 200 with a very hard core of about 100, who are there almost all the time. Most mornings we have 200 pickets. But in the first Monday and the first Tuesday we managed to pull together about 600 pickets — internal pickets these are, inside the gate.'

'The reason we pulled this many together was that management have got about 200 scabs — the highest management themselves, the supervisors, some ASTMS members, some APEX members and some staff who weren't in the union.'

'They stand along the pavement for about half an hour in the morning. They are organised by the management who continue to pay those who give their names.'

'Most of the staff are involved in the dispute, which is virtually unheard of. We've got senior staff reps involved in the committee. The best run staff union is TASS — they organise the foremen and chargehands. They've only got one or two



Photo: John Sturrock (Report)

'What we're asking people to do is not just to have a collection, but go on the shop floor, take collection sheets around, do a bulletin in your factory saying what's going on.' (Left) Collecting on the October 26 CND demo; (Bottom) and on the gate at Adamsons.

scabs. ASTMS has got a majority involved. With the clerical workers there are problems, possibly not a majority are involved. But a lot of the girls, especially the young girls, are involved in it now.

'The formal organisation inside the factory is the CSEU (Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions) committee. They tried to call it the strike committee, although we objected to that and said, "It's not a strike committee. The strike committee must be open to rank and file members, not just the stewards." The CSEU committee is made up of the works committee, and all the other reps and stewards, including those of the staff unions. We have found that these organisations are not effective. Even the works committee will agree that they're not effective. Not that individuals are not effective. They have been in a whole number of ways. But the bodies are not functioning in the way that they should.

'We've moved to the position now of having a number of separate committees — a picket committee, which should organise the picket roster and make sure there are pickets on at all times; what we call administration, printing and publicity which is for propaganda, the donations sheets and news sheets that are necessary inside the factory and outside; we've got a committee for the canteen to organise the food; there's a committee for entertainment; the safety committee, for which we're using the existing safety committee to ensure that the factory is safe. The most important committee which is beginning to function very well is the delegations committee.

'All of these committees are open for co-option. We've stressed that anybody willing to be involved can come forward. We're very aware that disputes throw up new leadership from the shop floor, and a



Photo: John Sturrock (Report)

lot of the existing stewards aren't capable or willing to reach the level of activity and organisation necessary to win the dispute. A few of them don't even come into the occupation. We're all aware of it, and we're taking steps to create the leadership we need.

'It's slower than I would like to see it, as an SWP member of long standing. If it was a completely SWP run strike, everything would be about a week in front of what it is now. But considering that most of them are apolitical people, they've not been involved in organisational politics, they're doing very well, they're really learning a hell of a lot. The attitudes in there are unbelievable, and the level of political discussion is very very high.

'Most of the delegations are young workers. There's usually one steward — sometimes two stewards — in a delegation of four. The lads involved in the delegations committee are getting stuck in and they're

learning, even if they make an occasional mistake.

Strikes and occupations always face the problems of the way in which management and the press try to put pressure on workers either directly or through their families to turn them against the struggle. Gardners' management have already tried this although in fairly hamfisted way, by sending redundancy notices through the post to about 700 workers. The workers or their families would be woken by the postman's knock to get a recorded delivery notice telling them they were being sacked.

Mick talked about the problems raised: 'We haven't done anything yet to get in contact with the workers not involved in the occupation, who spend all their time outside the factory. It would be ideal if we could. But it's a hell of a job. We've talked about it, we've thought about it, but God knows how you go about it. They live right

across Manchester and right out to Leigh and Bolton.

'We've got quite a lot of people involved actively, but to contact the people who aren't coming in, we'd have to utilise a hell of a lot of people to do that, the key people that can win arguments, and we haven't got that level of organisation, although I hope that we would reach it. But we have been able to use management's lists in the factory to send them all a letter.

'All disputes are won by a minority, and sometimes a very small minority in terms of activity. I think the number we have got active is quite large.

'We know that a number of workers may leave the factory in the course of the dispute. In 1973 the company lost 600 workers, some highly skilled, because at that time they could get jobs elsewhere. The number won't be as high this time. But some hundreds of people could leave. We know that. We think we can't avoid it. But the management won't have broken the union.'

Jannie Brightman, who is herself an evening shift worker in another local factory, described an attempt to deal with one part of the problem — management's attempts to pressurise the wives of the male workers.

'We tried to organise the wives about a week ago with a picket. We handed out a lot of leaflets inside the factory. But the problem was we didn't really go around talking to people and you don't get a response just from leaflets. The leaflets were read and appreciated, and on the day a fair number of people who were in the canteen came out. It gives people something to do for a little while and some of the women did get involved.

'Now the sort of things we are thinking of is to try and organise a social around Guy Fawkes. I also thought in response to the redundancy notices the Wives Support Group should put in a leaflet.

'The problem is that a lot of the older trade unionists just do not understand how important it is to involve the wives. Originally the chairman had written in the 'Code of Practice' on how to conduct the dispute "No wives, no outsiders", but because we were around at the beginning we managed to get that changed. There are a lot of kids on the site, usually being brought in by the father, and one of the things we did argue was that a creche should be set up, that some area should be set aside, so that the husbands looking after the kids could be more active.

'We've also suggested that the wives do some of the fund raising meetings — for instance, it would be quite powerful and emotive to have a wife standing up and speaking if a delegation has to go to, say, a trades council.'

Mick thinks a mistake was probably made in not warning workers about the danger of the company sending out redundancy notices in an effort to split those being sacked from those not yet due for the sack.

He says that it would have been better if all workers had been told to refuse to accept any correspondence from the company. But because the redundancies have been so arbitrarily arrived at, with workers at the factory six months being kept on, and those there 15 years being sacked, he thinks they have angered rather than divided the workforce.

'We know that there are quite a lot of people who are frightened and given the opportunity would get out the boat. But we think that we can contain that. We think that management may attempt to hold a secret ballot. That was done at Adamsons' Containers — but they didn't even win the ballot there. If they did a secret ballot themselves and called it carried, that could create some problems for us. But you have to remember that it's a nationally official strike, of all unions. It's very difficult to

break an official strike. The people who might need powerful right-wing leadership to go back into the factory and break the strike.'

He is very optimistic about the possibilities of victory. He says the situation is quite different from that of the Massey Ferguson occupation at Knowsley in Liverpool which collapsed in the early summer.

'This isn't a closure. Knowsley was, and it's very difficult to beat a closure. What is more, in that case part of the problem was that other factories were taking their work and let them down.'

He believes the dispute may drag on for months. But if the level of funds raised by the delegations going round the country is high enough he believes that there is a good chance of victory.

**Chris Harman**

## Defeat in Turin

The most important strike in Italy for the last five years has ended in a massive and bitter defeat for the workers' movement. For the first time since 1968, the movement has been substantially set-back, and some of the gains made over the last ten years removed.

The issue at stake was the right of management to pass on the burden of the crisis through mass sackings, and to reestablish control within the factories over production. The place was FIAT, the heart of the Italian working class and its most militant section. For twelve years a group of leftists have led perhaps the most sustained and radical struggle in any factory in Europe within its walls. Great gains had been won, over conditions, wages and speeds and it was these gains that were at stake in the struggle.

With sales of its models stagnant, FIAT is embarking on a massive programme of reinvestment and restructuring, hoping like all car firms to emerge over the next few years as more competitive and more productive than its rivals. To achieve that it needs the 'co-operation' of its workforce, i.e. their acquiescence to speed-up, to the introduction of new machinery, the worsening of conditions etc. FIAT were determined to push this programme through and to do that it needed to break up the resistance of its workforce.

In June this year FIAT announced 25,000 redundancies out of its 140,000 workforce. It made no secret of the fact that among those 25,000 were to be found most of the militants who had led the struggle of the last 12 years. All realised the national significance of this move: it was to give the green light for employers everywhere to solve their problems of profitability by mass sackings and reassert their 'right to manage'.

In mid-September, the first redundancies were announced, and the workers' response was immediate. Spontaneous strikes broke out everywhere in

the FIAT plants. Pickets took over the gates and for the next five weeks not a single car, piece of machinery or part left the factories. The spontaneous solidarity demonstrated by parts of the rest of the working class was enormous. All the FIAT plants struck, even those in the south not threatened with redundancies. Workers in Belgium refused to load parts destined for FIAT, the railways transported no FIAT cars. When FIAT started to run press adverts explaining their case, the print-workers in some papers refused to print them unless the unions were given similar space to put their case, free of charge.

From the official sections of the movement, reactions were more ambiguous.

On the one hand, the unions were forced to call a series of strikes given the pressure from the base, including an unprecedented general strike against FIAT. It was well supported with over a 100,000 in Milan demonstrating and large attendances in Rome, Turin and other centres.

On the other hand, the struggle at FIAT was a bit of an embarrassment for the unions. The position of the rank and file, against any redundancies and instead rotating lay-offs at 90 per cent of full pay, ran against the unions' policies of demanding the planning of Italian capitalism and its rational development. A rational plan at FIAT demanded sackings and increases in productivity, given that FIAT is locked into the crisis-ridden car sector and must stay competitive with its rivals. Further, the militants of FIAT organised in the factory council had always been to a certain extent beyond the control of the union hierarchy. And so the union leadership attempted to get the militants to call off the picketing, cancelled proposed general strikes, tried to pull the factory council into line. However, every wavering was met by such an angry



reaction, with union leaders being booed and whistled down, that they were forced to carry through the strike, however much their disagreement with it.

As a result certain key tasks were left undone. Mass collections for the strike were started only after the workers had lost 80 per cent of their September wages. The FIAT press offensive was answered only partially and ineffectively. And when the management went on the offensive in the last two weeks of the strike, the unions' response was feeble.

FIAT began to organise squads of managers to force the gates and attempt to work in the factory. The effects were limited, in that they rarely succeeded in entering the factory and few cars were made. But there were other effects, for the impression was created that some people wanted to work, that the militants were divided from the base and, further, that there was a risk of public disorder. There was a focus to all these workers who, not threatened directly with redundancy and suffering from a lack of pay, were having second thoughts about the strike.

On 14 October, FIAT dramatically altered the situation. It organised a mass demonstration against the strikes and against the militants. Some 30,000 turned up. Among them were the 18,000 supervisors of FIAT, but also many workers. It was the first time such a demonstration has been seen in Italy since the end of the war, and it pointed to serious problems with the organisation of the strike. Further, the same evening the prefect of Turin ordered armed police to guarantee free access to the factory.

This represented a major set-back and demanded a change of tactics, but it did not amount to a defeat. There could have been a response; perhaps occupation of the factory or staggered strikes.

The trade union leaders, however, turned the set-back into a rout.

The very same night as the demonstration, they signed an accord with FIAT. Merely to do so at such a time was to admit that FIAT had the initiative; but a rapid reading of the terms showed just how great the betrayal was. FIAT had already conceded when the movement was rising that there would be no redundancies; instead workers would be laid off. The agreement signed added nothing to this. FIAT promised only that in the end they would take everybody laid off back - but they have till June 1983 to do it!

In the words of one militant, the result is 'By the time I am re-employed, the factory will be a completely different place'. Even if FIAT do keep their promise, for two and a half years they are freed of the network of militants and will have a free hand to introduce speed-ups, new machinery and the like.

In a series of factory gate meetings, the accord was pushed through before most workers had time to discuss it and

against the factory delegates' (the equivalent of shop stewards) wishes. The most militant plants rejected it overwhelmingly, in others it went through only because the union leaders insisted that the supervisors should vote.

The bitterness was enormous: union cards were torn up, television crews, supervisors and scabs were beaten up, union leaders shouted down and, in one case, attacked. At the meetings, some delegates were in tears, since to them it was the end of an era. After 12 years of struggle, the network of militants had been defeated clearly and massively.

**'After 12 years of struggle the network of militants had been defeated clearly and massively.'**

So what conclusions can be drawn?

Some are obvious. Above all there is the role of the union leaders who so cynically capitulated to FIAT. Aspects of their behaviour were simply disgusting, as they rode roughshod over the wishes of the militants who had sustained organisation in the factories for the last decade. For instance, Sergio Garavini, Communist Party member and a secretary of the CP-led union said of those militants: 'These aren't delegates, they are riff-raff and the sooner we free ourselves from them the better.' What lies behind this is the wish of the union leaders to free themselves of the embarrassment of the militancy and independence of the factory councils and to reconstruct the unions from the top down. The situation is similar with the Communist Party itself. When the struggle was rising, it supported occupations of FIAT, yet at the first down-

turn, faded from the battle and ended up advising the workers to accept the accord.

Other results are more difficult to assess, especially given the wave of despair that has hit militants since the end of the struggle. To overcome the emotion and resignation is the first problem.

There seem to be three basic points.

Firstly, what does the defeat at FIAT mean in terms of the struggles against unemployment which are taking place throughout Italy? Victory would have given them an enormous boost, but how much will the defeat weigh on them?

Second, after the defeat at FIAT how can redundancies be avoided? For in head-on conflict between a powerful employer and a militant working class, the latter were defeated despite the militant tactics used and the solidarity forthcoming. The shutting down of the factory did not work and may have contributed to widening the gap between militants and base. What could have succeeded in its place?

The most important problem, though, is that of the relationship between militants and union structures. The strategy of the union leaders seems clear enough - to strengthen the union structures by weakening the elements of independence at the base. How can this be opposed without returning to a factory by factory perspective? In retrospect, one of the crucial weaknesses of the strike was that the picketing tied up all the militants at the gates of FIAT and thus detracted from the contacting of activists in other factories. The chance has been lost and there is no political force either willing or able to take up the task. The old schema of the union based on the factory councils, the democratic structures in the workplace, seems to have come to an end; both because the trade unions don't want this 'anomaly' of independence at the base and because the most powerful centre of such independence and militancy has been defeated.

Urgent answers to these questions are needed if a lasting set-back to the Italian working class is to be avoided.

Jack Fuller

*socialist*

# REVIEW

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# The great council house sell-out

The latest government cut backs in council spending and the freeze on all council house building have produced screams of rage from Labour councils. Witness the recent Lambeth conference. But they are unlikely to usher in a phase of "Poplarism" with outright defiance of Heseltine's attacks.

One has only to survey the performance of the leading 'rebel' councils over the issue of council house sales to see how deep is the commitment of Ted Knight of Lambeth, David Blunkett of Sheffield or Steven Moore of Rochdale (leaders of their respective Labour groups and co-sponsors of the conference) to defiance at this stage.

Look at what happened in Sheffield where the decision to set up the national Campaign Against Council House Sales originated. At the conference there on May 17th this year over fifty Local Authorities were represented, including most Inner London boroughs and cities like Birmingham and Leicester.

At the time, Heseltine's Local Government and Housing Bill, which contains the power to force council house sales, appeared to be running into considerable opposition from Tory as well as Labour councils over its financial provisions. It was by no means certain that the Bill would pass through Parliament in one piece. So whilst Sheffield, like most Labour councils, was passing through a 45 per cent rate increase and a 30 per cent council house rent increase, leader David Blunkett assured the party that there would be no flinching when it came to council house sales. The local election manifesto had made it clear — this would be the stand that could unite Labour councils across the country against Heseltine's law.

Over the summer however, this imposing stance began to droop. Heseltine managed to conclude a deal with the Tory-controlled Association of County Councils whereby they may actually receive an even larger

share of government grants than before at the expense of the cities. In return they dropped their embarrassing opposition to his Bill.

A group of Labour MPs led by Dennis Skinner almost succeeded in talking the Bill out of parliamentary time. This action was called off by a deal between Heseltine and Labour's right wing shadow environment secretary, Roy Hattersley (also, ironically, from Sheffield). At a meeting in a London hotel, on the Wednesday before Parliament dissolved, Hattersley agreed to stop the filibustering — in exchange Heseltine conceded that the Bill would exclude OAP's and disabled persons dwellings from sale!

On 6 September Labour's National Executive Committee held a conference of 60 Labour authorities, again in Sheffield, thus vaguely identifying with the previous conference in May. On this occasion however, the message, mainly put over by Hattersley, was entirely negative and defeatist. The NEC's advice was that there was no future in breaking the law, and they harped on the dire consequences of any council doing so. Councillors could be banned from office, Labour would lose control, officers could be put under political duress, and commissioners could be sent in to dismantle council services. The national political impact of such a stand in providing an inspiration and focus for the rest of the anti-cuts movement, was hardly mentioned, nor was the possibility of spreading the action to non-cooperation with Tory councillors or with government appointed commissioners.

The alternative put forward by Hattersley was euphemistically called "controlled sales", which in effect means a propaganda campaign aimed at dissuading tenants from buying, combined with throwing every possible bureaucratic obstacle in their way. From the time of this

conference, leaders of Sheffield District Labour Party, in common with those of Lambeth, Rochdale and other rebels, began to prepare the ground for this shabby alternative.

First, the previously united front presented by councillors, tenants' federation, district party, trades council and town hall unions in Sheffield was systematically undermined — with the help of a number of broad left and Communist Party full time union officials.

Only two days after the NEC conference, a top level meeting took place at the town hall between Blunkett and senior council officers, warning them that they could possibly be surcharged if a commissioner had to be called in. By the 12 September, Blunkett had produced a discussion paper for the Labour Group, "Principled martyrdom", as he called it, was not even included as an option.

A meeting was engineered on the 8 October between leading councillors and stewards of all the local government unions. At this meeting committee chairman Alan Billings and Clive Belts amplified the horror stories. With existing Labour councillors banned from office, the Tories would take over the town hall for at least three months — in that time they suggested, untold damage would be done, with compulsory redundancies, dismantling of the direct works department and wholesale cuts.

This scenario assumed of course, that councillors would be acting in a political vacuum without active rank-and-file support from either inside or outside the town hall. This is frequently how they seem to see themselves. The fact that the trades council had passed a NALGO sponsored motion to resist council house sales only the previous month was discounted. The possibility of their employees actually resisting the cuts by, for instance, blacking unfilled posts or refusing to cooperate with the destruction of services, is usually regarded as an embarrassment by most committee chairmen, if not by all councillors.

Meanwhile on the industrial wing, a letter was sent out to all TGWU and AUEW branches affiliated to the Communist Party-dominated Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions District No. 28. The letter told branch delegates to District Labour Party that the Confed's policy was to support "controlled sales" of council houses. It is unclear where the authority for this statement came from, since no proper meeting of the Confed had discussed it. Nevertheless it had the desired effect.

The CP-controlled Sheffield Tenants' Federation had picketed the NEC meeting in September urging them to stand firm against council house sales. They too carried out a U-turn in the following weeks.

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The first hint was an ambivalent statement by spokesman Percy Riley, a CP member, that "at the very least, I hope they do not come to a hasty decision". When the issue came up at the District Labour Party on October 14th the tenants' representatives were supporting "controlled sales", although some local tenants associations remained mystified about when the change in policy had occurred. It appeared that a "hasty decision" had been made after all.

A final last-ditch stand against the general retreat was made at a trades council sponsored conference against the cuts on 11th October. Housing Committee chairman Clive Belts argued that discussions with other leading Labour authorities indicated Sheffield would be on its own if it refused to sell. Previously this had been phrased rather differently as "Sheffield takes the leading role in the national campaign"! Councillor Mike Bower put the left's argument succinctly in reply:

"I don't believe the issue of council house sales can be separated from the other issues. The government has chosen to attack the movement on all fronts — I don't think people can delude themselves and think that we can retreat until we get to safe ground when we decide we are going to fight".

The final crunch came ten days after that conference, at the District Labour Party meeting. Four out of the seven constituency Labour Parties had sent in motions urging the council to break the law, and a minority of councillors were also still in favour of this line. Normal attendance at these meetings is around 80, but for this occasion numbers swelled to 140, with numerous backwoods-persons and trades union delegates making first-time appearances. The right wing had mobilised in a big way, assisted it appeared, by the broad left. The arguments were largely academic, since all four constituency motions were thrown out and Blunkett's sell-out policy was adopted.

Almost simultaneously Rochdale district councillors, who only a week before had declared their intention of going to gaol rather than sell, decided to obey the law, and Ted Knight of Lambeth stated, "We believe that if we had refused to sell council houses, Mr Heseltine would have sent in his own team of officials and some of our councillors would have been disqualified from office. We did not see the point of making an issue of this." (*Guardian*)

Some, cynically, might say that the threat of disqualification from council office, and incidentally, parliament, seems to have figured rather prominently in the calculations of Messrs. Ted Knight, David Blunkett, Clive Belts and Co. Any SWP member will tell you that you can't base a secure career on being a militant (though George Lansbury's spell in gaol while he was Mayor of Poplar didn't stop him becoming leader of the Labour Party ten years later).

The position these councils have now

adopted is indeed an uncomfortable one — that is to attempt to frustrate the sale of council houses by underhand means. Some of the ways proposed are simply lunatic. Rochdale councillors wanted the forms printed in Latin on the Pennine moors! Another suggestion has been made that the Bill does not oblige councils to sell gardens with the houses.

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**'We believe that if we had refused to sell council houses, Mr Heseltine would have sent in his own team of officials and some of our councillors would have been disqualified. We did not see the point in making an issue of this.'**

**Ted Knight**

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Sheffield, whilst placing some well-argued adverts in the press (ITV refused to carry similar ads, though it accepted the government's pro-sales publicity), has also taken up a belligerent attitude to prospective purchases. They are to be informed that they will be ineligible for OAP's flats and that they will go to the back of the queue for council mortgages and improvement grants, and they are warned sternly that if they get a council mortgage, they will be evicted if they fall down on the payments. Meanwhile councillors appear not too perturbed by the refusal of NALGO members to process the applications until they get more money and

staff for the extra work. Rent collectors have been asked to give out anti-sales leaflets (why not Labour Party members?) but have failed to win sufficient remuneration for extra work.

Such tactics are unlikely to impress tenants, who for too long have experienced an authoritarian and paternalistic regime under Labour. Though it has a good record for construction — there are 90,000 council houses in the city, almost half the stock — Sheffield actually spent 40 per cent less on maintenance than Tory-controlled Leeds last year. They have recently outraged sections of their tenants by imposing a strict "no pets" ruling.

With issues like this and the sales question, local Tories are having a field day posing as champion on tenants' rights while the Labour Party is cast in the role of bureaucratic bully-boy. Ironically, the only time in the last 50 years that Sheffield went Tory was for a few months in 1968 over a similar confrontation with its tenants over a "lodger tax". Sheffield councillors, like many others, would be in a better position to argue against sales if they hadn't put rents up by 30 per cent this year.

Against this background it is hard to take seriously the declarations of local Labour Party leaders at Lambeth. Nevertheless support for open defiance of the Tories is growing inside and outside the Labour Party, and the options open to Labour authorities are becoming fewer and fewer. It is becoming clear to them that there is no limit to the cuts the Tories will try to impose if they can. Defeats like the sale of council houses must be used to strengthen the argument for defiance. Then Ted Knight's "concerted industrial action" might serve some purpose.

**Simon Ogden**

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## **Knight in tarnished armour**

Standing above a red 'Lambeth — Fight the Cuts' banner, Ted Knight opened the Local Government in Crisis conference on 1 November with a fine show of fighting rhetoric.

With a blink of the eye we could all have been back in Central Hall, Westminster, a year ago. Then Knight, as leader of the Labour-run Lambeth Council, addressed a rally which followed a huge demonstration against the cuts. Jack Dromey introduced Knight and his fellow councillors as in the great tradition of George Lansbury and the Poplar councillors — who in 1921 were jailed for leading a successful mass campaign against government demands. Knight spoke of the 'wall of resistance' that should be built against the Tories, and of the fine example of the Clay Cross councillors against the last Tory government.

But on November 1st 1980, Ted Knight did not talk about active defiance of the Tories. Like most of the Labour

leaders and councillors who spoke, he passed the buck.

No amount of talk about the 'progressive' position taken by Lambeth — as opposed to the outright capitulation of most Labour councils — could conceal the fact that Knight and the others are quite unprepared to lead the fight. Just three weeks before the conference Lambeth Council reversed its long-standing policy and agreed to sell council houses — to apply the new Tory Housing Act.

It was the housing issue which produced the most bitter reaction from the 900 delegates at the conference. The meeting was perfectly timed to organise for a national campaign against the Act and the other Tory cuts for only two weeks before Heseltine had banned all new council house building. But with the smell of the Lambeth capitulation in the air, there was an impatient reaction to all the 'official' talk of resistance.

Certainly, Knight and the others seemed to be taking up a quite defiant position when compared to that of Ron Keating, NUPF executive member, who spoke as representative of the only union which had delegated to the conference at a national level. Keating urged the conference to recognise the 'fear that was stalking the land' - of unemployment, of redundancy and further cuts. He argued that with desperately low morale, effective resistance from the workplaces was impossible. Better to ask the Labour councillors to lead the fight within the council chambers. He elaborated a complex and absurd system of resignations and re-elections for councillors which would eventually show that 'the blame for cuts and the loss of democratic control will lie clearly with the government'. Thankfully this was defeated.

Keating was attacked on all sides by the trade union delegates who formed the bulk of the conference - but found some support from representatives of the Constituency Labour Parties, and not surprisingly, the ruling Labour groups. But Keating touched a raw nerve. After years of Labour and Tory cuts many public sector workers feel themselves to have taken a mauling. There was a nervousness about taking up any call for 'widespread industrial action' as the conference statement suggested but there was also, from all the trade union delegates, an eagerness to see a lead taken. And *because* Knight and his council had called this conference, taking on, with a great show of rhetoric, the role of leadership, it was to Lambeth and the councillors that many speakers turned.

Knight was repeatedly told to take up the fight, that one defiant council *could* inspire support and wider resistance throughout the country. On the platform Knight enthusiastically applauded them all, but Lambeth Council remain committed to application of the Housing Act, and *will*, it was made clear, implement further cuts unless action is taken at a national level.

The outcome of the conference was messy and inconclusive. A whole range of amendments were passed - varying from the call for a 35-hour week to demands for a general strike. Somewhere among these were the two which really counted - those from Lambeth and Hackney Housing Nalgo branches which asked delegates to begin to organise for wider action, by campaigning in their workplaces for no cover action, against flexibility, against re-deployment and natural wastage, for non-cooperation with new legislation or increased charges. Lambeth housing workers are already defying the government and their own council by refusing to implement the Housing Act. Such active, practical steps can advance the fight against the cuts, and roll back Keating's vision of the fearful, helpless, mass of the union membership.

But the Lambeth Nalgo resolution also deplored the Lambeth sale of council houses and insisted that a campaign

against the cuts can best be launched by the sort of intransigent stand by a Labour council of which Knight has spoken so much.

The conference elected a huge steering committee to meet and try to unravel the much amended declaration. Whatever they come up with will be a poor substitute for the real lead the majority of delegates were crying out for. Had Knight and the others taken up their stand against the Housing Act, the conference could have been the base from which to mobilise support and the

'widespread action' he wanted, from throughout the movement.

The speaker from the Gardners occupation *could* talk about defiance and real action, and was generously received. £406 was collected for the occupation. On the platform Ted Knight joined in the warm applause for Gardners. Did he remember the ovation at Central Hall a year ago? Unless they are able to turn some of the words into deeds, there will be fewer and fewer acclamations for Knight and his councillor friends.

Phil Marfleet

## A sectarian hunting ground

Very few conferences can have met in such an appositely named venue as the Labour Coordinating Committee's rank and file trade union conference in Leeds on 1 November. Meeting in a converted Anglican hospice, the former Hostel for the Resurrection, there were 130 delegates and observers. Unfortunately for the organisers, around half the delegates were themselves 'resurrectionists', though more in the tradition of Burke and Hare than the Anglican Church, and at one point the body looked like being torn asunder in the enthusiasm of competing sectarian teams.

The meeting started well enough with an appeal from Tom Macafee on behalf of Gardners which raised the respectable sum of £209, and it looked, when Bernard Connolly of the Sheffield steelworkers followed him, that it would get down to discussing the first item on the agenda, unemployment. With the next few speakers, however, it became apparent that the various entrust groups were more interested in presenting their own particular programmes than actually discussing concrete policies.

On behalf of the Right to Work Campaign I asked the conference to consider how we could maximise support for Gardners; how we could publicise their case eg by holding shop floor collections, taking the case to the members; support for the Right to Work march to Liverpool for the 29th November demonstration on unemployment.

Of the speakers who followed in this session only one, the delegate from Middlesbrough trades council actually talked about what they were doing in the North East to organise among the unemployed. Not one of the speakers took up the question of the Right to Work march or raising shop floor support for Gardners, though they all genuflected towards Manchester in the course of their contributions, most of which were directed at democratising the Labour Party. To some extent the rather laid-back chairing of Michael Meacher MP was probably to blame, since he made no attempt to direct speakers towards the subject matter. The morning finished with most people feeling rather depressed.

The afternoon session began with

IMG delegates, all clutching their brand new Labour Party membership cards, making what is called I believe an 'intervention'. They had a 'document' which they wished conference to discuss and vote on. The platform easily disposed of this by pointing out that they had stated that the conference was to be consultative with no votes being taken, and anyway the person who was actually moving the document was only registered as an observer.

There's not really much to say about the rest of the conference. The only two contributions of any interest came from the Secretary of the POEU broad left, and from a Post Office worker from Merseyside who did actually try and relate the specific problems of building a broad left in the unions and to what was happening in the Union of Communication Workers (the renamed UPW). A speaker from *Women Fight-back* made a useful contribution, and Peter Hain concluded the session by saying that the 'bankruptcy' of both the Liaison Committee and the Defend Our Unions committee was forcing more and more workers to turn towards the Coordinating Committee. Evidence of the contention was sadly lacking.

So what happened? The question that must be asked is how the Bennites can hold large, well attended meetings throughout the country, but seem incapable of bringing together any sizeable number of rank and file trade union militants. Benn can speak on platforms with Scargill and Fisher, but when his acolytes in the LCC call a conference in Scargill country no miners at all turn up. Peter Hain and Co. are painfully sincere in their wish to involve trade union members, but that they do not seem aware of the nature of the beast (the union bureaucracy) they are in alliance with. Scargill and Fisher may be prepared to form alliances at Labour Party conference with the Labour Coordinating Committee and to speak at mass meetings with Benn, but when their allies start to speak of rank and file control of the trade unions as well as the Labour Party then beware... they just stay away, and what could have been a useful conference becomes a sectarian hunting ground.

Jim Scott

# Between two storms

Continued tension between the authorities and the new unions in Poland. East German leader Honecker talks of 'anti-socialist forces' at work and seals off the population from any contact with Poland. Hungarian authorities reveal that they have faced strikes there. Reports of demonstrations and strikes inside the USSR in Estonia. Brezhnev reveals yet another failure of Russian agriculture to meet its targets, meaning intensified food shortages this winter.

The impact of the great Polish strike wave of July/August is making itself felt throughout the Eastern bloc, just as the extent of the economic crisis can no longer be hidden. Even though the storm of the summer has barely passed, a new storm is brewing of potentially much greater force.

In Poland the depth of the workers' support for the new unions can hardly be exaggerated. Ralph Darlington's article over the page gives some indication of the vast scale of their organisation, and the recent television pictures of shipyard leader Waleska's reception in the mining areas of the south showed the degree of worker enthusiasm for them.

This has not stopped the authorities trying to whittle down to nothing the concessions forced from them at the height of the strike movement. In a move that must have warmed James Prior's heart, the Warsaw district court has been doing what the regime was too nervous to do directly itself: it has denied the unions the right to be legally independent of the state and has insisted that their right to strike should be defined by the new trade union law that is being drawn up and not by the union's own rule books. The material submitted by the unions to the press is continuing to be censored. And many local magistrates are still refusing to pay the wage increases supposedly agreed on two months ago.

There are threats of new, 'selective' strikes as we go to press. Western reporters suggest that this is due to pressure on the cautious union committees from the workers who elected them. Apparently in Gdansk workers' representatives have



been talking of abandoning the pursuit of legalisation as a union committee in the courts and declaring themselves once again a strike committee.

It is doubtful if the regime wants an all-out confrontation with the unions yet. It still seems to be trying to buy time with all the means at its disposal. The head of the party, Kania, has been trying to do some sort of deal with the Church to cool things: after meeting Cardinal Wyszynski a joint communique affirmed 'a common view that constructive cooperation between the church and state serves well the interests of the nation'. And the premier is due to have talks with the Solidarity union leaders.

Some compromise may well be worked out this time. But it will not stop further tensions arising. The regime, under pressure from the Russians on the one hand and its Western creditors on the other, will

soon be back trying to recoup what it conceded at Gdansk. And the workers will resist every such move, seeing in the independent unions their only weapon against chronic food shortages, dangerous working conditions and bullying and managerial corruption.

The other East European leaders are visibly shaken by the upsurge of a real workers movement in Poland.

The Hungarian authorities claim they can handle the situation. They may be right: they have certain safety valves for discontent (see Tom Hickey's article). But the central party paper has admitted that 'in the past there have been stoppages in some places — or if you like strikes — lasting several hours'. And on 31 August (the day of the Gdansk agreement!) they rushed to rescind price increases due the next day for sugar, petrol, and other consumer items. Miklos Haraszti (author of *The Worker in the Workers' State*) has noted in the *Guardian*:

'Kadarism has not had to face a constantly falling living standard before and, save for the aborted Prague Spring, it has not had rivals in the liberalisation game. It is hard to tell how Kadarism could survive two such heavy blows which would deprive it of its two main appeals.'

If the Hungarian regime seems bleak, not so the East Germans. The tone of their talk of 'counter-revolutionary forces' is identical to that in the run up to the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. They see Poland as ravaged by a contagious

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disease, which has to be met with the strictest quarantine measures as an interim measure while consideration is given to the wholesale slaughter of those infected. After using currency regulations to cut West German visitors to their state by half, they have virtually banned travel of East Germans to Poland and Poles to East Germany.

But a fracturing of one's limbs is not as serious as sclerosis around the heart. And that is what is threatening Brezhnev's Russia.

Last year saw the lowest rate of economic growth since 1945. And now the harvests, for the third time in five years, failed to meet expectations. The food shortages that have been plaguing Russia's cities this year are likely to become quite desperate next.

The failure of agriculture is not some peculiar aberration in the Russian system. Rather it is inbuilt into it, as the other side of the apparent successes of state capitalism under Stalin and Khrushchev in industrialising the country. In order to provide an arms potential to match that of the West, resources were systematically grabbed from the countryside to build heavy industry in the towns for four decades.

Whatever the 'plans' promise in the way of investment for agriculture, their implementation saw it switched away from the farms to the military industrial complex. The peasants were driven into collectives and state farms, left to survive on what they could grow on their own minute private plots (chiefly potatoes). The younger and more energetic elements fled to the slightly better living standards of workers in the towns, leaving the countryside increasingly populated only by old people. The low level of mechanisation and the growing shortage of rural person power meant, inevitably, that agricultural output grew less rapidly than the demand for food of a growing urban population.

In the past ten years the regime has attempted to improve things with larger investments and inducements for skilled workers to remain on the farms. But the accumulated deficiencies of the past have been too great: indeed, the regime itself, has, in good harvest years, reverted to raiding agriculture in order to raise industrial investment. The product of accumulation, an industrial working class which did not experience the extreme deprivations of the collectivisation period of the 1930s or the ravages of the war, demands more and better food. The system based on accumulation can only offer stagnating living standards in good years, food shortages in bad. Against such a background, what is happening in Poland could detonate a massive explosion.

We reported the strikes in Russia's great car plants in an earlier issue of this *Review* (1980:7). Now there is news of strikes and street demonstrations in Estonia — one of the Baltic countries which was absorbed into the 'socialist' world thanks to Hitler's

agreement with Stalin in 1939. At the beginning of last month the town of Tartu experienced both a successful strike of 1,000 engineering workers and a demonstration of students asserting their national rights. The significance of these events is that Estonia is one of the few parts of the USSR with unrestricted access to the Western television broadcast in a language, Finnish, virtually identical to their own. They know what has been gained in Poland and want to move along the same path.

A *Financial Times* report could quote an

unnamed 'long time East European Communist' on 23 October. He was less 'optimistic than ever about Poland because of the disclosures of the Soviet Communist Party's Central Committee session in Moscow'. He feared that:

'If the Soviet harvest turns into another disaster as indicated, and there are problems feeding the Soviet people, Brezhnev and his politburo will indeed feel threatened, and not only in Poland.' He could well be right.

Chris Harman

## What happened in Gdansk

**The Socialist Workers Party recently sent Ewa Barker and Ralph Darlington to Poland to carry solidarity to the strike committees and to find out first hand about the strikes and the new unions. Some of the experiences have already been printed in *Socialist Worker*. Ewa has translated a marvellous interview with the woman strike leader in Gdansk, Anna Walentynowicz, in the most recent issue of *Womens Voice*. In the articles we print below Ralph provides the first detailed accounts to appear in Britain of the way the Gdansk strike developed and of how the workers have been organising.**

The rash of sporadic strikes that swept across Poland's cities in protest at rising meat prices grew into the largest and most spectacular workers' revolt seen anywhere in Europe since the General Strike that shook France in 1968.

Focal point of the unprecedented Polish workers' upheaval was the huge Lenin shipyards in the Baltic coastal town of Gdansk, where 16,000 workers threw out their bosses and began a seventeen day occupation.

Stoppages there in 1970 sparked off mass protests that left 60 people shot dead by Polish tanks and led to the overthrow of Gomułka and his replacement by Edward Gierek.

Ten years later workers began downing tools in Poland's largest shipyard until the seaport cities of Gdansk, Gdynia and Sopot were all enveloped in a major political confrontation.

Inside the headquarters of the new Solidarity independent trade union organisation in Gdansk we met the three young workers who began the strike at the sprawling Lenin shipyards.

We sat huddled together around a small table in the union's bar, drinking Turkish coffee and smoking cigarettes voluminously. These shipyard workers were buzzing with their new-found power and excitedly related the events that were to lead to the formation of a workers council-style organisation.

All three of them had been associated with the small group of activists who had distributed the workers' opposition bulletin, *Robotnik*. For a number of

months they had helped in its production and secretly campaigned amongst fellow workers for free trade unions independent of the State.

They had attended small weekly discussion meetings around *Robotnik* in the flats of other activists in Gdansk. When the meeting rooms became overcrowded they spilled over into smaller gatherings in nearby rooms.

The trio had met together regularly with the key organisers of the *Robotnik* editorial board — including Bogdan Borusewicz, a member of KOR, Anna Walentynowicz, a crane driver at the Lenin shipyard and constant irritant to the regime's officials and their trade union chiefs, and Lech Walesa, a leading participant in the 1970 strike and victimised from the shipyards in 1976.

They discussed the immediate problems of shopfloor concern and generalised them into agitation against the regime. *Robotnik* produced over a period of two years was intensely political and widely distributed inside a number of workplaces in the Gdansk region.

In the Paris Commune shipyard in Gdynia isolated copies of *Robotnik* circulated clandestinely. Sometimes they would be read together and discussed by small groups of workers in a particular section before being passed on.

One of the Lenin shipyard workers explained to us how he had suffered continual harassment from the police as a result of his oppositional activity. His flat had been raided by police searching for incriminating literature.

When the news leaked out of the victimisation of Anna Walentynowicz and the decision to transfer her to a job outside the city, he knew there would be widespread anger and resentment in the Lenin shipyards.

That Wednesday evening a trio of shopfloor militants quickly consulted with their friends around *Robotnik*. They were aware of the bushfire of economic strikes sweeping the country and of the growing mood of defiance within the shipyard. Rapid decisions had to be taken.

It was agreed to organise a strike. They anticipated that a walk-out in one or two sections could rapidly spread. The

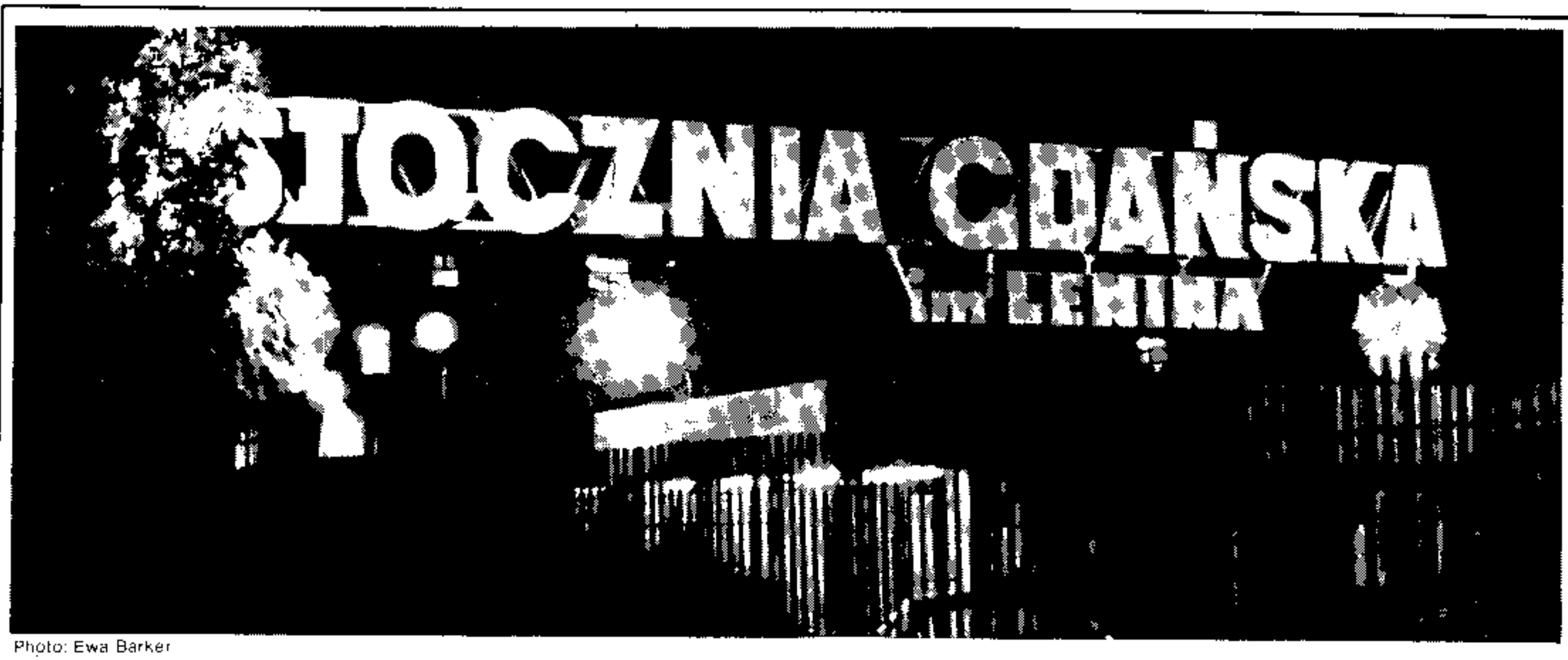


Photo: Ewa Barker

atmosphere was favourable and to wait much longer could be fatal. A bunch of leaflets and small posters were scratched together by this small bunch of oppositionists.

They agreed on three central demands. The reinstatement of Anna Walentynowicz, increased pay and a monument to be erected to the memory of those workers shot dead by Polish tanks outside the shipyard gates in 1970. Their unifying slogan was 'Enough is enough'.

And the following Thursday morning at 4.30 a.m. the trio smuggled the literature into the Lenin shipyard. One of the men, 24 year old Bogdan Felski, started handing out leaflets to workers finishing their midnight shift, which were also eagerly seized up by men entering the yard.

Meanwhile in the locker room of section K-5, Jurek Borowczak aged 23 leafleted workmates coming on shift and argued forcefully for a stoppage. Not everybody agreed. Many were frightened of the consequences. Others doubted the success of a strike. He managed to convince about 30 fellow workers to march across the entire length of the yards to section K-3 where 23 year old Ludwig Pradzinski, the third *Robotnik* activist worked.

As they tramped across the yards the determined group of strikers shouted out to workers they passed to join the protest. By the time they reached the K-3 building they were nearly 100 strong.

Out of the blue appeared the First Secretary of the Shipyard Party branch — with some 3,000 members — demanding to know what the hell was going wrong.

Within minutes the strikers had gathered hundreds of fellow workers around them from all sections of the shipyard. Even the yard's 30 security guards quickly joined the strike. There was no doubt about it — a full-scale dispute was now on.

Within a few hours a mass meeting embracing thousands of morning shift workers was in session on the large forecourt immediately in front of the shipyard gates. Lech Walesa, aware all along of what had been planned, scaled one of the shipyard walls and took over the leadership of the strike.

Older workers remembered Walesa from 1976 and his experience and organising activities of that period. For many younger workers Walesa was familiar because of *Robotnik*. His name and address had appeared — along with other members of the editorial board — on the back of each issue. His hard and consistent campaign for workers' rights won him immediate respect and admiration.

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They refused to begin negotiations until Anna Walentynowicz was brought into the shipyard, and a strike committee consisting of 21 workers erected. In the rush of events the strikers did not have the luxury of going through a formal election procedure. And anyway, only a section of the giant shipyard's workforce were present. For the time being at least it was a volunteer committee.

Nevertheless none of the new strike leaders would have been allowed on to such a body without the general consent of the thousands of strikers present. And the hastily formed committee began the momentous task of preparing for a total occupation of the yards while simultaneously opening up negotiations on their demands.

Communications with the outside world, and even the rest of Poland, was cut off or delayed by the authorities in a bid to prevent detailed news leaking out. Despite the absence of telephone links, the Lenin strikers succeeded in making contact with other factories in the Gdansk region.

The plant backs onto the Northern shipyard in Gdansk where some 8,000 workers came out on the Friday morning, and the dry docks with some 7,000 striking workers. Other factories in the area quickly joined the revolt.

During the preceding strike wave across Poland the authorities had attempted to isolate each strike as much as possible and

to divide the workers among themselves.

In the Lenin shipyard the management now embarked on a highly organised manoeuvre that aimed to wreck the strike. As part of their conditions for negotiating they steamrolled the strike committee into agreeing to elections to the leading body.

The strike leaders agreed to this, but did not organise the elections themselves, and the authorities seized their chance. While most of the strike leaders were either bogged down in negotiations or were outside the shipyard gates spreading the dispute, the management quickly organised half-rigged elections. They were conducted in the confusion present at the start of any all-out strike.

Many of the representatives that emerged were management plants or Party members who had no intention of prosecuting the strike into a major confrontation. They now joined the hard core of *Robotnik* supporters to form a new 200-strong committee.

Despite the strikers' wish to meet higher officials it was plant director Klemens Gnicch, flanked by the shipyard's Party secretary, who conducted the actual bargaining. The authorities' desire to end the strike at the yard was paramount. Any settlement there would speed up negotiations at other plants on strike.

On Friday evening it seemed as if differences were narrowing rapidly between the two sides. Management had conceded the reinstatement of sacked workers. The main unsettled issue was over the level of wage increases to be granted.

Around four o'clock on Saturday afternoon the Polish government news agency Interpress informed Western news reporters that the strike was over. A speedy end to the wave of disputes that had swept Poland's Baltic ports for three days appeared to be in sight.

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In fact the picture was more complicated. The strike committee had been engaged in a stormy argument over the terms of the settlement. Around noon a delegation of striking Gdansk bus drivers had gone to the shipyards after hearing that the strike was about to end. Afraid that without the Lenin shipyard supporting them, their bargaining power would be much reduced, they pleaded for the strike committee not to abandon them.

Walesa and a good number of other militant workers argued for a continuation of the rapidly escalating strike. Yet they were outvoted by a majority on the enlarged strike committee. As chairman of that Committee Walesa was forced to announce to a mass meeting of 8,000 workers the acceptance of a settlement and the ending of the strike.

Immediately after this announcement was made the Director re-assumed control of the tannoy system and broadcast periodic announcements that the strike was settled and everyone should go home.

For many of the activists the situation was intolerable. The idea of a solidarity strike had been born only a little earlier, but many of them were aware of the developing strike wave in the rest of the city. Their feelings were reinforced by the arrival, at that moment, of Jacek Borowczak who together with a group of shipyard strikers had been touring other factories. The urgent message this group carried back to the shipyard was an appeal for a continuation of the strike in solidarity with the workers of the tri-city ports. It seemed as if the appeal had reached the shipyard too late!

It was only a handful of the most involved militants who decided that the strike could not end in this way. It must go on. The confusion was terrible. Workers were pouring out of the gates. The tannoy was in the hands of management who still issued announcements about the end of the strike. Frantically they ran from gate to gate, shouting, yelling, turning people back.

They made it! Only a token force of workers (some 2000-3000) occupied the shipyard that night, but the strike was maintained. It was one of the most momentous decisions made in Poland this summer and it marked a decisive turning point in the whole revolt. The strike was to develop into a full blown occupation of the shipyards, which were to be used as a centre for the organisation of no less than 500 workplaces throughout the Baltic region. The result was the creation of the inter-factory committee - its Polish initials are MKZ - uniting all the striking enterprises of Gdansk, Gdynia and Sopot.

One of the most influential factors in ensuring shipyard workers actively joined the revolt was the role played by the women in Gdansk. Many of the workers' wives also went out to work in the highly industrialised Baltic region. And a good proportion of them had themselves come out on strike behind the lead given by the Lenin yard. They were instrumental in demanding their husbands actively join the occupation.

Early Monday literally thousands of workers trundled towards the strike-torn yard. Many were still unsure as to whether they should participate. Inside the gates hundreds of strikers confronted them 'Come on, in you come'. Most workers still hesitated. They were aware of the serious political implications.

Eventually a striker shouted out across

the gates. 'Look, either you're with us or against us. Either come in and join the occupation or get lost and go home'. At this ultimatum, a group of young workers at the front moved forward indicating that they wanted to go through the gates. The dam was broken and thousands of other workers followed their lead and flooded in.

What happened next is now history.

## Underneath Solidarity

The Solidarity national union in Poland now embraces well over six million workers. Literally hundreds of thousands of workers across the country are engaged in daily shopfloor battles with local management, the Party chiefs and the Polish regime itself.

Strike committees everywhere have been transformed into founding committees of the new Solidarity organisation. These workplace committees are linked together in every area by a regional MKZ inter-factory organisation. The Gdansk strike committee for example has become the Baltic region's new union Presidium with delegates from numerous workplaces represented.

Strike leaders at the Paris Commune shipyard in Gdynia showed us around the sprawling yards that employ some 10,000 workers. They explained to us how they are organising on the shopfloor.

Gdynia workers nicknamed the state run trade union in the shipyard 'The Travel Office'. 'All it did was arrange holidays, hand out social benefits - but never concern itself with the defence of workers' interests.'

15 shipyard workers were dragged unconscious away from a confined working area where they had been operating paint sprays amidst totally inadequate ventilation equipment. 'New equipment would be more expensive than paying out pensions for the injured workers. For the management it is a simple economic calculation - and the old union went along with it.'

We were told that it was a waste of time approaching the state union with any grievance. Refusal to undertake the dangerous jobs could mean harassment from the bosses in future. And by and large the old trade union in the shipyard would actively collaborate in weeding out militants - even to the extent of sanctioning their sacking.

Shopfloor workers' enthusiasm for joining an independent trade union - whose leaders have been openly tested in struggle - has been overwhelming. At both the Paris Commune and Lenin shipyards over eighty per cent of the workforce have formally stopped payment of dues and severed their links with the state-run bodies.

Mass meetings in various departments

are now organised as and when the new union committee see fit. They have been granted converted office space equipped with typewriters and telephones from which to organise. And both committees are producing their own regular shopfloor union bulletins containing material on the structure of Solidarity and its funding, details of strike agreements made elsewhere, and other desperately sought after news.

At both shipyards, and elsewhere, they are now busy preparing for elections to the new union committees so as to ensure a fully democratic structure of representation.

In Warsaw we visited the newly founded headquarters of the regional Solidarity organisation in the (Mazowsze) area. As in Gdansk the small rooms are crowded out with worker delegates clutching documents, exchanging news. The atmosphere is electrified by the magnitude of the decisions taken affecting the lives of many people.

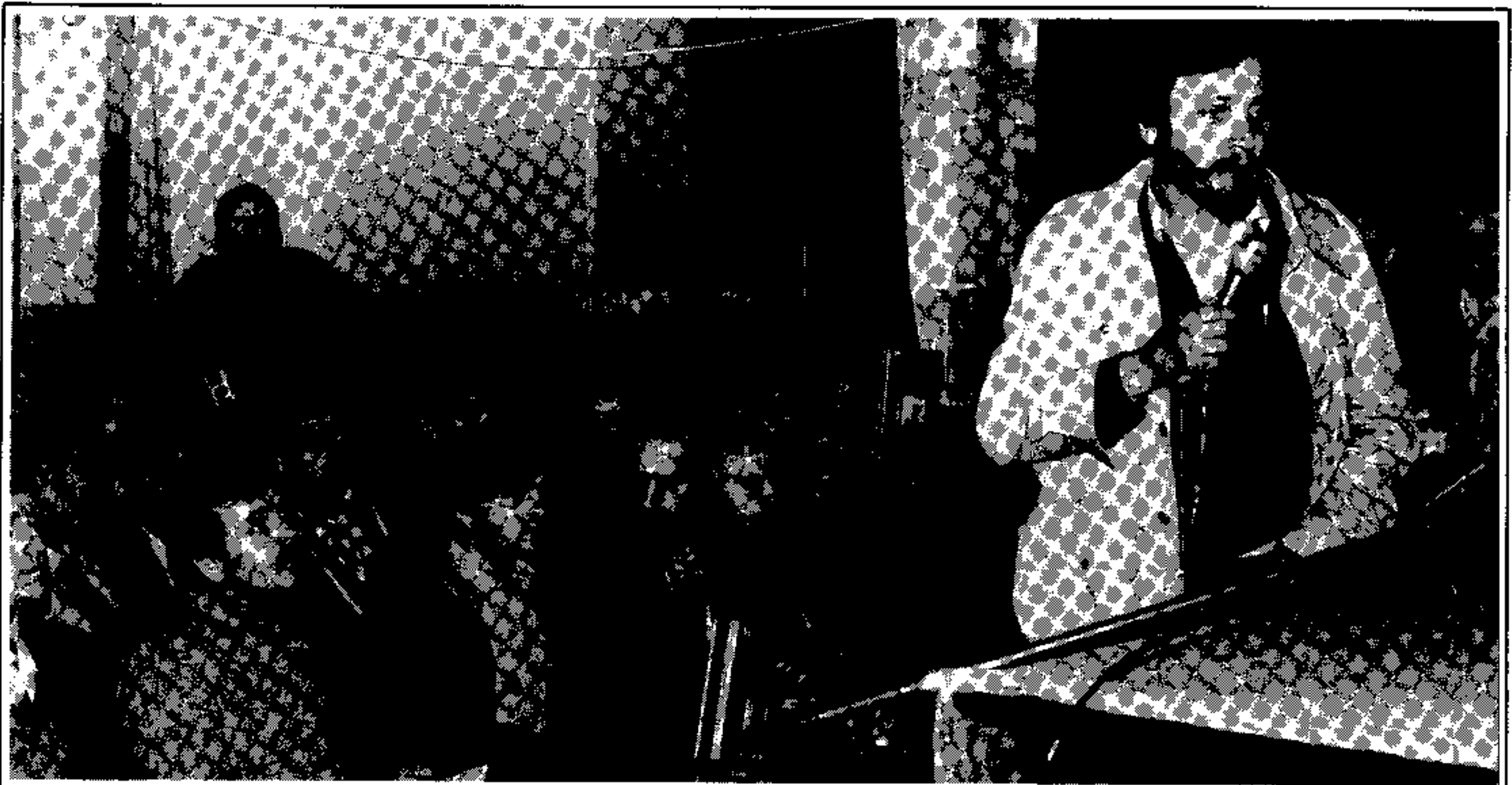
The praesidium of the Warsaw region of Solidarity formally greet our arrival. Each one a strike leader, these twenty young men now command authority to head and represent over 80,000 workers. Chairman of the all-powerful body is also the delegate from the Ursus engineering complex. Named Bujak, he describes how they built their city wide rank and file workers organisation.

The Ursus plant struck back in July and returned to work before Gdansk erupted. Yet during those staggering 17 days Bujak and a group of friends organised a small committee in the factory in solidarity with the Baltic strikers.

On the Monday morning they distributed 2,000 leaflets with details of the Lenin shipyard's 21 demands. The following day more bulletins were handed out inside the plant. Two mass meetings were held which passed resolutions in support of the Gdansk revolt. The formation of a solidarity committee was ratified.

Collections for the monument to be built in Gdansk raised £400 in one section alone - a massive donation if you take





**National delegate meeting of Solidarity in Gdansk.**

into account Polish workers' wages. Section meetings elected two or three delegates each to sit on the solidarity committee representing every division of the huge plant. A 100-strong body had emerged.

More meetings during the course of the Baltic revolt ensured workers were kept informed. And the solidarity initiative rapidly spread to other factories in the Warsaw region. Even small and badly organised workplaces struggled to make links with the Ursus plant. They included the giant Huta Warszawa steel plant.

The Gdansk settlement did not see the end of such organisation. In fact the impetus and spur to form committees that could be transformed into a new union organisation proved irresistible. And the Warsaw praesidium of Solidarity now links up a whole network of these factory committees into a regional body affiliated to the national union organisation.

Bujak pointed out:

'All our organisation is entirely new to us. It is run by people who have never organised a meeting or written a leaflet in their lives before. But we are learning fast.'

They are anxious as in Gdansk to build a union structure not vertically but across the shopfloor. 'We want as few full-time paid staff as soon as possible. We don't want to repeat the old bureaucratic union machine.' The entire 20-man Warsaw praesidium are to remain at the base in their respective workplaces.

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South of Poland's capital city lies the town of Katowice — centre of the country's steel production. Here we met the leaders of the

strike that engulfed the Huta Katowice steelworks — one of the largest in Europe. Andrzej Rozplochowski and Kazimierz Switon are chairman and secretary of the founding committees of Solidarity in the plant.

Building the union in this part of the world is painstakingly difficult. A collection of office space inside the steelworks has to act not only as a base for the Huta Katowice union committee but also as the centre of Solidarity's regional organisation.

They have managed to gain access to the management's printing facilities to produce a new union bulletin headed *Free Unionist*. This has advantages and disadvantages. The bulletin is of a superior quality to anywhere we visited. Yet there are dangers involved. Party bosses in the plant are using their influence to interfere with the bulletin's content. They even want to change its title, regarding it as too provocative.

For the time being at least the new union in the steel plant is able to print 40,000 copies of its bulletin, distributed in 121 other workplaces. They contain material on the need to drastically improve health and safety, to simplify the pay structure with one rate for everybody, to re-organise the steel industry to get rid of its heavy administration, and other articles on Solidarity itself.

The old trade union machine is doing its best to obstruct the Solidarity organisation. Individual workers have been intimidated from joining. Secret police agitators have been at work on the shopfloor, calling meetings, visiting workers at home, spreading false rumours and doubts. And one lad who spoke critically of the local Party secretary at a section meeting has been taken to court charged with slandering and dishonouring the Party's name. The independent union

has been forced to conduct a campaign for his defence with the use of lawyers obtained via Gdansk. In the meantime they have successfully managed to recruit 11,000 workers into Solidarity — over 60 per cent of the factory.

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Just north of the Czech border stretches the coal mining heartland of Silesia. The independent union MKZ committee is barracked in some municipal buildings in the town of Jastrzembie Zdroj. With 400,000 salt, sulphur and coal miners in the region they have tremendous power at their disposal. Already 91 pits have representatives on the MKZ body.

When we arrived in Jastrzembie an MKZ delegate meeting 700 pit and factory representatives was thrashing out last minute details for the national one hour 'warning' strike that recently shook Poland. This body now meets every Sunday to co-ordinate the new union movement which already has three million workers affiliated in the area.

An occupation of the July manifesto pit — where there were 2,000 Party members — spread across the mines in this part of Silesia after the Gdansk revolt had subsided. They were determined to ensure that wide-ranging concessions granted to the Baltic strikers would also apply in the South of Poland.

The Communist Party is universally identified with corruption here. The chairman of the regional praesidium Solidarity organisation, named Sienkiewicz, told us that the wealth accumulated by leading management members is an issue of real concern inside the pits. 'They are thieves who have robbed us.'



## How the march got its masses

When we first thought of getting the report together we saw it as a set of experiences which would encourage other comrades in and around the SWP to contribute to and gain from the new nuclear disarmament movement. In the event the massive turnout for the 26th October CND demonstration (with up to 100,000 people coming) has rendered some of this superfluous – almost *whatever* anyone did on the question bore fruit in great abundance. The tide is currently flowing so strongly that the crucial point is to participate in it.

The movement has developed some of its strongest roots in East Anglia, which originally seemed to be the likeliest site

for the Cruise missile bases. There are now anti-missile groups in virtually every town in the region, operating within the umbrella organisation East Anglia Against the Missiles and with the participation also of wider anti-nuclear groups such as the Anti-Nuclear Campaign. These groups have organised a regular flow of public meetings, film shows (e.g. *The War Game*), local demonstrations and regular letters in the press (now tending to concentrate on a debate on the value of 'civil defence').

The basis of active support has slowly widened from the 'traditional' base of middle class and church groups with very woolly political analysis. A general problem though has been to increase the number of activists prepared to help in the sheer grind of building and *maintaining* a grass roots movement. SWP initiatives have been significant in gaining trade union support from the beginning at an official level. This needs to be translated into active support at all levels (there were very few TU banners on 26th October).

It was the divisional council of ASTMS that sponsored the meeting to found East Anglia Against Missiles and similarly ASTMS 246 branch sponsored the founding meeting of Norwich v. Missiles. As far as youth goes, there has been a strong interest in the demos and in wearing CND and ANC badges. A number of local bands have been prepared to do some very successful benefit gigs.

The 'left' has been closely associated with the campaign – to the worry of some activists! There has been a high level of support against nuclear weapons by the local Labour and Communist parties. SWP locally remains the main

left wing group opposed both to nuclear power and weapons and has generally taken a much more openly political stance. The problem for the SWP is, as usual, the number of members needed to create a really solid impact alongside our work in other areas such as unemployment.

One thing that does emerge is that it has seemed to make no important difference to the ability to mobilise large numbers whether the local organisation is an anti-missile campaign, a European Nuclear Disarmament (END) group, the ANC or the CND. On the whole the best turnouts were possibly from non-CND groups (the East Anglian committees sent down 50 or 60 coaches, and even in a small town like Worcester the ANC sent down three), but the differences are not really significant. (Furthermore, CND's success in calling the 26th October demonstration is bound to be reflected in a big growth of local CND groups in the immediate future.)

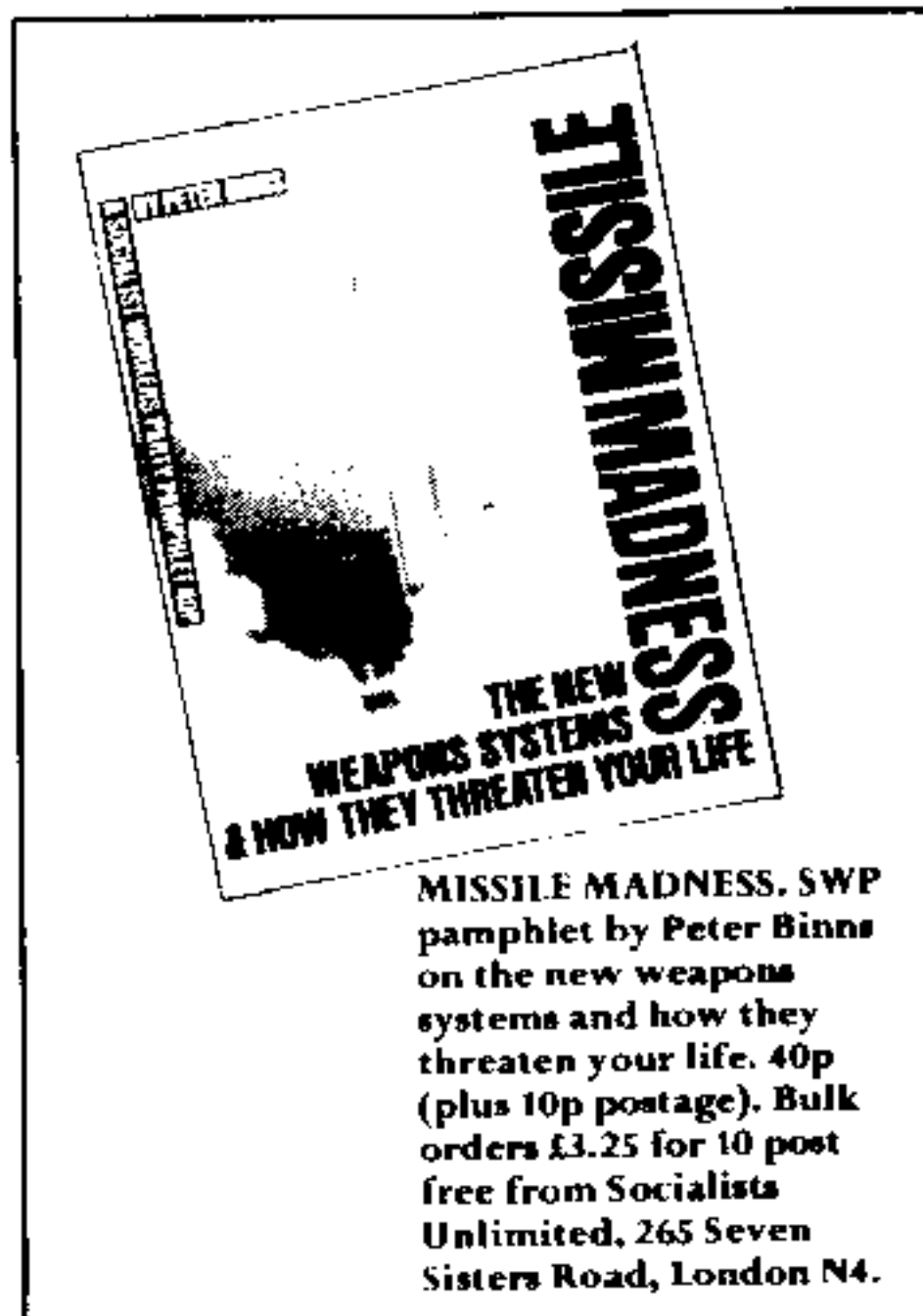
Manchester is another area where the campaign has developed fairly strongly; it sent down a train and about 15 coaches to the 26th October demonstration. Though here it has proved very uneven, with four of these 15 coaches coming from just one suburb – Chorlton. The Manchester campaign began with a massive meeting addressed by Edward Thompson; the hall was filled to its 750-seat capacity and there were still another 400 more unable to get in.

In Chorlton the campaign was pursued through approaching the people on the ANL contact list, and very soon the committee had around 200 members. Before the demonstration it distributed 20,000 leaflets on a door-by-door basis and organised street meetings, a small youth group and so on.

Manchester's unevenness is to be explained by several factors. In part it is due to the inactivity and bureaucratic manoeuvrings of Manchester Against the Missiles (MAN) the area's umbrella group (run, ironically, by an arch 'libertarian' *Beyond the Fragments* person), which has forced the local groups to ignore it or perish. In part also the left's involvement has largely been either non-existent or sporadic or not directed toward real activity (the IMG for example has concentrated on attempting to get affiliations from local ward Labour Parties).

In addition, there are of course huge problems in getting a foothold in the organised working class movement. At the Gardners occupation only about 20 people turned up to see *The War Game*, and as often as not the threat of unemployment undermines support for CND on the part of weapons producers like Hawker Siddeley, or UCATT workers whose daily bread might depend on building bases.

Oxford sent ten coaches to the demonstration (just for comparison to get the



same density of coaches per head of the population, that would be equivalent to over 100 coaches from a place like Manchester), and has helped organise important local demonstrations such as the one at the USAF Upper Heyford base. Again trade union contacts and work have been very weak there too. As is generally the case, there has been no lack of understanding in the movement of the connection between, for instance, the welfare cuts and the missiles, but the problem remains of connecting these general notions with immediate action.

The much smaller town of Leamington Spa sent four coaches (another five were sent by the University of Warwick) and has an active European Nuclear Disarmament group which has supplanted the earlier ANC and CND groups. Its weekly business meetings have brought in 50+ attenders, it has involved more than 70 people in distributing 25,000 leaflets to every house in the area, and it has had very well attended EP Thompson meetings and *The War Game* showings. The leaking of the Operation Square Leg secret briefing to the local committee gave a big filip to the campaign; but here as elsewhere there has been negligible organised working class involvement and very little attempt to connect the missiles with the other anti-working class features of the Tory government.

Only in Glasgow, so far as we are aware, has the SWP managed to make more of an impact. There the anti-missiles campaign has been taken up in regular factory bulletins in Yarrow, Talbot, Houghton, Wills, Hoover, etc, and SWP stewards have distributed a good number of leaflets within the factories. Four of the fifty or so meetings on the missiles that were set up by the SWP in the fortnight before the demonstration were held in Glasgow. At Glasgow's demonstration on 25th October, 6,000 people turned out, including a good 1,000 behind trade union banners — a vastly higher proportion than in London the next day. An extra 300 *Socialist Workers* were sold and one report talks of the new SWP pamphlet *Missile Madness* 'selling like hot cakes'.

As yet it is only possible to speculate and to draw fairly tentative conclusions. CND is holding a national conference in November and the likelihood is that another (possibly much bigger and more representative) will be held in April. A number of questions that remained unresolved during CND's last flowering in the 60s are bound to recur, the most obvious of these being direct action/civil disobedience and the Labour Party. But it is important to note what a small role they have both played until now.

In spite of the fact that nuclear disarmament dominated the Labour Party conference in September, there were comparatively few LP banners on the 26th and virtually no one selling *Tribune* and *Labour Weekly*, and even *Militant* was comparatively thin on the ground. In

the 60s the frustrations experienced through the Labour Party machine led to support for the Committee of 100 in its campaign of civil disobedience. Today those experiences are still mainly to be lived through by a new generation of activists.

The one thing that *has* changed dramatically since the 1960s is the big decline in strength of the CP. The SWP on the other hand is now 40 times as big as it was then.

The crucial task for the SWP will remain the fusing of the anti-missile campaign with the campaigns against the cuts, the Right to Work Campaign, the campaign against H block and so on. This will mean raising the issue of the bomb wherever it is possible in those campaigns. It will also mean raising those other campaigns within CND (the mass collection for Gardners by the Right to Work Campaign on the 26th October

demonstration was an excellent example of what can be done).

Within CND we must emerge as the strongest supporters of direct action and the most insistent on the *class* nature of the bomb and of the need to support *all* of Thatcher's victims. We are in a much better position to do this now than we were 17 years ago when CND was last active — it is now up to us to grasp these opportunities with both hands.

The movement has mobilised very large numbers already and it is very much up to us to make sure that they do not end up in the dead end of the Labour Party — or worse still, singing pacifist hymns at St Martin's in the Fields.

Compiled by Peter Binns with the assistance of Malcolm Atkin, Rip Buckley, Les Kay and Mike Gonzalez

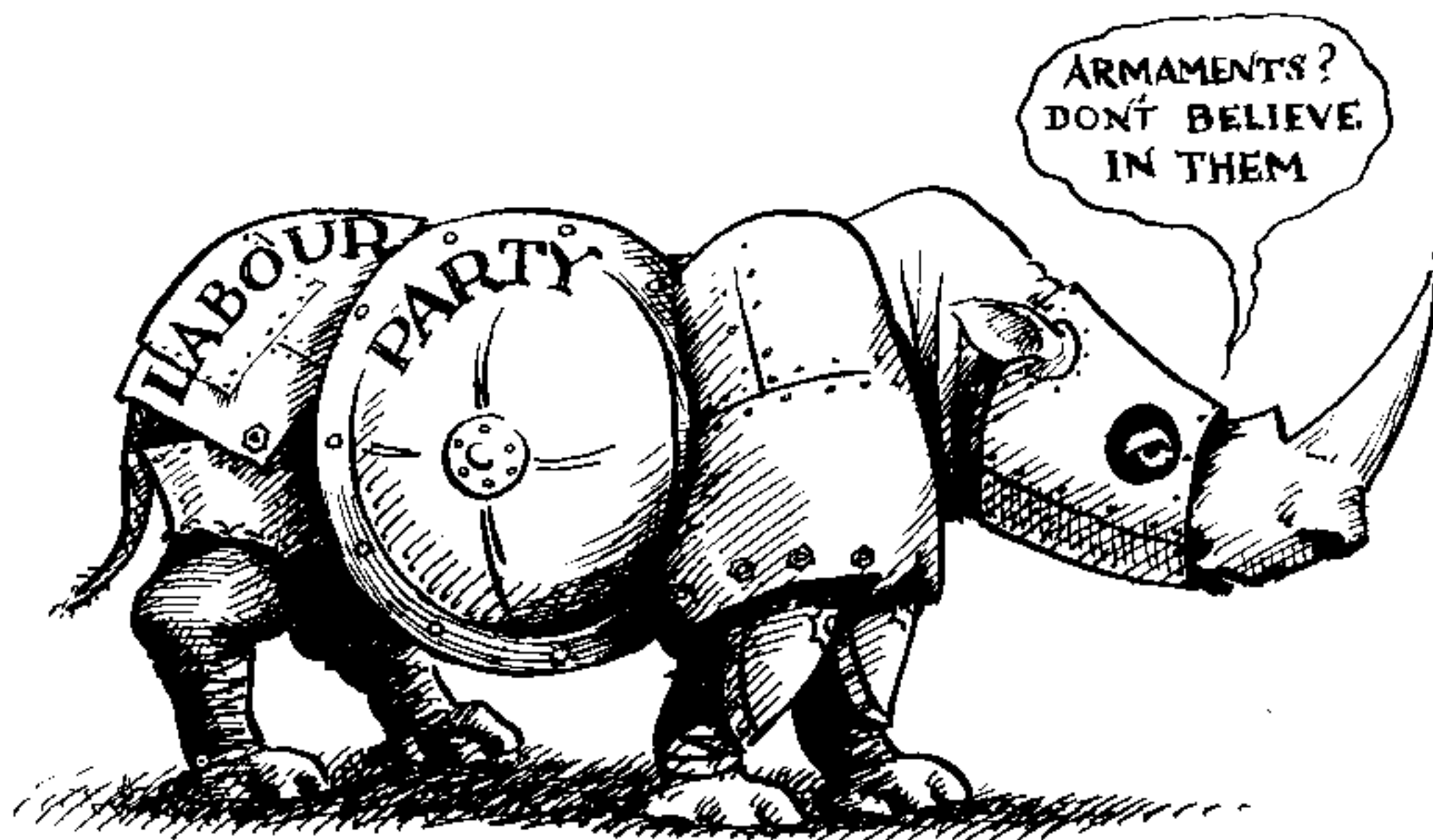


Illustration by Sophie Grillet

## Labour and the bomb

With a hundred thousand people on the streets to demonstrate against nuclear weapons, the Labour Party is anxious to get in on the act. Tony Benn spoke in Trafalgar Square, and gained some of the loudest applause of the day. Michael Foot, not to be upstaged, has announced that as prime minister he would return any Cruise or Pershing missiles based in Britain to the United States (*Guardian*, 27.10.80). (Impounding and dismantling them would have been a little too extreme even for an Aldermaston veteran like Foot.)

There are obviously good reasons why many people in the anti-Bomb movement are looking to the Labour Party. Initial involvement in CND may spring from a purely moral — and wholly legitimate — revulsion at the threat of the destruction of humanity. But protest cannot remain purely moral. Getting rid of the Bomb is a political problem, a question of power. The

Labour Party, a governmental political party likely to be catapulted back into office by Thatcher's ineptitude if not by its own merits, is clearly a more 'realistic' instrument for nuclear disarmament than any more ideologically pure political alternative. It is therefore necessary to take very seriously the arguments of those who see the future for CND as lying in closer and closer co-operation with the Labour Party. For if we cannot win the argument on this question, there is an all too great danger that the defeats of twenty years ago will be repeated.

Nuclear weapons are not a morally obscene blot on an otherwise healthy system. They are an integral part of the whole social order which oppresses us.

Nuclear weapons in Britain are a by-product of Britain's membership of NATO and of the British alliance to American imperialism. The massive expenditure on nuclear weapons has been a key determining factor in the

evolution of Western capitalist economies since World War II. The control systems inherent in the nature of nuclear weapons has reinforced the continuing tendency to ever more centralised state power. To take on the Bomb is to take on all these things. But the Labour Party – and especially the Labour left – is irrevocably wedded to parliamentary reformism and cannot take on these tasks. It is this that explains the contradictions that run through Labour policy on the Bomb.

Last month's Labour Party conference voted by an overwhelming show of hands for a 'commitment in the Labour Party manifesto to unilateral nuclear disarmament'; and conference also agreed to oppose British participation in any defence policy 'based on the use or threatened use of nuclear weapons'. So far so good.

But conference also – on the advice of the allegedly leftist NEC – declined (by a massive majority of 6,274,000 to 826,000) to support a motion calling for withdrawal from NATO. Conference also, by an almost two-to-one majority, rejected a motion opposing 'peaceful' uses of nuclear power. (*Tribune*, 10.10.80).

These contradictions have led to some contradictory logic-chopping on the part of some representatives of the left. Thus Benn told demonstrators in Trafalgar Square that 'any government needed to have a credible defence policy, but it did not have to be a nuclear one'. (*Guardian*, 27.10.80) And Chris Jones

of *Tribune* (24.10.80) informed his readers that 'if the resources we now put into nuclear weapons were diverted in conventional weapons, they could actually *strengthen* NATO on the ground in Central Europe, where the military planners are most worried by the Warsaw Pact's strength.'

Banning the Bomb, defending Britain and strengthening NATO – a contradictory enough set of objectives. When the chips are down and the question of political power is posed, Benn, Foot and the *Tribune* gang will have to decide which way to jump.

Writing in *Tribune*, veteran left MP Frank Allaun says (24.10.80):

'But *Tribune* readers must be warned: *the battle has not yet been won*. In 1960 the Labour Party conference similarly took this limited unilateral step. A year later, after intensive work by the Campaign for Democratic Socialism and Hugh Gaitskell, the decision was reversed. 'There will be a similar attempt before our next annual conference. *We must, at all costs, hold that line.*'

Allaun has learnt nothing and forgotten nothing. He is quite prepared to go through the whole shabby scenario again with nothing but a greater determination to win. But there are some real lessons to be learnt from the movement of the early sixties.

It was, of course, a Labour government, that of Clement Attlee in 1947 (which included Aneurin Bevan and Harold Wilson), that first decided to manu-

facture an independent British nuclear 'deterrent'. True to the undemocratic tradition that characterises nuclear politics, Attlee did not even inform all his Cabinet colleagues of the decision.

For a long time anti-nuclear protest was muted, trapped in the frozen polarities of the Cold War. It was only after the twin crisis of Suez and Hungary had begun to create space for a non-aligned movement that nuclear disarmament began to gain momentum. Initially the momentum came from outside the Labour Party. A group of intellectuals (Bertrand Russell, AJP Taylor, JB Priestley) found a base among a new generation of radicalised students, readers of such publications as *Universities* and *Left Review*.

It was only after Labour's third consecutive election defeat in the autumn of 1959 that the debate was taken centrally into the Labour Party. With over four years to go before another election, and considerable demoralisation at the grassroots, both left and right factions in the party could afford a showdown. Nuclear disarmament became just one of the weapons in that struggle. At Easter 1960 a hundred thousand people joined the CND march from Aldermaston to London. And in the autumn of the same year, the Labour Party conference at Scarborough voted for unilateral nuclear disarmament, to the shock, horror and indignation of the bourgeois press and the Gaitskellite party leadership.

In fact, the base of the victory was somewhat shallow. The constituency party votes had gone against unilateralism (521,000 against and only 260,000 for). The unilateralist victory was secured by the union block votes, especially those of the TGWU (now led, by an accident of mortality, by Frank Cousins after years of right-wing domination) and of the AEU (after a bizarre set of manoeuvres which had led, at the previous month's TUC, to the AEU voting both for and against unilateralism). The famous Scarborough victory was, in short, a product of two factors; firstly, the emergence of CND as a mass movement of youth and students outside the Labour Party; secondly, an anti-Gaitskell feud by trade union leaders during Labour's traditional post-electoral leftward lurch.

Having won the victory, the Labour left rested on its constitutional laurels. It did not fight effectively in the constituency parties, nor did it take the argument to the rank-and-file of the unilateralist unions. Indeed, the Campaign for Democratic Socialism, a body hurriedly set up by the pro-Gaitskellites to fight for a reversal of the 1960 decision, did more genuine grass-roots campaigning than the Labour left. The issue was further clouded by the so-called 'Crossman-Padley compromise' (devised by the man who became known as Dick Double-Crossman) which called for abandonment of the independent British deterrent but insisted on Britain's

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staying within a nuclear NATO (a rationalisation quite acceptable to American imperialism). Foot and Cousins backed the compromise in the interests of party 'unity'. As a result the unilateralist position was easily reversed at the following year's conference. (Just about the only voice in the movement to point out the fragility of the 1960 decision, and to call for a rank-and-file strategy as the only way of preserving victory, was the infinitesimal *Socialist Review* group.)

Other events now intervened. At the Labour Party conference in 1962 Gaitskell made an anti-Common Market speech which helped to reconcile him to the left. Then, early in 1963 he died suddenly and was replaced as Labour leader by Harold Wilson, a man who had never been a unilateralist, but retained links with the Labour left.

In the summer of 1963 the Profumo scandal revealed the decay of Toryism and made Labour electoral victory almost inevitable. The Labour MPs who had backed CND began to realise where their priorities lay. What was the destruction of all life on earth compared with the first Labour government for thirteen years?

The whole left collapsed into servile flattery of Wilson. Thus Aldermaston marcher Michael Foot could write that Wilson had:

'Other considerable qualities too for a Labour leader - a coherence of ideas, a readiness to follow unorthodox courses, a respect for democracy...above all a deep and genuine love of the Labour movement.

'We are told he is tricky, untrustworthy, an addict of political infighting. Of course he is canny, ambitious, often cautious, always cool, usually calculating. And why not?' (*Tribune*, 22.263)

Faced with the collapse of its lifeline to the Labour Party CND was left floundering. In late 1962 the CND executive issued a new policy draft called *Steps Towards Peace*, which effectively abandoned unilateralism altogether and stressed nuclear-free zones and more power to the United Nations. Yet such was the magnetic power of the Labour Party (plus the absence of real democratic structures in CND) that only a few people from the extreme left made any attempt at a fight against this new line. The Aldermaston March was suppressed in favour of a one-day stroll across London.

The radicalism that was left in CND was channelled into the direct action (non-violent sit-downs) organised by the Committee of 100. In itself this direct action was a useful break with the parliamentary cretinism of British politics. But without any real political framework it too was doomed to evaporate.

In the run-up to the election Wilson continued to promise that the British

'independent deterrent' would be abandoned by a Labour government, while stressing that this was fully in conformity with US wishes. But six weeks after taking power, Wilson visited US president Lyndon Johnson, and his line was now somewhat different.

'Wilson proposed an Atlantic Nuclear Force, which excluded the Germans and the French. The British contribution to the ANF, promised Wilson, would be the V-bomber fleet and the full complement of Polaris submarines, whose building would go ahead as planned. Thus the promised 'renegotiation' of the Nassau agreement turned out to be a proposal to remove 'the German finger from the nuclear trigger', and the explicit promise that Britain should stop making her own nuclear weapons was clearly broken by the decision to continue with the building of the British Polaris.' (P. Foot, *The Politics of Harold Wilson*, Penguin, 1968, p.212)

True, Wilson did appoint a minister

of disarmament (Lord Chalfont). He also appointed a minister of defence (Denis Healey) who cut defence expenditure from 7 per cent of GNP to 6.3 per cent. But that was still the highest figure of any Western European country, and Healey's cuts were achieved by rationalisation of expenditure, not by any effective disarmament.

So a mass movement of enormous potential was squandered because there was no alternative to tailing the Labour Party. Twenty years on it is no surprise that a Labour Party, starved of rank-and-file activists, is casting envious eyes on the hundred thousand CND marchers. *Tribune* headlines 'Common Market and nuclear disarmament could be Labour's election winner.' (10.10.80)

But we must not let history repeat itself. There are two roads for CND - to sink into the Labour Party swamp, or to link up with the struggle for the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. The clear lesson of 1960-64 is that only the latter is a 'realistic' course.

Ian Birchall

## IRELAND

# Don't let them die!

The Tory cabinet's decision to allow all prisoners in the North of Ireland to wear civilian clothes represents a victory for only one of the demands to the Republican prisoners in the 'H' Blocks of Long Kesh. That they have decided to go ahead with their hunger strike is a clear indication of their determination to win their remaining four demands as well.

The concession on prison uniform is the first step towards the admission by the British government that the prisoners in the North of Ireland are political. It was made in a clear attempt to strike the first blow in the propaganda war that surrounds the prisoners' decision to embark on the desperate campaign of the hunger strike. As the *Guardian* (24th October) puts it: 'The government was influenced by the fact that the hunger strike could be put to damaging propaganda use by the IRA.'

In 1976, when the Labour government abolished political status in an attempt to criminalise those convicted of offences arising out of the struggle in the North, Republican prisoners refused to wear prison uniforms and began their 'blanket' protest. They sat in their cells in the newly constructed 'H' Blocks in Long Kesh wrapped only in a blanket. This protest was stepped up to include a refusal to slop out their cells in the face of continued harassment and ill treatment from the warders and the failure of the original protest to get a response from the outside world.

In the past two years the wall of silence on the 'H' Blocks has eventually been broken and the prisoners' protest has become an internationally debated issue. It was the British government's refusal to make any real concessions in

the face of this world-wide concern that led the prisoners to decide to begin the hunger strike on October 27th.

The government wants to prevent the glare of the media's spotlights focusing on the North of Ireland at the moment. Its current strategy for repression of the Republican movement is becoming more selective and more deadly. The decision to increase the numbers of Special Air Services soldiers in the North coincides with publicity being given to their policy of assassination of known Republicans. The murders of Noel Little and Ronnie Bunting, two prominent Irish Republican Socialist Party members who were active on the National 'H' Block Committee, were almost certainly the work of the SAS. The subsequent raid on a meeting of the Relatives Action Committee was also the work of the SAS, but was carried out so hamfistedly that it led to questions being asked about the earlier and more deadly attack.

It is clear that the Tories have taken a decision to pursue the tactic of individual terrorism in an attempt to bring the Republican movement to heel where more conventional forms of repression have failed. If the undercover operations are to succeed then Ireland has to be kept off the front pages. The world-wide attention of a hunger strike might begin to focus on the activities of the SAS.

For some years now British propaganda about the 'H' Block campaign tried to convince the outside world, and particularly the British people, that these prisoners were heartless murderers who had been convicted as such and deserved the sympathy of no one. The Labour Northern Ireland Secretary, Roy Mason, rather crudely hoped that if he repeated

this lie often enough then people would believe it. He regularly added another lie to it, namely that the Provisionals were being defeated and that they had no support at all from the Catholic community. It was this second lie that exploded in his face first. As mentioned in the last issue of *Socialist Review*, a secret army document testified to the continued effectiveness of the Provos military campaign and to the measure of support they maintained in the Catholic areas. The Provisionals themselves confirmed this assessment by the ambush and killing of 18 paratroopers at Warrenpoint and the assassination of Lord Mountbatten in August 1979.

Mason's other lie has taken a lot longer to expose, but the Tories have become convinced that they cannot continue to give utterance to it with the same bravado that was Mason's hallmark. Many people are now becoming aware that Republican prisoners have not been properly convicted of any crime and that many of them have been imprisoned as the result of 'confessions' extracted under torture. Of course, this knowledge is not new to the relatives of the prisoners or to anyone who has followed events in the North closely over the past two years, but it is now being accepted also within the sections of the British media. The most recent example of this acceptance is the publication of the ironically named *Beating the Terrorists?* by Peter Taylor (Penguin books, £1.50), who works for BBC's Panorama programme. The book itself is an admirable account of methods of interrogation at Castlereagh and Gough barracks and of how the British government turned a blind eye to torture. Taylor shows that despite concern from prominent members of the Northern Ireland establishment, including Barry Shaw, the director of public prosecutions, both Roy Mason and Sir Kenneth Newman, the then chief constable, chose to cover up for the security forces. The knowledge went even higher; the prime minister, Jim Callaghan, was warned in a confidential memo from the attorney general, Sam Silkin, that there was medical evidence of assaults on prisoners. Callaghan, of course, had other considerations on his mind, and was aided by the long-time hero of the Labour left, Michael Foot, as he tried to cement an alliance with the Ulster Unionists in parliament in order to keep his administration alive. The last thing he wanted was to embarrass his potential Unionist allies.

Taylor is also clear why the torture took place. After the withdrawal of Special Category Status and the introduction of the Diplock no-jury courts there was pressure on the RUC, particularly its detectives, to secure rapid convictions so that the new system of 'justice' could be seen to work. The RUC's political overlords were content to let them get on with producing victims for the conveyor belt, by whatever means.

What is significant about Taylor's book is the way in which it is being

received in some parts of the British media. The *Guardian*, whose liberal stance on the North was abandoned as soon as the first bullet was fired, carried a lengthy review by its former Northern Ireland correspondent, Anne McHardy. The review is detailed and sympathetic and concludes with the following two paragraphs:

'The publication of his book now, when a hunger strike in the Maze prison at Long Kesh is being threatened by Republican prisoners, will undoubtedly embarrass the present Northern Ireland secretary, Mr Humphrey Atkins, even though the number of cases of ill-treatment is now apparently shrinking.

'The book raises the same question that the prisoners raise in making their demand for political status inside the Maze. The system of justice under which they were convicted is an emergency not an ordinary one and the only substantial evidence against many of them was a confession obtained at Castlereagh or Gough.'

It is the job of socialists in this country to build a mass campaign of support for the demands of the hunger strikers that will put enough pressure on the government to make it concede on all issues. We have got very little time on our hands. If the Tories refuse to budge the first coffins could be coming out of Long Kesh around Christmas. And the

Tories will be hard to budge; Humphrey Atkin, the Northern Ireland secretary, has already made it clear that he is prepared to see the prisoners die rather than back down on any of the four remaining demands.

The demands themselves do not seem to merit this intransigence since they are hardly revolutionary:

1. *The right to refrain from prison work.*
2. *The right to free association with other political prisoners.*
3. *The right to organise their own educational and recreational facilities and to receive one visit, one letter, one parcel a week.*
4. *The right to full remission of sentence.*

In an attempt to maximise support for these demands and to stop the prisoners from dying an Ad Hoc committee open to all interested groups has been set up on the theme 'Don't Let the Prisoners Die.' Details of the campaign's activities are appearing in *Socialist Worker* every week; look out for them and try to win as much support for them as you can. It is particularly important to raise this issue in workplaces and trade unions. Charter 80 has already got significant support from trade union and Labour leaders, we must seek to transform this support into a movement that will force the government to concede.

Shaun Docherty

## LETTERS

### Confusions confounded

Phil Webster (*Letters SR 1980:8*) detected some confusion about the class position of white collar workers. The trouble is that instead of clearing up the confusion his letter confounded it mightily.

When will he, and so many others on the left, get it straight that the whole concept of middle class is a non-issue, a diversion from the real struggle for socialism? The term may be useful to sociologists and the like as a means of classifying people according to their occupations, pay, attitudes, etc., but as a category for defining people's class (i.e. economic) role in capitalism it is worse than useless.

What counts is not how others classify us, nor indeed how we see ourselves (as working class, middle class, 'new' middle class, etc.) but the relationships in which we stand to the means of production as miners, nurses and clerks. They own none of them. Therefore people in all these jobs are members of the same economic class, the working class, all equally dependent on a wage or salary for a living and all possessing nothing to speak of but their labour power (not their 'labour' incidentally as Phil Webster wrongly stated) which they are forced to offer for sale to an employer. In addition they all have, no matter how they may see it, a common class interest in abolishing the minority ownership of

wealth (capitalism) and establishing a classless society of common ownership (socialism).

Nor does the unfortunate fact that so few of them see things this way change the reality of their situation. All it does is to indicate the depressingly low level of political understanding among the working class and point to the need for clear-headed socialists to help them to raise it by demolishing once and for all the long-standing myth of the 'middle class'.

Yours for socialism

H. Moss

Swansea

### Prevent contamination?

Harman's analysis of Thompson's argument (*SR 1980:9*) could hardly have been more superficial. In this Harman attempts to show that Thompson is wrong to hold that the 'exterminist' stage of the arms race cannot be reduced to a linear class analysis, that it can be explained adequately by reference to world imperialism, and that Thompson ignores the relation of economic crises to the present 'cold war' conjuncture. These arguments, however, are essentially restatements of the SWP's own doctrinal positions — and they have the debilitating effect of evacuating the argument of any serious substance. Of course Thompson

does not see his argument as 'right outside the perspectives of classical Marxism' but he does see, with genuine urgency, that *present* Marxist theorists have not provided a 'cogent theoretical and class analysis of the present war crisis'. (NLR 121 p 3) The SWP has not, in real contrast, provided a cogent analysis of this phenomenon, nor is it a 'social force' which could now or in the conceivable future even begin to 'dismantle the missiles'.

Moreover Harman's description of the development of the Bolshevik party is confused and inappropriate. During February 1917 the Bolshevik party was, in certain respects, moderate, and distrustful of the large scale workers' strikes then taking place. Many Bolsheviks distrusted the notion of soviets, and the leaders thought it prudent not to hand out weapons — or even leaflets — to the striking workers. Evidences of conflict and moderation are widespread. On April 8 the Petrograd Committee rejected Lenin's April Theses by 13 votes to two, and the massive influx of members from April to August (membership increased by a factor of 20) led Trotsky to declare that Lenin's party had become 'de-bolshevized' (Deutscher, *Prophet Armed* p 258). The facts are that throughout 1917 the Bolshevik party was neither monolithic nor capable of operating in a monolithic fashion. Harman's description of the arrival of the 'organisational form' of the party is completely distorted, and the facts do not support his claim that real 'social forces' necessarily need monolithic, disciplined or centralist parties to bring them about.

Harman's article, riddled as it is with similar confusions, contortions and collapsed arguments, — does nothing to further debate. Its purpose is to prevent contamination of any of the SWP's own closely guarded revisionist doctrines. Any socialist party which displays such stifling doctrinal orthodoxy cannot truly claim the heritage of Marxism (although it might remain a splinter within it). Such immobilism is self-defeating.

Vern Martel  
Hull

## No precedent

I wonder if you would care to publish the views of a CND activist on your piece *Marxism and the Missiles* (SR 1980:9).

(1) You're right that the disagreement between Thompson and you is a matter not of how we analyse the arms race, but of how we combat it. As Thompson says in his *New Left Review* piece, 'the end of politics is to act — and with effect'. Since our action simply has got to be effective, I believe everyone in the disarmament movement should welcome political discussion of the kind your article exemplified. Equally, I believe that the sectarianism which has afflicted the left must not here transform important differences of emphasis into ideological barriers which inhibit common action.

(2) Many of those now active in CND are

fully aware that we will not win our aims unless we can enlist the active cooperation of the labour movement, both organised and rank and file. Resolutions to CND annual conference demonstrate this awareness.

On the other hand, a practical point: we in Brighton (for instance) have publicised our activities through the trades council and through its bulletin, which has quite a wide circulation. We have notified every ward of the two Brighton CLPs. Not one TU activist has attended any of our meetings. If the vital juncture has not yet been effected between the disarmament movement and the organised working class, that is not a simple matter of CND's political naivety.

(3) Of course you're right to insist that the nuclear arsenals don't exist in a vacuum — that they are 'integral to the society in which we live'. But I must disagree with the inference which you seem to draw — namely, that opposition to the missiles can only succeed if it is based on an explicit revolutionary politics which opposes the capitalist state *per se*, and which is organised by a latter-day Bolshevik Party. Indeed I believe that were the nuclear disarmament campaign to become dominated by such a party, that would be a guarantee of failure, for the simple reason that the mass movement we need will never be built around policies, however correct, which enjoy at the moment such negligible support among the British people. And there really is not time anymore for us to work at instilling that long-awaited 'revolutionary consciousness'.

But (and here I hope we can agree again), might not the issue of nuclear weapons be the very issue through which such a consciousness might be generated — not indeed by the party and its militants, but by the nature and ramifications of the issue itself?

Theory, and party organisation based upon theory, certainly played a crucial role in the Bolshevik revolution. But there was a further factor (as with the French Revolution): *people were starving*. It can well be argued that only extremity of suffering or threat will awaken mass struggle against the state and the ruling class, with all the risks and dangers that this involves. The peril of nuclear annihilation is such a threat; the psychological toll which it exacts is such suffering. And there are signs that a mass movement, with tens of thousands of activists, will shortly exist to oppose the policies which have brought us all under such threat.

A movement which begins with a single aim of disarming the military of their most genocidal equipment will soon find that it is being resisted by the apparatus of the state. In this sense, it is bound to become a politically conscious movement, or else give up the fight. And the kind of people who are coming by scores to CND meetings, and involving themselves in a range of activity, are not going to give up. They are going to find forms of action, and political principles, which allow them to intensify their struggle *and* continue to work together. Not only is it unlikely that

these forms and principles will be those of the 'disciplined revolutionary party' of Russia in 1917; it is also, in my view, wrong in principle for 'the Left' to make their pre-emptive strike, and say 'either the policies will be these, or they will fail'.

Whether we can find the strategies we need remains to be seen. The active participation of the left, with its sense of history and of the class basis of our society, will be a factor in any success. But if the mass movement we need does build itself, and especially if it attains an international dimension, I believe that we on the left will be in the presence of something *new* — something whose growth and activity will not follow the exigencies of any brand of theory, or of theory in general. The movement will be responding to a reality which it will at the same time be changing. Changed circumstances and changed human activity will go together.


This doesn't mean we don't need to think about theory and strategy. If I'm right, we need to think about them as much as ever. But while we must continue to bear in mind the lessons which history has to teach, we must be more attentive than we have perhaps always been to the particularities of today. There is no precedent for the end of the world; no precedent, then, for a movement which is striving to avert it.

Martin H Ryle  
Brighton

## Sorry!

It's nit-picking, I know, but Jacqueline Mulhallen in her attack on Roland Muldoon (Letters, SR 1980:9) confuses the meaning of the word archetype. It doesn't mean original in the sense that she has it, but original in the sense of having started a tradition — a prototype. In this sense Muggins can be an archetype *and* a stereotype in a non-historical sense. It would have made her letter about 150 words shorter. Sorry!

Nigel Pollitt  
North West London



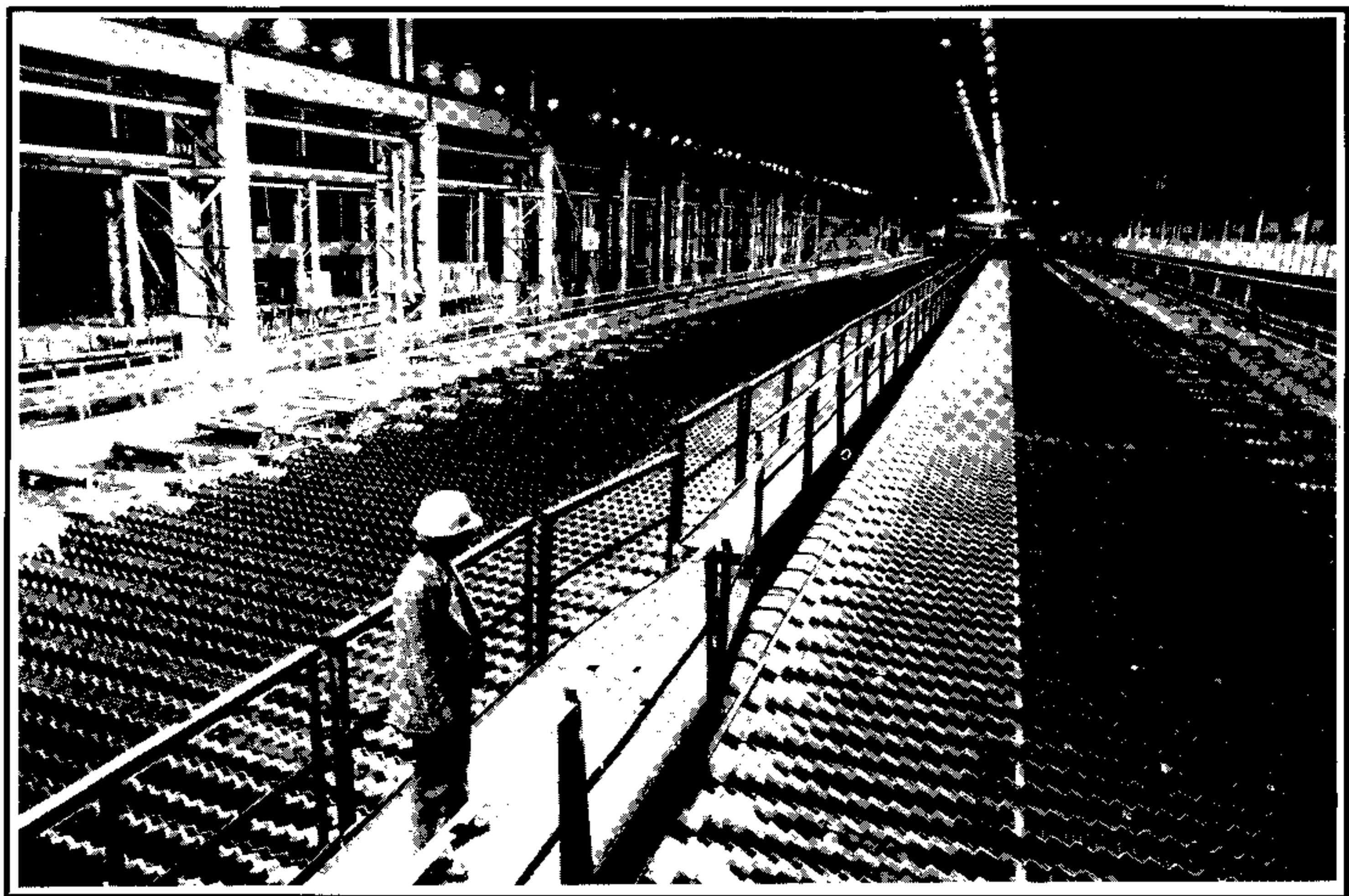
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## From the old pack

Alternative economic strategies are the vogue these days in official union circles. The main steel union, the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation (ISTC) has produced a book, *The New Deal for Steel*, which proposes an alternative strategy to cut prices, halt closures, make profits and grow. At a time of mass lay offs in the steel industry, and with Ian MacGregor secretly preparing the next onslaught on closures and jobs, any proposals to halt the decline in the industry from the largest steel union deserve to be examined.

The book has been written without drawing on the immense experience of the recent steel strike. The spirit, determination and organisation of the rank and file steelworkers gave power to the strike and prevented a worse outcome. Any discussion of the way forward should start by recognising that power. In contrast *The New Deal* says, 'We do not wish to dwell on the 13 weeks national steel strike, except to say that it was unnecessary.'

Even though the comment on the strike is confined to two short paragraphs the fact cannot be concealed that our union leaders were busy selling us out from the beginning:

'During the early stages of the strike ISTC and the NUB twice offered to resume negotiations on the basis of improved offers which they invited the British Steel Corporation to make. Both times BSC ignored the life-line offer, prolonging the strike.

Yet the final settlement was considerably more than the money the unions had suggested be the basis for renegotiation.'

The book is, however, full of useful information, whatever its ultimate conclusions. The two central arguments of the Corporation are that labour productivity is too low (and therefore there must be job streamlining and wage moderation) and that there is unacceptable over-capacity (and therefore there must be closures). *The New Deal* very effectively destroys these myths.

The Steel Corporation claims that workers' productivity is 141 tonnes per man each year in Britain, compared to 237 in Germany. But British figures include tube making and cold rolling, research, apprentices, catering, health and safety facilities, the cutting, packing and despatch of steel, and certain maintenance activities. None of these are included in the continental figures. Thus, comparing like with like, the ISTC Research Department estimates the tonnes produced per man-year as 192 in BSC and 200 in Germany.

If you look at wages paid out to steelworkers, you see even more clearly that labour costs could never have caused the crisis in BSC. In 1978 the average labour costs for one BSC worker was £5,000 compared with £10,500 in Germany. The more honest productivity figures show that labour costs amounted to only £30.72 per tonne for BSC steel, compared with £52.50 in Germany.

What about the Corporation's claim that closures are inevitable because of overcapacity? In 1978, in the middle of the recession, the BSC utilised 81 per cent of its capacity. Another 19 per cent of steel could have been produced with existing plant. But the utilisation rate was only 60 per cent in Germany, 70 per cent in France and Italy and a mere 46 per cent in the British private sector.

*The New Deal* includes a secret BSC policy document outlining their plans for a return to 'viability' which includes an admission by the Corporation itself that it has an 'abortive expenditure list' of £353m. This is money spent on building plant which will never function.

All the European steel industry is in crisis; but BSC with its lower labour costs and less idle plant is pushing ahead with the most savage job-cutting and closure programme, using totally phoney arguments to justify itself.

Having dispelled BSC's central arguments you might think you were well on the way to formulating an alternative strategy based on no job losses, no closures and no wage moderation. But sadly and predictably this is not the way of the ISTC.

At the heart of the ISTC analysis is a complete acceptance of the capitalist principles of profit and competition. If BSC is suffering losses, then it must be suffering from unfair competition. The solution is solely in terms of making BSC more competitive than foreign steel producers. Therefore the first point in



the alternative strategy is to call for a 10 per cent cut in prices to improve competitiveness, since the strong pound has forced British prices 10 per cent above European prices.

*The New Deal* proposes a whole list of ways in which £500m a year could be found to fund the 10 per cent cut. It argues for at least half the £1904m debts to be written off (a £100m saving each year), for the level of the 'anti-strike' stocks to be reduced (a saving of £81m), and for other operational and financial changes. In passing, it is interesting to see that the ISTC proposal to cut overtime is put down as a saving for BSC -- in other words, the people left would work harder! A reduction of overtime to force new jobs for people on the dole should cost the BSC money, not save it.

Another proposal is government subsidies. European steel producers received many indirect subsidies, such as government subsidies to the coal, rail and electricity industries, as well as lower interest rates for their capital expenditure. *The New Deal* points out that if BSC received the same subsidies as its rivals, then it would be £510m a year better off.

Many of the points are quite reasonable, but they amount to a massive state intervention in steel if the effects of the crisis are to be taken off the shoulders of the workforce. Such a change means direct confrontation with the Tories, and there is no guide in *The New Deal* on how such a struggle can be waged.

*The New Deal* does show how the closure programme only takes us a downward spiral. It is estimated that the closure programme only takes us a due to loss of tax revenue and additional welfare payments, while only making a net saving for the government owned BSC and other nationalised industries of £232m.

If ISTC has been sitting on all these fine bits of information, you begin to become very angry when you read the 'death list' of closures since 1968. The ISTC has presided over 360 separate closures (from departments up to large plants) in 12 years of nationalisation, and still there is no fight back!

The tragedy of *The New Deal* is that the alternative strategy becomes little more than an appeal to management to adopt a more aggressive commercial policy, export more steel, improve the quality of steel and give more flexibility and customer choice. It runs away from the conclusions that are trying to jump out of the tables and figures. It runs away from a fight back.

The 'alternative strategy' is totally irrelevant to steelworkers. The BSC has pushed through short-time working, which has meant steelworkers giving up the much valued guaranteed working week agreement. This was done by splitting up the workforce and causing con-

fusion. With joint union shop stewards committees in each plant the guaranteed week may have been defended, as the dockers defended five days work or five days pay.

Perhaps the worst problem for steelworkers is feeling that closures and job losses are inevitable. *The New Deal for Steel* in itself will never be able to stop the rot. It is things like the occupation at Gardners in Manchester which show the way forward.

We do need an alternative strategy, but one based on occupations to stop closures, on blacking orders from threatened plants, on refusing to sell jobs by productivity deals, on pushing for a wage increase to keep up with inflation (£25 across the board), on no hiving off of BSC into private hands, as well as on building shop floor organisation in every plant and forcing democratic reform of the union.

Joe Herbertson

## Blood on the Street

In a still topical pamphlet produced by Fleet Street SWP\* earlier this year we described the issue at stake after eleven month *Times* lock-out in the following terms:

"Control over who operates the new technology is part of, but secondary to the central question of control over manning. If you lose the strategic battle over manning control then you are immeasurably weakened in the subsequent tactical battle over who operates what."

At the time our contention that the main unions involved in the lock-out had made damaging concessions on manning was unpopular among fellow Fleet Street militants. Certainly we were over-pessimistic about the ability of the NATSOPA Clerical chapels (local union sub-sections) to secure all the jobs of their members while substantially improving wages and conditions. By any standards a blow to management attempts to subjugate nearly the third of its 4,000 odd employees in this area was struck in the months after the November 1979 return to work. The same cannot be said about the conduct of the NGA chapels in the composing room and machine room, the SOGAT chapels in the publishing area and, most definitely, the NATSOPA machine chapel.

There are problems with assessing what has happened to manning in these areas. Fleet Street's 'job selling' deals of recent years have been murky, by definition. We only know what is going on in the Clerical Chapels, for instance, because militants in the NATSOPA Clerical Branch have successfully campaigned for a union policy of fixing minimum manning levels and an end to all job-loss. In November 1979 non-clerical union leaders did not contradict *The Times* management when it crowed about a deal with the NGA compositors for a 45% cut in manning and with the NATSOPA machinemen for the sale of over 60 jobs. The *Observer* obituary on *The Times* (26.10.80) could refer knowingly to the "robust and successful deals with the distribution union, SOGAT" which have taken place this year.

The consequences of job selling for inter-union solidarity against the management have been most clear in the machine room. Here there has been stoppage after stoppage by the *Sunday Times*' now under-manned NATSOPA machine assistants. But they have not been about the appalling health and safety problems as tired men do not have time to clean the place. Instead the chapel leaders of these unskilled men have tried to cover-up for such results of job selling by extraordinary displays of



Illustration by Ray Lowry

Well gentlemen, we've called this meeting to discuss the gross overmanning on the printing side of the newspaper."

## INDUSTRIAL DISCUSSION SECTION

sectionalism towards the skilled (and admittedly often craftist) NGA machine managers.

This has reflected a national 'poaching' squabble between NATSOPA and the NGA in the pages of the unions' journals. Both sets of national union leaders have been desperate to squirm out of what now looms at *The Times* — an all out confrontation over jobs — by alleging that the other union is in collusion with management.

At the *Sunday Times* the NATSOPA machine leaders continually harp on about the management failing to pay the machine assistants 87½% of the NGA machine managers' rates — a custom and practice within the industry. NGA men allege that the cause of the stoppage which provoked last month's closure announcement was the NATSOPA steward 'insulting' NGA managers by 'jokingly' pinning up a notice calling for assistants to volunteer to do managers' jobs.

Fortunately inter-union relations outside of the machine room have recently been much healthier. Management attempts to force the NGA compositors to give up their monopoly of 'keying-in' (typesetting) all copy has been thwarted: the NATSOPA Clerical Chapels and the journalists NUJ Chapels have refused to scab on the NGA. The management were forced in early October to stop trying to buy out compositors with early retirement deals and agreed to maintain the remaining 149 compositing jobs on a new guaranteed flat rate of £227.50. Previously the exact manning level had been hazy and the men tried to chase after wages approaching £300 through doing piece work. It is unclear whether or not their agreement to accept compensation varying from £4,000 to £19,000 for the drop in average earnings relates to the previous disappearance of jobs. The main point remains that the management have failed in one of their central objectives — to dispense with compositing as a specialised job altogether.

This management failure in the composing room came shortly after the humiliation of being defeated by the one group of employees that it would normally have regarded as its lapdog, the journalists. Links were built between the NUJ and the other unions on the lock-out shop stewards' committee, and so journalists were confident of their support when they struck in August for the first time in *The Times'* 195 years for a 21½ wage demand. The fact that they won was a severe blow to a management faced with a queue of 62 other negotiating units in the annual wage round.

The problem now at *The Times* is that the unions, both locally and nationally, are muscle-bound by the relative success of their wage militancy. It is taking all chapels considerable time to adjust to the fact that this time round they are not dealing with a temporary lock-out.

Thomson's definitely intend to sell the

papers, and whoever buys will only do so if they are confident that they can reduce union power. The most likely way is to wait until March, allow the Thomson Organisation to bear the burden of paying the redundancy money (only £50 million, it is said!) and then to employ new labour. If you think that unlikely you should read about how American managements achieved just that in our pamphlet, *Associated Newspapers*, hot tipped as prospective buyers of the *Sunday Times*, have proved their ability to dispense with 1,800 Evening News jobs without a whimper of resistance from the seven unions involved.

What was said of the November 1978 lock-out is now proving true two long years later: "The battle for Fleet Street" is on.

There are rank and file leaders at *The Times* and *Sunday Times* of a calibre that was lacking at the *Evening News*. Now is the time for them to compensate for their failure to encourage *News* members to make a stand. They have to show the way themselves.

It is no use sitting it out until March. That is what the prospective buyer wants. The only way to prepare for the coming confrontation is a joint declaration from the reconvened liaison committee of shop stewards making clear the chapels' intent to secure all jobs irrespective of the employer and, if necessary, without one.

**Jim Richards**

\* Jobs under attack — 50p each, 10 for £8, from Box S, 265 Seven Sisters Road, London N55.

## St Ben's balance sheet

In October 1979 Wandsworth Sutton & Merton Area Health Authority (AHA) announced £6,000,000 worth of cuts to fall in line with the Tory government's cash limits. The cuts included the closing of six hospitals, one convalescent home and many other reductions in service in the remaining hospitals.

To date (October 1980) most of these cuts have been achieved, four hospitals (Putney, Cumberland, St George's HPC and St Benedict's) have been shut, one convalescent home and various other smaller cutbacks went by on the nod. One other hospital (Wimbledon) is due to close in the near future, and the one remaining (Henderson) has been given a two year reprieve.

It has just been announced that the AHA is still way overspent, so who knows what the future holds.

When the cuts were first announced there was uproar in the hospitals in the area, one meeting of over 100 shop stewards promised to fight the closures to the finish. But here the role of the full-time officials started to shine through. When everyone was looking to them to take some positive action they did nothing, they were going to take strictly a back seat. They either did not know how to or would not give occupations any teeth. They never co-ordinated any action between the threatened hospitals or organised any meetings in the large general hospitals to gain support. Faced with such leadership any organised fightback soon evaporated, most people lost touch with what was happening and it became more and more difficult to organise district shop stewards' meetings. Fisher and Co made many fine speeches about St Ben's and the cuts, but in reality they did nothing.

In October 1979 there was only one SWP hospital worker in the area and no rank and file group. *Hospital Worker* nationally was not in very good shape

either and this added to the problems. The main priority of the SWP was to build a rank and file group and gain the confidence of the hospital workers taking action, and this took months. There were many problems, the main one being how does one SWP hospital worker become more. It was one great effort for me to get off my rear and start producing hospital worker bulletins. When this was done and distributed people started to come out of the woodwork. To date now there are more than 20 people close contacts and many more interested (the *Hospital Worker* order has gone from 50 to 125). The only good thing to come out of the closing of St Ben's is that no one lost their job. We now have 100 experienced fighters spread throughout the district.

The hospital was occupied on 15 November 1979, this date was chosen because management had said they would start moving patients and equipment any time after this day. An inter-union committee was set up, and many previously unorganised workers joined a union to get in on the fight. Because of the lack of leadership from the unions the occupation quickly became weakened when it was decided not to throw management out. This was to have serious consequences during the last days of the hospital, with St Ben's managers openly helping with the eviction of the patients.

Until the raids management tried very little in the way of force to move any one or anything. They concentrated on sending the workers letters — some threatening, some begging, and some enticing — in an attempt to break the work-in. This tactic had quite an effect: numbers of workers got so confused and worried that they either took a transfer or just left.

The occupation committee and the supporters' committee were quick to start organising a campaign to save the

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hospital. Street meetings, a petition (signed by 40,000), a bed push to Downing Street, workplace visits, demonstrations, an open day and discos were all organised to gain public support with a great deal of success.

Nevertheless when the crunch came in September of this year, it became clear that the occupation would be smashed without industrial action in all the hospitals in the area.

The first raid happened on Tuesday 9th September in the morning. We were expecting something to happen that day, so we had called for a mass picket, but it was for the afternoon. When word went around what had happened there was a lot of shocked disbelief that management would sink so low, but was hope of winning.

The ambulancemen succeeded in postponing further raids for two days by threatening to refuse to move patients out of any hospital in the district. Sadly, when talks with management broke down, they did not carry out their threat.

The raids started again on Friday morning and the pickets were waiting. The hospital gates were locked and barricaded but the police and management cleared a way for the JUNESCO private ambulances. At the sight of the scabs the pickets erupted, bricks and stones were thrown and the ambulances tyres were slashed, with three arrests.

After this, the weight of the law was used to try to screw us down, nine injunctions were granted in the courts: three against union officials, four against St Ben's shop stewards, and two against the support committee. The shop stewards injunctions stated they must not picket their place of work - one better than Prior.

Every day during the last week we built a bigger and better barricade, but the police played their usual role and cleared us out of the way. The final toll was 23 arrests and many more injured as the chief inspector put it on the last day 'no hard feelings'.

The support in the community and the other hospitals was on the side of St Ben's, but it was unorganised. On the last day of the raids 400 workers at St George's Tooting, walked out in support but it was an hour too late. The last of St Ben's patients had gone.

We saw injunctions used against shop stewards to try and stop them organising. This was quite effective in the case of St Ben's. Full-timers told them to obey the injunctions which would be 'fought in the courts'. It is no good contesting injunctions in court. Given the bias of most judges you do not stand much chance of winning and losing means you have to pay thousands of pounds in costs. It has just cost us £400 for obeying one injunction to the letter. Workers have to start defying injunctions and calling on mass action in support. Bosses will soon stop

using this tactic when it starts costing them too much.

What were the other lessons of the struggle?

Occupations must be real occupations where management are thrown out.

A strong rank and file organisation must be built within the occupation to run it, so there is no reliance on full-time officials.

Management is well organised on a district and area level. And if they are we have to be. Shop stewards must work towards setting up joint shop stewards committees in the districts. These joint

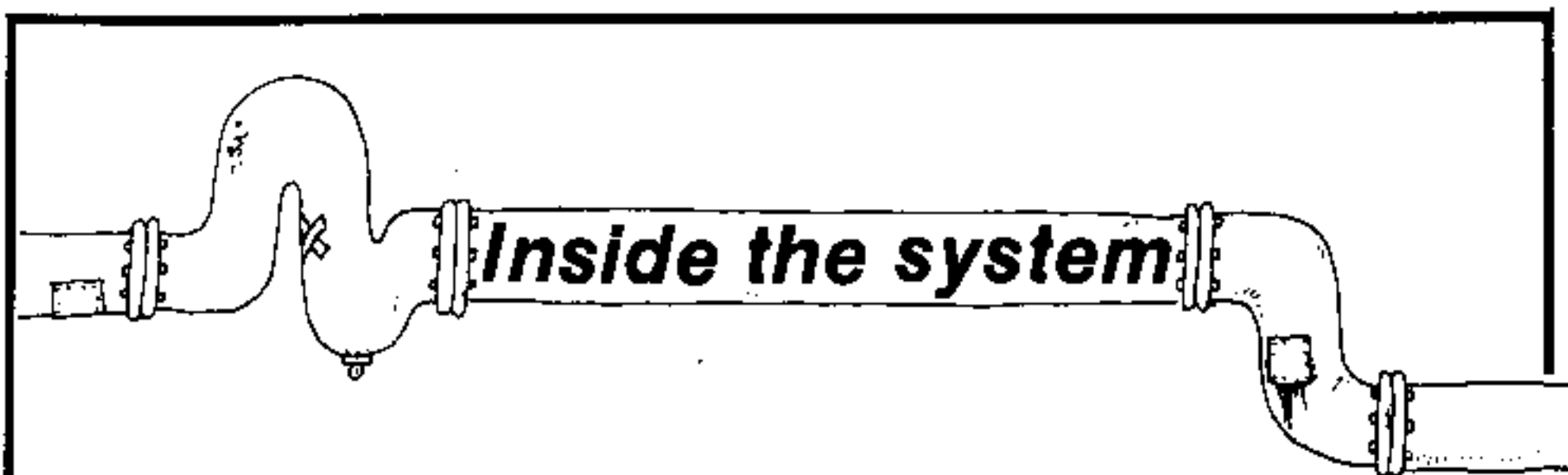
stewards committees should co-ordinate future confrontations.

During St Ben's occupation management deliberately let staffing levels drop. The workers should not be frightened to take industrial action to defend jobs, to refuse to cover unfilled vacancies and if necessary to be prepared to walk out of the gates.

Keep the money coming in - if you are not spending something's wrong.

Outside workers will not take action unless the workers in occupation are seen to be fighting, if you do nothing so will they.

Chris Rooney



There are two good arguments against import controls. One is that they are nationalist and thus dangerous to workers' interests. The other is that they do not work. This story illustrates this second point.

Under the Multi-Fibre Arrangement, the EEC has quotas for imported clothing. Recently the British government persuaded the EEC to impose such quotas on trousers, blouses and shirts originating in Indonesia.

No doubt the Tories thought that firm action would show the lesser breeds that the good old British lion still counted for a thing or two in the world. The admittedly barbarous rulers of Indonesia did not see it quite that way. They immediately started retaliating against British exports. One early casualty was a methanol plant contract, already won by some British capitalist but now to be handed over to a West German one (they are probably both owned by the same bank).

Indonesian exports to Britain total around sixty million pounds. British exports to Indonesia around ninety million pounds worth of goods each year. It looks as though retaliation will cost about £150m pounds worth of goods. More lost jobs. Import controls don't work.

It is well known in the labour movement that Terry Duffy is one of our finest thinkers. This was proved once again at the Labour Party conference. In one of the haggles over the voting for ways of electing the leader, Sir John Boyd was laying down the line. 'There is no way we are going to accept a system of 30 per cent votes for the unions, 30 per cent of the

MPs and 30 per cent for the constituencies', growled the Salvationists.

Just to ram home the point, Terry chipped in too:

'What we want is this: 50 per cent for the unions, 50 per cent for the MPs, and...50 per cent for the constituencies.'

Sir John is reported to be a few steps nearer his eternal reward.

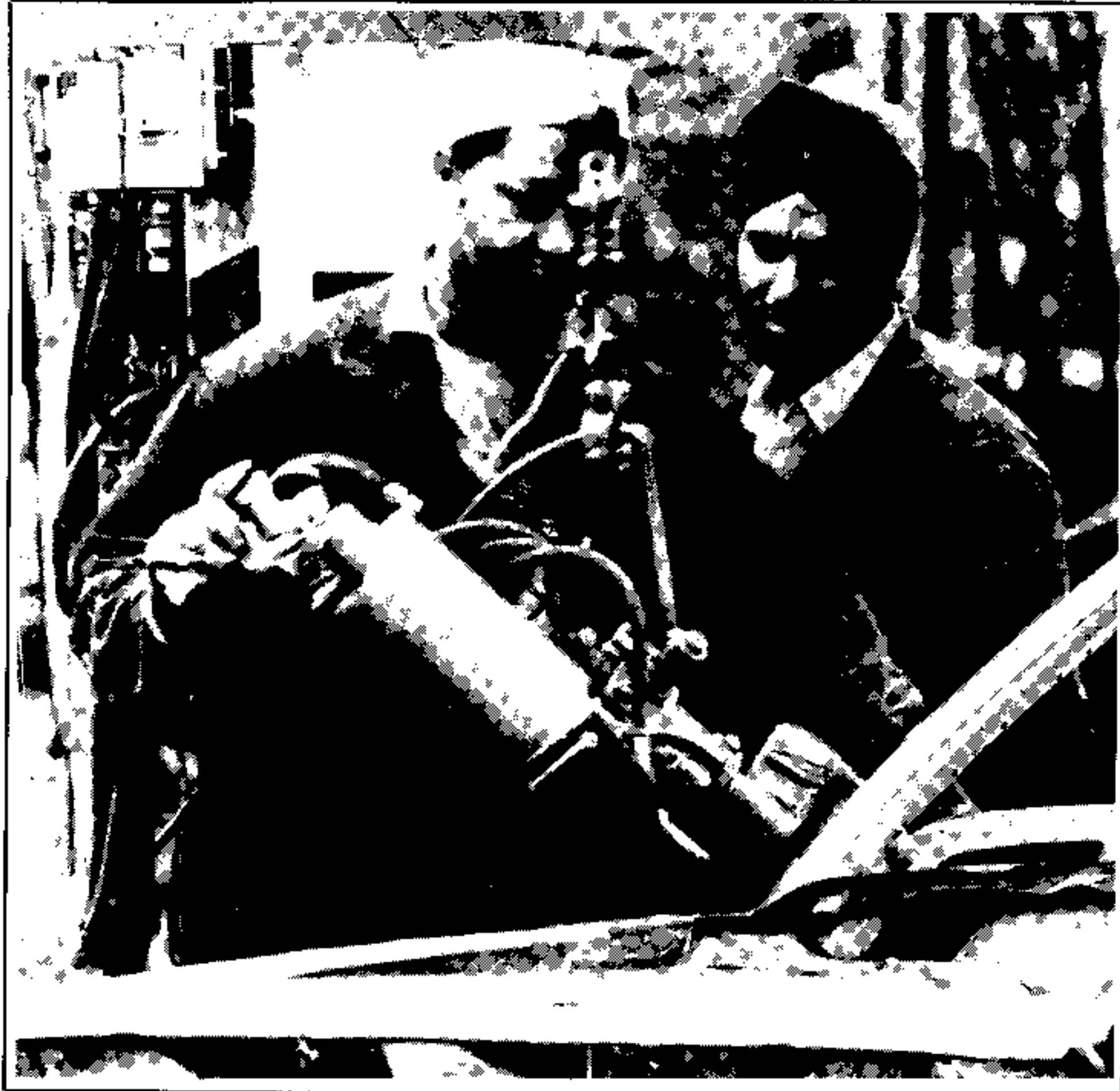
Marx argued that one of the ways that capitalism solved its recurrent problems was by means of the destruction of inefficient producers. While efficient and profitable firms could survive and even grow in a crisis, the weaker went to the wall. The Tories argue the contrary, that it is only by means of a revival of small businesses that economic problems can be solved. Of course, they admit that there will be a few accidents on the way.

The current recession provides a gloomy test-bed for such theories.

So far, we only have the results for the first, or downturn phase of the crisis. These show an increase of 68 per cent in bankruptcies over the last year. Engineering and metal were the worst hit with a 139 per cent jump. Furniture and upholstery were up 80 per cent. Distribution by 51 per cent, and building and construction by 17 per cent.

The Tory rank-and-file do not like this, since it is their little empires that are going to the wall - along with the hopes of two million workers. There seems little doubt that, however much the Tories whine, the outcome of the recession will prove Marx right. The economy will be dominated by fewer and larger firms.

# Black workers in Britain



Did you know that there is a greater proportion of West Indian women working than Asian women? Or that not all Indians own newspaper or grocery shops? Or that among West Indian workers a high proportion are skilled manual workers?

This was revealed in a study in the Department of Employment Gazette, August 1980 (using material from the National Dwelling and Housing Survey conducted in 1977/78 along with a survey conducted in 1974 and in the 1971 census data). The study, carried out by Ann Barber of the Unit for Manpower Studies, helps in our understanding of the black labour force in England.

## The black population

In 1978 there were about 1.9 million people of what are called "new Commonwealth and Pakistani ethnic origin" resident in Great Britain — roughly 3.6 per cent of the total population. About half of these were Asians and a third West Indians. About 4 in 10 people of the black (Asian and West Indian) population were born in the UK. Also the ethnic minorities have a relatively young population and very few over retirement age.

The regional distribution of different ethnic groups varies; nearly two-thirds of the West Indian population live in the South East, 17 per cent in the West Midlands and only five per cent in the Yorks/Humberside areas — whereas for people of Pakistani/Bangladeshi origin, 43

per cent live in the South east, 15 per cent in the West Midlands and nearly one-fifth in Yorkshire/Humberside.

The survey reveals fascinating facts about the economic activity rate of black women. The rates for married black women are in general lower than those for the rest, but the rates vary for different ethnic groups. West Indian women of all ages are much more likely than those of white or other minorities origin to be economically active. Indian women have activity rates higher than those of white women at young ages but lower in the older age groups.

## The numbers working

A major part of the study is on what Ann Barber calls the activity rate — those working or seeking work as a proportion of the total population of each group — for men and women of different races. For the over 35s, the rates are very similar to whites. In the younger age groups, there is a higher proportion of students among black men than white men; while among those blacks born in the UK there is a lower proportion who are students. Only one in 10 Pakistani/Bangladeshi women are economically active.

## Jobs and skills

The survey shows that compared to men of either white origin or from other minority groups, men of West Indian origin aged 16-29 are less likely to be of professional status and more likely to hold

skilled manual jobs. Examples of jobs which fall into skilled manual category are electricians, carpenters, fitters, bricklayers, railway guards, lorry drivers. The survey suggests that this tendency to a high proportion of skilled workers may have continued to the second generation.

The proportion of professional and managerial workers among overseas-born men of Indian origin is similar to that of males of white origin. But the proportion among males of Pakistani/Bangladeshi origin born overseas is lower, and that among men of West Indian origin born overseas lowest of all.

## Race and Unemployment

On unemployment the study soberly states that "minority ethnic groups tend to fare less well than those of white ethnic origin", with particularly high (registered and non-registered) unemployment among West Indians and Pakistanis/Bangladeshis.

The 1974 findings suggested that the unemployment among minority groups may be higher at times of high general unemployment because they function to some extent as a marginal source of labour; on that basis one would expect to find higher relative unemployment in 1977/78 than 1971; which, in fact, is the case.

The unemployment rates (registered and non-registered) in 1977/78 were found to be over 11 per cent for those of minority ethnic origin born in the UK and over seven per cent for those of minority ethnic origin born abroad, compared to 4.6 per cent for those of white ethnic origin.

Skills play a highly significant part in determining the chances of being unemployed. "Non-manual" workers have the lowest chance of being unemployed and "other manual" workers the highest.

The areas chosen for analysis of skills and unemployment were London, Birmingham, and Leicester — these three towns account for about 56 per cent of the total black population in England in 77/78 — and Manchester, Sandwell, Kirklees, Bradford, Wolverhampton, Coventry and Reading which account for 10 per cent of the black population. In the first three cities about 86 per cent of the minority men were in age groups where they were more likely to be unemployed than their counterparts of white ethnic origin. In London, amongst the black population, Pakistani/Bangladeshi or West Indian men were mostly likely to be unemployed, and Indians least likely — in fact, the chances of Indians being unemployed are not significantly greater than white men.

In the second group of areas, the proportion unemployed were similar for men of all ethnic origins. Race, skill and age were seen as factors significant in explaining unemployment for London, Leicester and Birmingham, while only skill (except in Wolverhampton, where age was included) was seen as the factor in explaining unemployment in the second group of men.

**Bipin Patel**

## The Tory book of rules

Simon Raven was expelled from his public school, Charterhouse, for homosexuality; he failed to complete his post-graduate studies at Cambridge University because of idleness; and he was discreetly thrown out of the Army (and warned off the Turf) for gambling debts. He is, then, a man who knows some of the main institutions of the ruling class from the inside. If he has been excluded from them, it is not because he has any principled opposition to them, but solely because they have imposed limits on his self-indulgence. Raven's writings – especially *Alms for Oblivion*, a cycle of ten novels – may help us a little in drawing the map of Tory Britain.

I recall, shortly after the Lewisham anti-NF demonstration in 1977, watching a late-night by-election programme on television. The Labour representative, a somewhat intense 'intellectual', was demanding that SWP members be put in concentration camps or psychiatric hospitals. The Tory, however, was Angus Maude (now a close associate of Thatcher), and he was taking a much more affable, relaxed line, confident that everything would 'blow over'. Perplexed by this paradox, I realised that the only way I could make sense of it was to see Maude as Raven's Captain Detterling.

Detterling is a fixer, a man whose relaxed cynicism is based on a pragmatic willingness to bend almost any principle, but who is never shaken in the belief that privilege in general, and his own very considerable privilege in particular, is absolutely justified and assured. As one of his friends puts it, he is 'callous, cowardly, corrupt and viciously smug'.

Raven gives us a whole gallery of Tories. Four of the nine key characters in *Alms for Oblivion* are Tory MPs, and three achieve ministerial status. Not that he writes 'political novels' in the normal sense. We never actually see any of his MPs in parliament, and indeed they are so busy with blackmail, indulgence in sex, drink, cricket and expensive meals, and lining their own pockets that one wonders how they ever find time to attend parliament. For Raven politics is mainly intrigue and backstairs manoeuvring. If you're fed up with reading the Tory press pontificating about the re-selection of Labour MPs, give yourself a change by reading Raven's account of a Tory selection in *Friends in Low Places*.

*Alms for Oblivion* gives us ten novels, each self-contained, but all interlocking with the rest. There are nine main characters, and at least a hundred minor ones. Raven is an ingenious and skilful narrator, and much of the charm of the work derives from the way that half-forgotten characters reappear in new settings, and minor incidents that pass

unnoticed suddenly acquire significance. What makes Raven an excellent storyteller, always able to exploit a detail or an accident, is his Tory view of history. In his own words 'Human effort and goodwill are persistently vulnerable to the malice of time, chance and the rest of the human race.' In other words, all efforts to change the world are futile.

The individual destinies traced in the cycle are intertwined with twenty-eight years of British history. The cycle opens with a memorial service to celebrate the end of World War II; it ends in the summer of 1973, just a few months before the Middle East war finally brought the post-war boom to an end.

What Raven chronicles over this period is the declining world role of British imperialism. The institutions that Raven knows and dissects are inescapably tied up with imperialism. The public schools trained colonial administrators, and the army kept 'order'. Yet history has condemned British imperialism.

So deeply is Raven entrenched in the British imperialist dream that some of the novels are based on the absurd fantasy that the United States actually organised such anti-British liberation movements as EOKA in Cyprus. Above all, Anthony Eden's Suez adventure in 1956 is the point at which the utter bankruptcy of British imperialism is revealed; two of the ten novels are focused on the Suez events.

But the old gang are determined to survive the decline of Empire. To do so they have to adapt themselves to a changing world. How they do so is suggested symbolically in an incident that comes in the earliest novel, *Fielding Gray*, and shows just how important sport is for moulding the ideology of the ruling class. At the end of a tightly balanced cricket match the batsman simply stops the ball dead at his feet. With the approval of the opposing captain he picks up the ball to throw back to the bowler, who then appeals. The umpire (Somerset Lloyd-James, future blackmailer and Tory MP) gives him out, declaring 'No one can give a player permission to break the rules'. The bowler had breached all the conventions of gentlemanly play; but the rules are unbreachable. This might provide the moral for all Raven's work – you may, indeed you will have to, break the conventions, but the rules are sacred.

So Raven traces the way in which the old ruling group, the products of the public schools and Oxford and Cambridge, adapted themselves in the fifties and sixties to the changing pattern of British society. The Marquis Canteloupe, whose ancestor was in charge of the other-rank brothel at Agincourt, makes a fortune from turning his stately home into a profitable

company called Cant-Fun. The whole milieu is a parasitic one – the army, education, politics, publishing and advertising. Productive industry never soils Raven's pages.

Raven undoubtedly owes much of his success to the lurid accounts of sexual activity in his novels. At times one feels that with each novel there is a frantic search to find a variant even more esoteric than those in previous volumes. By the time we get to Sasha Grimes, who can only make it by miming the crucifixion, we begin to wonder if it's really worth bothering.

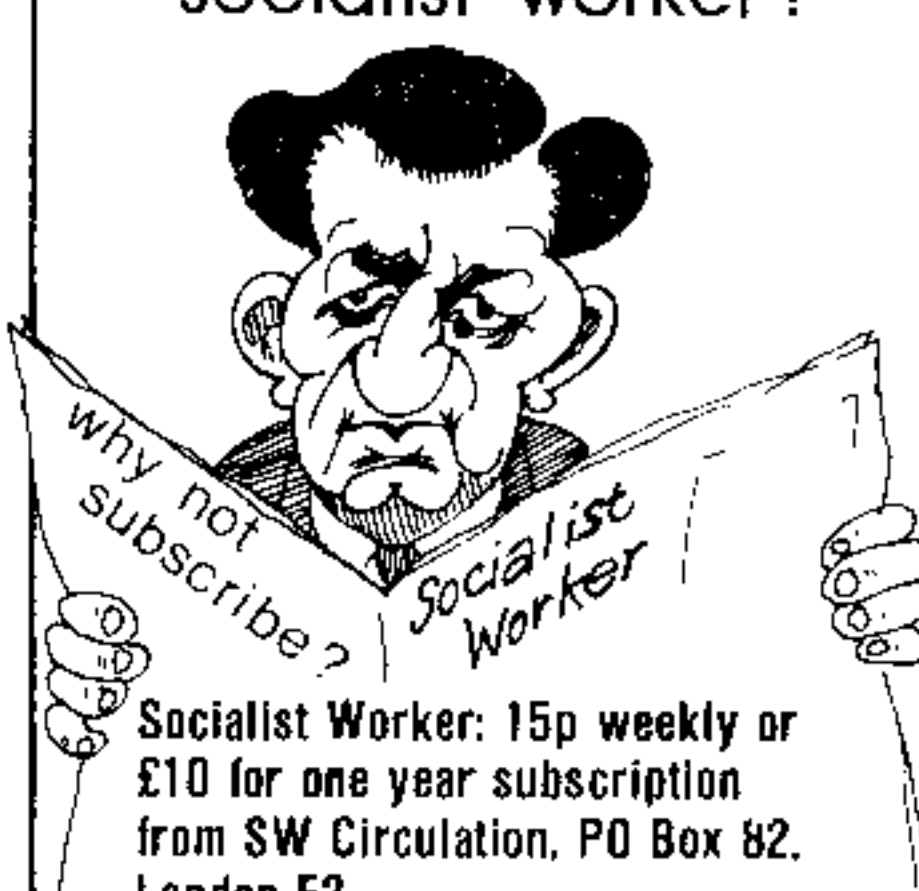
But behind the sensationalism, Raven applies the same principles to sex as he does to politics. At first sight he is tolerant and broadminded. Many of his (male) characters are bisexual. Fielding Gray, the central figure and obviously in part a self-portrait of Raven, is haunted through his adult life by the only person he ever loved, his school-friend Christopher Roland, whom he drove to suicide.

But if the conventions may be handled laxly, the rules remain. None of his characters would dream of 'coming out'. Raven knows well that on occasion the sexual double standards of the ruling class as in the Profumo case of 1963 – can have an explosive force to shake the credibility of the elite.

Finally, Raven offers us a mirror in which we can see ourselves as Tories see us. For there are socialists in Raven's world. Their values are perceived as alien and threatening.

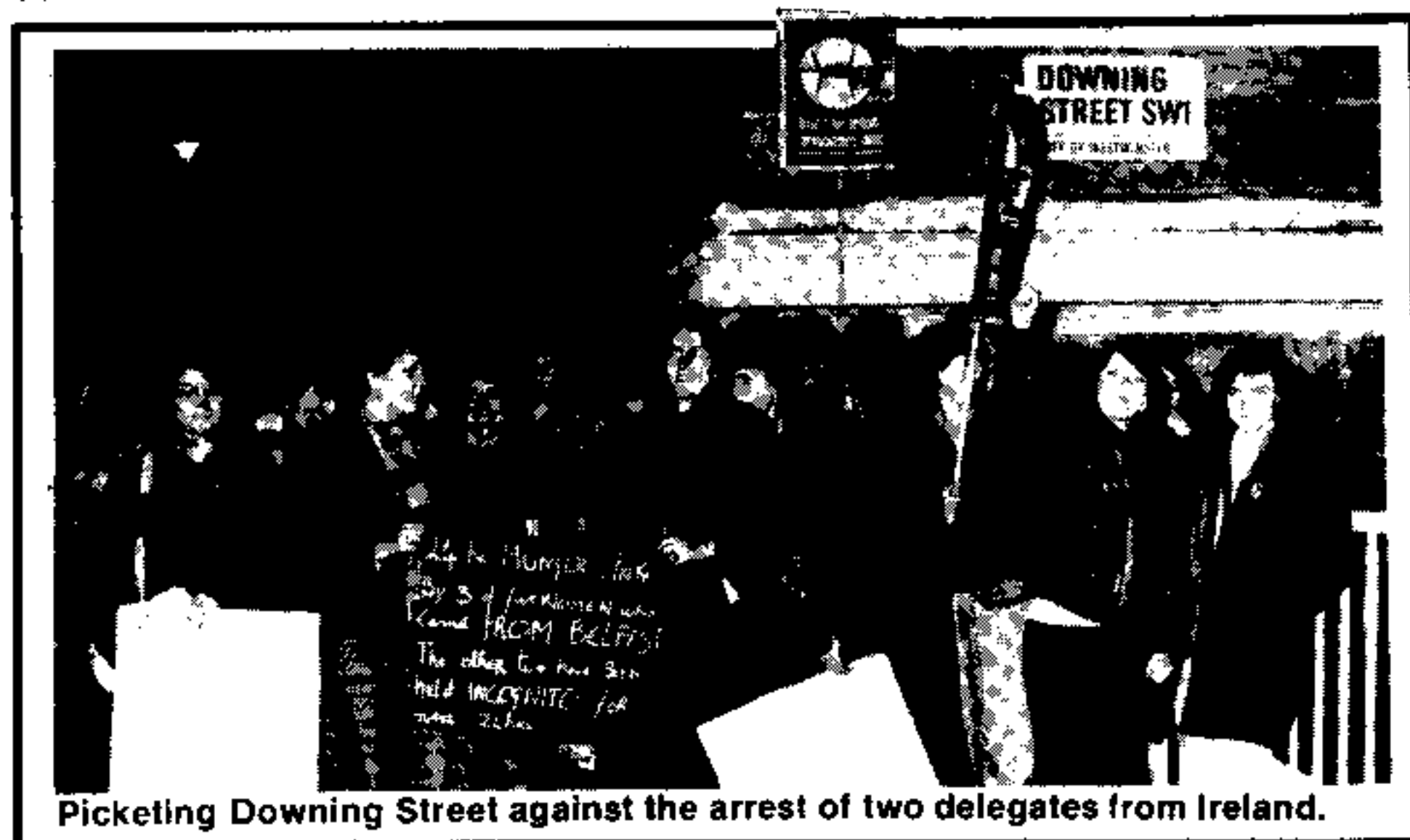
The worst novel of the cycle is *Places Where They Sing*, dealing with the student movement of the late sixties. Here Raven lurches from the grotesque (a girl who in the heat of sexual ecstasy shouts 'Marx, Mao, Marcuse, Fidel, Che) to reactionary fantasy (everything is blamed on the mysterious outside agitator Mayerston). Thus Raven shows us, not only the twists and turns of the Tory mind, but also its fatal blind-spots.  
Ian Birchall

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## THE MOVEMENT



Picketing Downing Street against the arrest of two delegates from Ireland.

## Everyone voted for everything

If it were possible to predict in advance a topic likely to remain at the level of abstraction, women and imperialism would be such a topic. Yet it was around this theme that the first Socialist Feminist conference for two years, which took place in London last month, was organised.

The many workshops discussed the effect of imperialism on women's oppression, differences between women in advanced capitalist countries and the third world, and the implications for socialist feminism. Over 1000 women participated on the first day, although probably the majority of those preferred to demonstrate against cruise missiles rather than attend the Sunday plenary.

Yet despite the numbers, and the attraction of many of the ideas of socialist feminism, the outcome of the conference was extremely limited.

There were a number of reasons for this. Guest speakers like Anwar Ditta, the Rochdale woman whose children are refused entry into Britain from Pakistan, and women from Northern Ireland who support the Armagh and H block dirty protests for political prisoner status, were well received. But there was little attempt to build action in the here and now to support victims of British imperialism at home.

As one woman put it, despite everyone voting for everything in the final plenary session, there was a strong feeling that little would be implemented, since there was no real mechanism for doing so.

Secondly, many women failed to make the link between what imperialism does to women in the 'colonial' countries, and how we fight the British ruling class here. There was an unwillingness in many workshops to see the need to take up issues concerning workers in general and immigrant women in particular as a way of fighting the imperialist system.

Instead there was the vague and rather guilt ridden idea that we couldn't

really pronounce on what women in other countries were doing since we in Britain all 'benefit from imperialism'. This led to the even stranger conclusion that we had no right to condemn clitorectomy as this could be a protest against western culture.

There has not been a women's liberation conference for some time, so many women came who were by no means socialist feminists. Many radical feminists of various hues saw it as a forum for debate which meant that there was not a common understanding of socialist ideas. Instead much time was taken up in discussing the merits or

### INTERVIEW: TREVOR GRIFFITHS

## Up against the mindshapers

Trevor Griffiths has become one of the best known left wing playwrights in Britain in recent years, with his series of television plays *Bill Brand*, and his plays *The Party* — about a small left wing group — and *Comedians*.

So how do you become a socialist playwright? More importantly, how do you remain one? We got the answers to these and a hundred other questions on a very damp morning in Regent's Park.

Born in Manchester in 1935 with his father out of work and the family homeless, Griffiths was brought up as a Catholic by his grandmother. She also taught him to read by the time he was three.

'It was a terrific start... I was carrying the flag of Catholicism for the family, I was the only one to go to a Catholic school — it was a very intensive period of mind formation and consciousness, all the Catholic imagery was burned in. People say that *The Wages of Thin* is full of Catholic imagery, though I don't see it. But the Catholic church does operate, as it were, democratic central-

otherwise of socialism.

All this made for a diffuse and often uncoordinated conference. There were some very positive points. Over 300 women demonstrated outside Downing Street on Saturday night, in protest at the detention of two Irish guest speakers under the PTA.

There were useful discussions at specialist workshops on topics as diverse as Ireland and feminist publications. The atmosphere and discussion was, to me, more friendly and positive than at, say, the *Beyond the Fragments* conference.

Yet it remains an indictment of 'Socialist Feminism', one of the best tendencies within the women's movement, that at the first conference in two years there was no discussion of the major problems facing working class women — unemployment, Tory attempts to hold down wages in the public sector, sales of council houses, cuts in services. There was not even an attempt to discuss the balance sheet of the Corrie campaign, or how the women's movement faces up to the problem of a reactionary woman prime minister.

Paradoxically, more and more working class women are accepting some of the ideas of women's liberation. Many women are taking action against the attacks on their rights, and could be attracted to a women's organisation.

But it is at precisely this time, as the crisis bites deeper, that the women's movement is moving away from facing up to the real problems confronting women, and so making itself less and less relevant.

Lindsey German

to write a series called *The Big House* around the strike at AEI. I'd been involved in a newspaper called *Labour's Northern Voice* which was really a front for Frank Allaun and Stan Orme, and I covered this strike. I'd been realising that there weren't just unions and management, that there were workers in the middle, stewards, militants, who were served by neither interest.

'So I said I wanted to write this, and Garnett said, "Well, how long have you worked in a factory?" I said I never had, I was a teacher, so he said why not write about teaching? I was very angry, but I thought about it, it was an important emphasis on the concreteness of experience. So I wrote *The Love Maniac* about comprehensive education and teaching, and he bought it. That's when I felt like a playwright, when someone paid money for my play.

'I'd just been reading essays by Gramsci charting the months from February to October 1920 and telling the story of the factory occupations in Italy and the role of the Comintern. This was in 1968-69, when factory occupations had been revived as a tactic. I wanted to look at the events of May '68 through an earlier historical moment, so I wrote *Occupations*.

'In the meantime I'd been going to meetings at Tony Garnett's house — the whole SLL/WRP scene. I sat there, ghosting, watching what was going on, and found a play coming through *The Party*.

He feels it is difficult to assess how successful his work is.

'Goals have to be achievable. If you say, when this play is produced, the Himalayas will be split in half, it's a bullshit goal, right? You're not going to have an insurrection the morning after transmission, nor are you going to have people lining up saying, "That great play we saw last night will lead us forward to the new dawn".

'Plays are stains on the mind, or solvents of stains on the mind. They're part of the consciousness industry. It would be great if for every play that told us, for example, how good the police are, or the army, there was a play which challenged those so-called "natural assumptions" about the forces of "law and order".

'Dominant ideologies will have to be confronted by radical playwrights within the mass media, increasingly and regularly. No question about it. We are not going to alter the industry of mindshape by working in the theatre. You've got to contest lies, like the *Law and Order* TV plays did. That was wonderful.

'I have never written a TV play as successful as *Edward and Mrs Simpson*. That's our challenge. I want to write a comedy series. It goes into the protected ground of bedsit comedy, which is deeply reactionary. Sometimes you get opportunities... A play I wrote in the *Fall of Eagles* series was costume, royalty — commercially it couldn't fail. I made a strategic decision to place the play

*Absolute Beginners* within that series. It was about the formation of the Bolshevik Party, and was seen willy nilly, the pill within the sugar, in 63 countries.'

It isn't always that easy, however. Producers, directors, controllers can ruin the product and the artist because they are part of the establishment that the play is attacking

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**'Why have the leading left publications only just begun to cover TV — which is the mass medium.'**

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'There's this gentleman's code they operate — they ring you up, talk to you, get chummy and invite you for a drink, and it all gets confused, so you finish up losing the battle over whatever it is. They have meetings on the 6th floor, making concordats, treading you under. Yet you have to work with these people — you have to learn to co-operate without giving in.'

He rejects the idea that he is detached from the struggles of the everyday socialist, or that he has the freedom to be self-indulgent.

'I don't write just what I want to write about. That is hopelessly romantic. You write about what you *can* write about — if your writing is experience-based, as mine is. And I'm not detached, I just don't operate within the SWP or the IMG in London. I don't slide off the face of the earth because I'm not physically shoulder-to-shoulder with you, I'm a regional person, all my concrete history is in Manchester and Leeds.

'You're right in thinking that I want to protect my creativity from the super-ventions of parties or factions; I don't think any good Marxist or socialist writing is done that way because Marxism is about the concentrated probing of contradictions. You could say all my work is about contradictions, as indeed one's life is. Like, what I'm working through now is the contradiction of having large so-called earned surpluses as a product of socialist endeavour, and how that is livable with. That is my central experience right now.'

Experience is one of Griffiths' most-used words. He is heavily into the debate between Althusser and EP Thompson about experience v. abstraction in Marxist thought.

'I'm very close to Thompson on this. It's about experience, agency, how classes of people can re-order historical events to make history, as against the more Stalinist formations. My politics is my job, working sixteen-plus hours a day at writing. But one's image is of struggle. Take Poland. Poland is hugely exciting and frightening at the moment; that's where new historic moments are

being formed, not at my desk or at Howard Brenton's desk. Nevertheless, writing has a part to play. I write socialist plays. I don't write other sorts of play. They may not be acceptable, for instance, my socialism is not acceptable to, broadly speaking, the WRP. But they are a part of it, of the struggle.'

Griffiths agrees that there's a great lack of socialist writing at present, and that there doesn't seem to be much creative response to the economic and political crisis. Is this because writers are too isolated from one another and can't build on a shared experience?

'No, that's not the problem. In post-revolutionary Russia, agitprop worked wonderfully, the living newspaper was effective, but in mature capitalist society it's much more problematic. I'm writing six plays called *Tory Stories* which are an attempt to examine the wealth/power mix in post-war British society. They are devastatingly difficult pieces to write, and they can't be agitprop because that's not the way I work best and so they wouldn't say what I want them to say.'

He is adamant that the mass media is the future arena for cultural battle. 'Why have the leading left publications only just begun to cover TV — which is the mass medium? It's inestimably more important than live theatre. Popular culture is actually an area of struggle take *Crossroads*. That is the stuff of mass cultural experience, and we need a socialist analysis of it from someone with a gut reaction, someone who watches it obsessively. We don't need all this intellectual stuff where they watch a videotape and analyse it frame by frame.'

And the last word?

'You can't impose a political culture on people, like the Stalinists tried to. It has to grow, to shape itself. Being a socialist playwright — well, the positive is what you get out of it. The negative is what they get out of you.'

Susan Pearce

*Inside the system*

The outcry over the Howard Brenton play, 'The Romans in Britain' has let lots of little cockroaches free to scamper around. One of the nastiest was the GLC's Conservative chief whip, who said:

'I must confess I found it offensive to see male rape on the stage.'

Now any rape is a disgusting and vicious crime, but the GLC has hundreds of places of entertainment in its area. Many of these have shown films and plays which present rape. Mr Geoffrey Seaton, the cockroach in question, is not known to have protested about these. Presumably because the vast majority of these rapes were against women, which would not seem to matter very much.

## No better second time round

**The IRA**  
 Tim Pat Coogan  
 Fontana £2.50

The first edition of this book appeared in 1970 when the IRA was still on the sidelines on the Northern Ireland upheaval. As a history of the movement from its beginnings sixty odd years ago to the end of the 'border campaign' in 1962 it was a peculiar mixture of anecdotes and fairly low-level interpretation. Key concepts like British imperialism and Irish capitalism were excluded, and no attempt was made to integrate the history of republican struggle into an analysis of Irish society. Coogan's work was soon surpassed by an infinitely better study of the IRA, Bowyer Bell's *The Secret Army* (Sphere 1972).

The second edition of *The IRA* reproduces the first unchanged (except for the deletion of its concluding comment: 'My personal belief is that the forces of moderation will triumph'), and contains twelve new chapters on the past decade presented as a series of disconnected themes — 'hunger striking', 'arms', 'torture', 'sectarian murder', etc. Coogan effectively destroys many myths about the supposed 'good intentions' of the British and the 'evilness' of the IRA, but his method of presentation and the shallowness of his analysis make the second part of the book even more disappointing than the first.

As a middle class nationalist who sympathises with the republican objective of a united Ireland, while abhorring IRA methods, Coogan is unable to come to grips with the class nature of republicanism. Its tendency through the decades to splits is presented in terms of 'revolutionism' versus 'constitutionalism'. The revolutionaries are depicted as those who have maintained faith in the methods of pure physical force and the

constitutionalists as those who have 'deviated' towards political struggle. But the pursuit of one's objectives by military means does not amount to a revolutionary perspective. More often than not the physical force purists have simply been armed reformists, seeking political changes that would leave the social structure intact. This persistent feature of the Irish liberation struggle can only be understood by acknowledging the petty bourgeois origins of republicanism, its ideology, organisational forms and traditions.

Similarly, those who turned away from physical force to politics did so not simply because of a preference for constitutional methods, but because they represented (or sought to represent) different class interests. Their turn to politics could be potentially more revolutionary than the actions of the militarists. But Coogan dismisses such developments (as, for example, Saor Eire and the Republican Congress movement of the 1930s) as peripheral and irrelevant.

Coogan faces real problems when he comes to discuss the Provisional IRA. Only in passing does he note that Ireland's devastating level of unemployment is 'a potentially highly important consideration for the IRA of the future'.

The fact is, of course, that the prevailing economic conditions are not simply potentially important for the future, but have already ensured that the IRA, for the first time in its history, is now a predominantly working class organisation. The significance of this fact is completely ignored by Coogan.

Not only does Coogan overlook the current leftward political developments within the Provisionals, he also erroneously describes Sinn Fein and the Workers' Party (the old Officials) as 'Marxist', and, again erroneously, states that the Irish National Liberation Army is 'bitterly opposed' to all forms of socialism.

Coogan ends with his own blue print for solving the crisis. The British should leave, thus removing the IRA's *raison d'être*. The UN should become involved in ensuring 'acceptable' policing in Catholic working class areas. An injection of American and EEC capital should be sought to revive the economy. And the South should liberalise its constitution and laws to create a 'pluralist' society. Thus, and only thus, Coogan maintains, can Ireland be made safe for international capitalism. Up the Republic!

If you already have a copy of Bowyer Bell's *The Secret Army*, then give Coogan a miss and save your money. Supplement Bell with McCann's *War and an Irish Town*, still by far the best account of the last ten years of the Irish struggle.

Mike Milotte

## When everyone knew their place

**The Meaning Of Conservatism**  
 Roger Scruton  
 Penguin £1.95

'Know your enemy' is a useful maxim for war in general and the class war in particular, so a book about Conservatism

by a Conservative is not necessarily to be scoffed at. Nonetheless, I must confess, I found it hard to read this book without succumbing to the constant urge to throw it in the dustbin. For *The Meaning Of Conservatism* is not representative of Thatcherite Toryism, nor does it offer much insight into the contemporary mind of the ruling class. Still less is it a 'new and striking challenge to Marxism' as claimed on the jacket.

Roger Scruton is a man who regrets not only the twentieth century but also most of the nineteenth century. He has no time for the 'contagion of democracy' or 'free speech' or 'the rights of man', or even laissez-faire and the free market economy. All these are products of Conservatism's great enemy, liberalism. He stands for authority and allegiance, private property and the family, patriotism and order. And he is going to defend these time honoured values against the modern diseases of change and reform. He inhabits, in his mind, the eighteenth century world of the secure social order when everyone knew their place. What Scruton, in his plea for continuity and his desire 'to conserve' has

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not come to terms with is the fact pointed out by Marx, that:

'The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instruments of production and therefore the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society...Constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones.'

Thus the modern Conservative defends bourgeois power but cannot do so by standing still. He, or more to the point, she, is compelled to be a determined and 'radical' reformer, and in the face of this pressing reality Scruton's nostalgia for the values of the distant past, while close to many Tory hearts, is essentially irrelevant.

In general Scruton prefers the evocation of mood and the appeal to instinct to dealing in ideas, but insofar as the book possesses a key idea it is that society is an 'organism' and that good government is based on a feeling of 'fellowship' with this organism. Of course, there is a sense in which society is an organism, a system of more or less harmoniously functioning parts, but this is only half the truth – the conservative half. As well as unity there is contradiction and antagonism, the class struggle and the forces of the new society growing within the old, ultimately exploding it. As for government it does indeed belong to those who have a feeling of fellowship with the system, namely the beneficiaries of the system – the rich, the powerful, the ruling class.

Scruton's tone is restrained, almost reassuring. The aim – to lull rather than browbeat the reader into acceptance. The method – the oppressive idea wrapped in the elegant phrase. But now and again the mask slips to reveal the reality beneath. Thus he protests at the personalisation of the American presidency. 'How dangerous it is for a state to cultivate this identity between man and office. For how can a president order the bombing of a city, if the blame is individually his?'

But there is one passage which stands out like a sore thumb because of its clear-sighted class consciousness, and contains lessons for every socialist and worker. It concerns the 'establishment' of the trade union movement.

'It is therefore in the interests of state that union leaders are able to accept and rejoice in peerages. It is in the interest of state that they are granted powers and privileges that completely outrun the power that arises autonomously. It is widely known that, under recent Labour governments, trade union officials have become recipients of extreme political patronage. (In 1977, according to one estimate, thirty-nine members of the TUC general council held no less than 180 state offices between them – most of them salaried.) Now the extent of this 'New Corruption' is vast – vaster by

far than the patronage exerted by Whigs or by the Stuart monarchy. But it would be misguided for a conservative to think he is compelled by dogma to oppose it. On the contrary, this sudden emergence of a power into the offices of government spells the eventual diminution of that power; and its incorporation into the

state. Initially it is costly. But in the long run it must be beneficial...the hierarchical nature of trade union power enables the state to deal directly with a small number of stubborn but often bribable officials.'

Hear! Hear! Build the rank-and-file movement!

John Molyneux

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## When the writing is on the wall

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### Culture and Crisis in Britain in the 30s

ed. Clark and others

Lawrence and Wishart £3.50

### Extreme Situations

D. Craig and Michael Egan

Macmillan

If the social and political history of this century has been one of great revolutions and the bloody suppression of popular revolts, there are those who would have us believe that literature is above all of this. They are not all on the right: some modern left-wing critics share the view that the proper concern of literature is with its own making.

Both of these books deny that. They stand firmly in the classical tradition of Marxism which asserts that there is such a relationship between what goes on in the outside world and what gets written on a page. One book studies the cultural implications of the crisis in Britain in the 1930s, the other sweeps through the great crisis of the century and looks at the culture of many lands.

The books have many differences. Craig and Egan, for example, while making many powerful points and whetting your appetite for forgotten or unread authors, sometimes rush between crises and continents so swiftly as to leave the reader gasping. They do, however, have a great advantage in honestly confronting the great problem of the left: the defeat of the Russian revolution and its effects on the revolutionary movement. While I certainly do not agree with their line derived from Isaac Deutscher, they are very far from either the 'natural vices of socialism' school of reactionary explanation, or the 'muttered

regrets and lets move on to something else' school of modern CP apologists.

The same cannot be said of the other book, which is firmly within the camp of the British Road to Literary Criticism. *Culture and Crisis* opens with a posthumous essay by James Klugmann which sets the tone in arguing that one of the CP's achievements in 1935 was to recognise that:

'Genuine, progressive national feelings and patriotism were the other side of the medal of popular and proletarian internationalism...In relation to democracy, the French again gave us much in the 1934-35 period. They retook possession of the French Revolution, they repossessed the tricolour, the colours of France. They put the red flag side by side with the tricolour, and at the end of their meetings sung the *Marseillaise* and the *Internationale*. It wasn't always easy for us...'

Klugmann, however, gritted his few remaining proletarian teeth and made the transition. So too, did some of the other contributors, and that leads to some very evasive judgements.

All of this is a pity, because the book does contain some fresh and interesting information. But it is a rotten book. It is rotten with compromise. It is a historical compromise.

*Extreme Situations* is much better. Although I might disagree with much the authors have to say I don't want to accuse them of dishonesty. In many ways their book is a good, if up-market, successor to Paul O'Flinn's *Them and Us in Literature*. It is well worth a read. Colin Sparks

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## Theatre Review

# Bringing London to life

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### Jack London: The man from Eden's Grove

by Chuck Portz

When I was over in the States I had the good fortune to know a character called Carl Cowl. Carl was among the first people to have joined the American Communist Party. He was also among the first to be thrown out when Stalinisation took place. He had thus seen a

lot and he was a great story teller. I could listen to him for hours but I was never sure I could believe everything he said. I felt pretty much the same about Chuck Portz's one man show: *Jack London: The Man from Eden's Grove*.

Jack London was certainly one of the world's great story tellers most popularly known for his so-called dog stories *Call of the Wild* and *White Fang*. What is not so well known about London and

political commitment. A member of the American Socialist Party he selflessly devoted himself to the cause of Socialism. He undertook extensive speaking tours for the party as well as contributing some of the money he got from his writings.

Chuck Protz documents London's life in three sections. The first is devoted to London's working class youth where he describes the process that made him a socialist. He talks graphically of his work in a canning factory where many of the workers died of tuberculosis before they reached the fine old age of 16.

He further tells of the realisation that during the time he had worked heaving at an electrical power station he had unknowingly cause the unemployment of two previous workers. But London goes beyond just the hardship of his own youth. He tells how he saw it as the result of a system, a capitalist system which had inequality built into it. It was this realisation that made him devote himself as a socialist to the cause of the revolution.

The second and third sections of the play draw a picture of London at the height of his literary fame and of his final years of disillusionment both with himself and the possibilities of socialism. It was at this stage that I wished there had been other characters to begin asking questions of Jack London. He tells of the bitterness of his divorce from his first wife, saying she accused him of everything from drunkenness to physical brutality. Were they just accusations? The audience has no way of telling.

Further, some of the more controversial aspects of London's beliefs are not brought out. Throughout his life London believed in White supremacy and could write in 1905 what a terrible thing it was that a 'yellow inferior race' like the Japanese could defeat the Russians.

None of this, however, detracts from the strength of Chuck's performance in recreating Jack London. Particularly effective is a scene where London tells of how at the height of his popularity he was much in demand as a speaker at universities and businessmen's forums. Never one to pass up the opportunity of upsetting the rich and powerful at a businessmen's forum in New York he convinced everyone in the audience that the building was surrounded by revolutionaries just waiting to burst in and gun them down.

The effect must have been wonderful. London was full of such stories as powerful and intimate as that one. Stories about the poverty and degradation of life in the East End of Edwardian London that went into his book *The People of the Abyss*. Stories about the repression directed against American socialists like Eugene Debbs and Big Bill Haywood. These helped form the basis of his best known political novel *The Iron Heel* - a truly prophetic book about counter revolution that predated the rise of fascism by some 20 years.

Chuck Protz playing Jack London.



Chuck's play is thus more than welcome in bringing to life such a character as Jack London. It is particularly refreshing in this the month of the Ameri-

can presidential election, when it often seems hard to believe there ever was a socialist tradition in the United States.  
Pete Court

## Coming your way

CAST has been taking entertainment to the labour movement for the past 15 years. Apart from touring its own plays to halls, clubs, and pubs around Britain, CAST has been building a Union Circuit and encouraging participation in it from other theatre groups. (This autumn, the New York Labor Theater is using Union Circuit to present *Jack London the Man from Eden's Grove*.)

CAST's new show, *From One Strike to Another*, puts the spotlight on an industrial dispute where strikers are up against the law.

To put the show together, Roland Muldoon (of *Confessions of a Socialist* fame) and the Company have secured the services of the Smellnice Strike Committee, who tell us in their own words what it's like to be isolated, up against the wall, and the target of the government's new Employment Bill.

Billed as 'distinctive, eye-opening and humorous', the production has already been attacked by Tory MP for Southend, Teddy Tayler, who said in the *Telegraph*: 'I often wonder about the sanity of the Arts Council in the way it gives state money to little groups whose objectives are political and not artistic. It is about time the government started laying down guidelines on matters like this.'

However, the Smellnice Strike Committee are taking a chance on government action and will be touring the show as follows:

<b>Tues 11 Nov</b>	East Sutton Labour Club, St. Helens
<b>Weds 12 Nov</b>	Christ's College, Woolton Road, Liverpool
<b>Thurs 13 Nov</b>	Edge Hill College, St. Helens Road, Ormskirk
<b>Fri 14 Nov</b>	Labour Club, Birkenhead
<b>Sat 15 Nov</b>	Liverpool
<b>Tues 18 Nov</b>	Milton Keynes
<b>Weds 19 Nov</b>	Eckington, Derbyshire
<b>Fri 21 Nov</b>	Derby

Sat 22 Nov Leicester

CAST are available for bookings in the South, South-East, and London from 25 Nov to 13 Dec. Ring Warren Lakin on 01-250 1789 for bookings and details of venues.

It's all good news from the company of 'Les Oeufs Malades' this month. Firstly, they're looking for a new company name, and secondly, their production of Bryony Lavery's play *The Family Album* will be touring England, Scotland, and Wales between now and next March.

*The Family Album* is about relationships in the nuclear family and how people are destroyed by bourgeois values, expectations, and restrictions. It may therefore be a surprise to hear that the play is a barrel of knife-edged laughs nearly all the way through.

So if you want an evening of thought-provoking and thoroughly enjoyable entertainment, it is not to be missed.

*The Family Album* begins its tour as follows:

<b>13 Nov</b>	Ipswich, Drama Centre
<b>14-15 Nov</b>	Stamford, Theatre
<b>17-19 Nov</b>	Swindon, Wyvern Theatre
<b>20-22 Nov</b>	Cardiff, Sherman Theatre

Londoners have the chance this month to see a new musical at the New Half Moon Theatre in Stepney. After its success with *Pal Joey*, which has now moved to the West End, it is putting on *Dreamer* by Bill Colville and Melvyn Robinson. It is described as 'a violent family drama' enacted 'against a larger background of a crumbling Britain', which 'explores the clash between public and private worlds with humour and with love'.

It is showing from 6-29 November. Tickets are available from the box office, 480 6465.

Susan Pearce

## FILM REVIEWS

### Where survival is the only glory ...

#### The Big Red One

Director: Samuel Fuller

In 1942 Hollywood screen-writer Samuel Fuller was conscripted into the United States army. He served in North Africa, Italy and Northern Europe as an infantryman in the US First Infantry Division. He survived and returned to Hollywood to direct many films—most of them made quickly and cheaply. He has become a cult film director, a friend of Godard, and a grand old man of Hollywood. All of that time, he wanted to make a film dealing directly with his war-time experiences.

He finally got the money and *The Big Red One* is the result. It is a very good film. The title is the nickname of the First Infantry, and the story is told through the narrative of a young writer who, like Fuller, survives the battles.

Fuller once said: 'War is organised madness'. That is the thesis of the film. Fuller is not very subtle about making his point.

One of the climactic scenes is the destruction of a German observation post in Belgium. The post is hidden in an asylum for the mentally ill and retarded. One of the US soldiers, anxious to avoid combat, asks if it would not be easier to bomb it out. The sergeant says no because killing crazy people is bad publicity. The soldier asks: 'Then killing sane people is OK, but killing crazy people is wrong?' 'Yes', answers the sergeant.

With the help of a Belgian woman resistance fighter, who has passed herself off as mad, they complete half the job with only limited bloodshed. But then it all goes wrong and a shoot-out develops in the mess-hall, half full of German soldiers and half full of patients. While the GIs cower in terror most of the patients eat on, ignoring the bullets. But one of them seizes a machine gun from a dead German and starts shooting too. He grins with joy, shouting out: 'I'm free, I'm sane, I'm one of you.'

The first man we see killed in the film is a German soldier trying to surrender after the end of the First World War. He is knifed by the sergeant who does not know the war is over. The last victim of the film is another German soldier who meets the same fate at the hands of the sergeant at the end of World War Two. But he has the luck to survive. The narrator says he has more in common with the German than with his dead US fellows: 'He survived, and surviving is the only glory in war...' Those are the last words in the film, and they sum up its message.

But there is a problem. Throughout the film the survivors become more and more isolated. About the central figure of the sergeant we know nothing except that he is a soldier. The others undergo

the same process. When the writer sells his book to Hollywood he asks his friends what they will do with the women he promises to provide. The world beyond the war has become so remote that none of them can answer, except a doomed young replacement who gives a mildly sadistic adolescent fantasy.

The film is very insistent that it is about *all* war, perhaps all life.

But the last battle takes place in a concentration camp, and the discovery of atrocities which have been committed there unbalances all of the US soldiers. One of them, grinning, empties his rifle time and again into a German he has trapped in the camp crematorium. Surely, Fuller is recognising here that it is sometimes necessary to fight. However, in his world of isolated individual survivors, how are we to know what is right or wrong apart from surviving?

Still, we cannot demand of Fuller that he recognises the differences between imperialist war and revolutionary war. Within the limits of his own American individualist world-view he has gone a very long way. The film is a must when it comes round to you.

Colin Sparks

### Dressed to degrade

#### Dressed to Kill

Director: Brian de Palma

Brian de Palma has always been obsessed with Hitchcock. It is therefore no surprise that in his latest film, *Dressed to Kill*, he has finally got around to reworking *Psycho*. Technically the film is brilliant. For nigh on two hours you are held on the edge of your seat, mesmerised by the threat of a glinting, cut-throat razor. An adventurous camera sweeps you on a silent, twenty minute journey through the Museum of Modern Art in New York as Angie Dickenson seeks flesh-and-blood fulfilment of her sexual fantasies, with not a break in the tension. It is a pity such a tour de force of technique should turn out to be such a thoroughly nasty film.

The opening scene sets the tone as the camera glides up and down a nubile body, apparently belonging to Angie Dickenson, as she stands under a steaming shower. (I say 'apparently' because in fact the body is not Angie Dickenson's: Hollywood evidently feels the real body of a woman over forty will do little for its box office returns.) Remembering *Psycho* we wait for her assailant who turns out to be a fantasy lover with all the subtlety of a rapist. We discover our middle-aged housewife has a somewhat

unsatisfactory love-life. Predictably she goes in search of something more, and thus, in terms of the film's thinking, deserves everything she gets for being so brazenly concerned with her own sexuality.

If that were the only criticism to be made of the film, it would be nothing new. The 'she asked for it' view of women has been served up many times before. What angered me more about this film was its voyeurism. As the plot advances, playing curious tricks with expectations and assumptions about hero figures, you get the feeling that scene after scene is constructed to offer more than its face value. Many scenes are played for laughs: the stereotyped, black lace seduction of the psychiatrist, the minutely detailed account of how a sex change is physically achieved. And they are quite funny. But in both cases you feel the humour and irony of the scenes concerned was of secondary importance to de Palma, whose aim was simply to find some vehicle by which to convey the titillating details to the voyeur sitting behind you.

I am all for erotic scenes in films. Very, very few films, however, display any understanding of women's sexuality. In most cases the women moan while the men come. More recently, as if a memo had been issued in Hollywood, there have been attempts to show 'the female orgasm', since 'liberated women' have become marketable. De Palma obviously took note of the memo. He must have pieced his film together with all the care of a chef preparing an exotic dish: take a frustrated, sexy, middle-aged woman, with thighs open to groping impersonal hands; a psychotic transvestite who rejects masculinity; a high class hooker with the ingenuity to play detective. Blend characters together around an insubstantial plot and what do you have? A film which degrades women more blatantly than any other I can remember in recent years.

Jane Ure Smith

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## R is for Revolution

On November 7th 1917 the working class of Petrograd, sick of war and starvation, seized power from the inept provisional government. The revolution was organised through the Soviets and led by the Bolshevik Party. How did the ever impartial British press see the world's first socialist revolution?

On November 9th the news hit the headlines. 'Zederblum (?) alias Lenin claims power,' screamed the *Daily Mail*. 'Pro-Germans capture Russia and Demand Peace Now... Russia reduced to Anarchy...' wrote the *Daily Express*, which continued, 'Lenin, the German Agent, is in control and all the forces of anarchy have been let loose.' The *Daily Mirror*: 'Lenin (the German agent) and the Russian Anarchists have overthrown the Government in Petrograd and have assumed power.'

Blaming revolutions on enemy agents and anarchists (especially in wartime) is what you would expect. But how did these Bolsheviks, 'the most dangerous and reckless body of anarchical extremists in Europe' (*Daily Telegraph*, November 9th), manage to pull it off?

'Little is to be hoped,' lamented the *Daily Mail* (November 9th), 'from men who destroy governments to the watchword of the revolution passed a fortnight ago by the Petrograd Workmen's Council, "Down with Everything".'

The *Daily Telegraph's* analysis was similar but slightly more sophisticated. Apart from the 'small body of convinced fanatics, many of them cultured and self-oblivious,' and the 'large number of Germany's agents and sympathisers who see in Bolshevism the force most likely to destroy the Russian army,' there is finally 'the rabble who think only of loot.'

But the real threat of the Bolshevik appeal is this: 'Other socialistic parties promise the population the ownership of the land and of the factories in which they work at some distant and indefinite date. The Maximalists promise them

these things at once. In fact they invite them to take them. That is one of the greatest dangers of Bolshevism' (*Daily Telegraph*, November 8th).

'The Soviet,' complained the *Daily Mail* (November 10th 'has successfully convinced the working classes in the towns that their duty is to do as little work as possible and to get as much money as possible.'

But of course this state of anarchy, with lazy, greedy workers and a looting rabble, could not last. How could it when ignorant, common people took over? As the *Daily Mirror* reported, with something of a shock:

'Sailor Made Governor-General of Finland... Engine Driver Appointed Vice Governor... Post for Labourer.'

The press was soon confidently predicting the imminent downfall of the Bolsheviks. Quoting an 'official communique,' the *Mirror* claimed (November 12th), that the 'liquidation of the Bolshevik adventure is only a matter of days or even hours...' and four days later, that 'it would appear that the Leninists have lost the confidence of the people.' (This was based on the first 'authentic' news from Petrograd.)

The *Daily Telegraph* on November 14th even went so far as to quote a Swedish Social Democratic newspaper to the effect that Kornilov, 'the general who had the courage to say that only by military dictatorship and the suppression of these fatal committees could Russia be saved...' held Petrograd and that Lenin had been taken prisoner.

This substitution of wish-fulfilment for reality underlay Fleet Street's outrage at the Bolsheviks' proposals to stop the carnage of the war. *The Times* (November 9th) could not believe that 'the real Russia will ever consent to make a separate peace, or ever acquiesce in all the extravagances of the soviet manifestoes... The great mass of people if they were allowed to express themselves freely on the subject would not countenance any such procedure.' And the *Daily Telegraph* thought it impossible that 'the Russian people as a whole can either sympathise with or support men like Lenin and Trotsky' (November 25th).

But the real Russia failed to stand up. The British press explained this by printing lurid stories about how 'the ignorant masses and the demoralised soldiery' had been indoctrinated to believe that peace would bring bread and land (*The Times*, November 9th). The leaders were German agents (*Daily Mail*, *Daily Express*, November 9th). In particular, Lenin, 'the popular idol... the

creature of Berlin... bought a house recently for £80,000... Before the war he lived in Geneva in poverty for several years... He suddenly became rich with German gold at the end of 1914' (*Daily Express*, November 9th and 15th).

On November 23rd, the monster was finally revealed to the British public. On the front page of the *Mirror*, under a huge picture of a nondescript army officer, read the inscription: 'First photo of Lenin to be published in Britain shows him seated on a horse leading a procession of pacifists.' Quite a scoop!

Lenin was accompanied in his foul deeds by the 'extraordinarily clever and quite unscrupulous' (*Telegraph*, November 9th) Trotsky, 'alias Braunstein (sic), an anarchist who has made most countries too hot for him' (*Daily Mail*, November 9th).

Typical of this dangerous man was a 'violent demagogical speech' he made to the Soviets concerning the publishing of secret peace treaties. 'It is difficult to believe,' snorted the *Daily Mail* indignantly, 'that such a speech could be made in the twentieth century. It was rendered possible only by the level of intelligence of his audience,' who were told that 'all the secret treaties which were now in his hands would soon be published. Russia would fling them on the rubbish pile.' The correspondent thought it unnecessary to comment on this speech, 'which, I am convinced, is as unpalatable to the Russian democracy as the enemy of the Allies' (November 24th). So much for German agents!

The new regime, despite press encouragement, failed to vanish overnight. The Fleet Street hacks were compelled to recognise 'the sober truth that Petrograd is as perfectly calm as a London suburb on a bank holiday... Trains still run, electric lights still burn, tradesmen still hand over goods in return for scraps of paper that are called money and even the postman goes on his daily round' (*Telegraph*, November 21st).

Russia's present plight,' wrote the *Express* (November 24th) with rare insight, 'has no parallel in modern history... Today there is no such thing as the Russian state.' The last word belongs to *The Times* (November 9th), which just two days after the Bolshevik revolution summed up the true feelings of the old ruling class. 'When constitutional authority is palpably incapable of backing words by deed, when anarchy is allowed to increase daily, when arms are recklessly given to the mob, then the end cannot be far off.'

Andy Durgan