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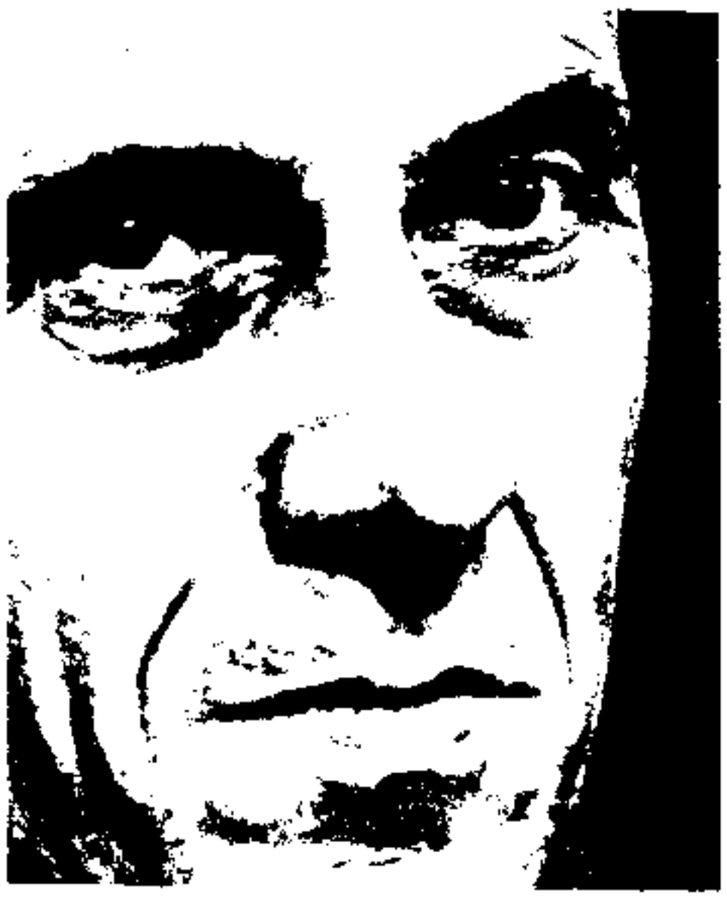
socialist
REVIEW
Monthly Magazine of the Socialist Workers Party

Was God a Tory?

A seasonal look at the origins of Christianity

INSIDE: Should socialists be inside the Labour Party? Tariq Ali debates with Socialist Review / Tebbit's Bill explained / Are the Tories finished?



Tebbit: Now for the bill that bites

Norman Tebbit's name was unknown to most people until a couple of months ago. But the Bill he is preparing to push through the House of Commons is rapidly changing that. For it represents a very big challenge indeed to certain basic forms of trade unionism, even if the challenge is dressed up as a mere tidying up of odd aspects of the existing law.

A number of elements in the proposed Bill are especially important.

The press has concentrated its attention on the question of the closed shop. But the real centre of the Tory attack is somewhere else—in its complete banning of all types of 'secondary' industrial action. 'Lawful' trade disputes are to be restricted to 'disputes between an employer and his own employees'. So any attempt to stop one firm functioning normally in order to aid workers in another firm will be open to action by the courts—injunctions and the imposition of damages.

In effect, virtually all forms of solidarity would be illegal. So would attempts by workers in unionised establishments to force employers of non-union labour to come to terms with the unions.

So, for example, container drivers from well organised firms have been using blacking on the Liverpool docks to bring to heel firms with weak organisation, whose drivers accept appalling conditions and low wages. This would now be illegal, since neither those calling for the blacking nor those enforcing it are 'in dispute with their own employer'. Again, printers in the NGA and SLADE refuse to work with graphics or typesetting not produced in union shops. This too would be illegal.

This represents an improtant tightening up the provisions of the existing Tory Employment Act. When that was drafted there was a lot of pressure from Tory MPs to ban all secondary action. But in the end, it was mainly 'tertiary actions' (for example, the banning from some ports of lorry firms that had scabbed at other ports) which were made unlawful. Tighter restrictions, it was argued by both Prior and important groups of employers, would be counterproductive, by provoking defiance and strikes against the law.

However, in the 18 months since Prior's law came into force, union leaders have sat back and allowed the courts to dictate what can and what cannot be done. And the rank and file has not felt confident to act without official support. Now the Tories feel they can easily get away with a further restriction on workers' rights.

Linked to the attack on basic solidarity is the making unlawful of 'disputes relating solely to matters occurring outside Great Britain'. This would, of course, penalise workers who blacked products meant for South Africa or Chile. If dockers refused to load coal meant to break a strike of miners in, say, Poland, that too would be illegal.

Most immediately, it would mean an open attack on the campaign the International Transport Federation has been waging for some years now to force 'flag of convenience' ships to pay union rates.

The third thing in the proposed Bill which will be of particular significance is the way it extends who can be sued for 'unlawful' actions. Until now only individuals have been liable, not unions. In this way the Tories sought in the Prior Employment Act to avoid antagonising the trade union bureaucracy and, above all, to avoid what happened with the engineering union over the Con Mech dispute eight years ago—the whole union membership came out on strike when the courts seized its funds.

But again, the failure of unions to respond to legal attacks over the last year has convinced the government it can get away with a lot more now.

Not that the Tories are really intent on extracting large sums of money from the AUEW, the EEPTU or the TGWU. Rather, the cleverer of them recognise that threats to the unions' finances will be a marvellous excuse for officials who want to persuade their members not to engage in certain actions. They believe that Terry Duffy, Frank Chapple and Alex Kitson will instruct their members not to picket for solidarity action rather than risk a loss of union money.

Once unions have denounced their own members, it will be much easier for the courts to get away with imposing punitive damages on individual strikers.

It is here too that the proposal to make explicit a ban on 'political' strikes is important. You can just see union officials arguing that calls for, for example, stoppages against Heseltine's attack on local authority services and jobs cannot even be discussed, since they would put the unions funds at risk. Finally, the proposals on the closed shop—which increase the level of compensation for scabs who refuse to join the union—have a sting in their tail. This compensation would no longer be paid just by the employer. 'The government believes the trade union should be liable to pay a share of any compensation.'

At the moment, unions are only liable for such compensation only if the *employer* raises the question of union pressure on him—something which in practice does not happen, because an employer who wants to placate the union by dismissing a scab is not then going to upset the union by demanding that it pays the compensation.

The new Bill will change this state of affairs. The *sacked scab* can demand payment from the *union*.

It is easy to see the bitterness this will cause in many factories. Scabs will effectively be able to blackmail the union into giving them some of the dues paid by the union membership. Being a non-unionist will become a very profitable business.

The Bill is not just an example of crude Tory union baiting. It is an intergral part of the Tories' plans to increase the competitiveness of British capitalism if and when the economy begins to expand out of the recession—as David Beecham shows later in this issue. It will hamper struggles where secondary picketing is crucial to success (and that is an increasing proportion of struggles). It will provide added excuses for the 'moderates' in the unions to sell out strikes. It will make it much more difficult for unions to control the introduction of new technology by blacking products produced by weakly organised workforces.

The Tories feel confident they can get this law through now, without much bother either from the union leaderships or the rank and file, because of the very widespread defeatism and demoralisation on the factory floor. The TUC, no doubt, will organise the token protests—as it did over Heath's Industrial Relations Bill. But this time there will not be the widespread unofficial action that built up the pressure for defiance of the law in 1972 and 1974.

The Tories could be right. But there are factors in the Bill which could upset their calculations. For their proposals open the door for maverick employers and greedy scabs to initiate legal actions that, from the point of view of the ruling class as a whole, are tactically mad.

The situation could arise in which a single cowboy lorry firm was to try to drag a powerful group of workers, like the Merseyside container drivers, before the courts or in which a non-union scab provoked his workmates beyond endurance by demanding that the union 'compensate' him.

It was such cases that undermined the strategy of the employers and the government in Heath's time. The working class movement feels weaker today. But they could still reduce Tebbit's plans to chaos.


THE GUARDI

Printed in London and Manchester

SDP takes 49 per cent in 'upheaval' election • 19,000 Conservative lead wiped away • Labo

Crosby topples as Shirley Williams sweeps home


STAR

1am: CROSBY GOES SDP

SHIRLEY!

She's in after an amazing landslide

SHIRLEY WILLIAMS romped home to a sensational victory in the Crosby by - election early today and turned politics upside down.

The Labour Left's day of reckoning

Facts have to be faced, however hard they are to bear. Crosby confirms that the social democrats are much more of a force than any of us expected. It is possible to speculate endlessly about how much of their support they will hold through to the next general election. But one thing is now absolutely clear. The havoc being wreaked by Thatcher does not guarantee a Labour government in 18 months or two years time. Those who believed that the swing of the pendulum plus the packing of a few committees would be enough to bring about a 'Labour government of a new type' will have to think again.

Already we can see the social democrat gains pushing Labour to the right. Foot hangs on to every potential defector, giving key jobs to people who have been suggesting openly they may make the switch. The soft left around Kinnock hang on to Foot. The 'hard' lefts find themselves isolated, not knowing whether to keep fighting as in the past, or to repair their bridges to the soft left and the centre.

But no amount of manoeuvring will enable the Labour left to come to terms with its problems. For the source of them is not an 'accidental' defeat in conference votes or an 'accidental' slump in the vote at Crosby. It is that they are weak and have been pretending they are strong.

The honest elements of the Labour left want to challenge the present system. But the forces they have to challenge it with are still a small *minority* inside the working class.

That minority can be enough to get the occasional resolution through the committees of the local Labour Party or to get the right sort of constituency delegates to conferences. It can even be enough to get quite large one-off demonstrations. But it is not enough to gain substantial victories in the face of determined opposition from a highly experienced and still powerful ruling class.

Of course, those of us who are *revolutionary* socialists are an even smaller minority. But we recognise a minority can begin to win if—and only if—it relates to wide sections of less political workers who find themselves in struggle against this ruling class, often on issues which seem 'trivial' or 'economistic' to the established politicos—wages, conditions of work, resistance to redundancy, opposition to rent *and* rate increases. This is precisely the kind of agitation that the Labour left have not, in the overwhelming majority of cases, been prepared to carry in the past. It has seemed unimportant compared with their obsession with passing resolutions, electing conference delegates, winning reselection conferences, manning council committees. They simply have not noticed how cut off they themselves have been from the vast bulk of working class people in any locality.

Now they're paying the price for it. Crosby was one part of the price. The miserably small demonstration that greeted the Jobs Express in London was another. Even the political minority will not keep agitating and demonstrating indefinitely unless they feel they are getting somewhere.

In the past year the very low level of real class struggle has been accompanied by a 'political upturn '—an increased interest in politics among a several hundred thousand strong minority of workers. The danger now is that set-backs suffered by the Labour left and the failure of demonstrations by the minority to achieve anything will lead to renewed demoralisation and depoliticisation.

The job of revolutionaries is to counter this, by going out of our way to involve supporters of the Labour left in joint activity around real struggles. These may be small at the moment, but in them the small victories can be won that sustain morale, rebuild organisation and prepare the ground for the rise in the level of class struggle that is to be expected in the not-too-distant future.

socialist REVIEW

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The Labour left and the mood for compromise

The Labour left would not accept most of our analysis of what is happening in the party. But they were having to make some reassessments even before Crosby. To get one of their views, we sent Jonathon Brearman to interview **Nigel Stanley**, secretary of the Labour Coordinating committee (speaking in a personal capacity).

Nigel began by insisting that Healey's victory at Brighton should not be overrated.
First of all I wouldn't take the defeat of Tony Benn as a loss. It would be very inaccurate. Two years ago nobody would have thought that a candidate identified with the left would come so near to capturing a major position. The fact that he did so well was quite an achievement for the left.

The loss of the left majority on the NEC is a big problem. But it would be wrong to say there had ever been a hard left majority on the NEC.

Nigel went on to talk of the 'soft' or 'inside' left in the parliamentary party and on the NEC who have refused to support Benn in the struggle against the right.
I think they were toally wrong. They may well have had legitimate political criticisms of Tony Benn. However, to express those criticisms by letting in the candidates of the right, and the hard right, seems to me totally wrong.

But I don't think there is now any point in going through a stage of defining the Labour left as very narrow, or going through an orgy of recriminations.

'It would be tactically divisive', he said, to oppose 'soft left' MPs at reselection conferences. He then went on to argue that a rerun of the deputy leadership contest next year might not necessarily be the best way for the hard left to fight back.
The LCC iself has decided at its AGM, by an overwhelming majority, that there should be a moratorium on discussing whether the deputy leadership should be contested. It seems to me that a whole number of issues will have to be taken into account before that. The likelihood of defeating Denis Healey would clearly be paramount. But there are other factors as well. The party at the base are beginning to think more of the next election, and may not want to have another prolonged inner-party struggle.

Certainly the one thing the left should be learning from the deputy leadership election was that those unions which had the most democratic procedures, apart from the NUM, tended to go for the right wing candidates. So the left is beginning to think of developing a strategy which will win support for left policies outside the narrow ranks of inner party struggle. It could well be that winning support among the rank-and-file of the unions could be more important for the left over the coming period rather than the precise form of inner-party struggle around the deputy leadership question.

Very few people on the Labour left have ever claimed that socialism itself is very popular. It may well be true that some Labour policies like unilateral disarmament and opposition to EEC membership, a return to full employment are popular policies, but that doesn't mean there is mass support for how a socialist society should be organised. Those on the left who think that usually find it is a mistake.

There are no short cuts. One can't wait for the inevitable swing of the electoral pendulum to put Labour into government. This is why the LCC is committed to extra-parliamentary mobilisation. We are still clearly a long way from that mobilisation. Many of the things we are going to do are going to be small at this stage. It means more campaigning, linking into the peace movement, which is clearly mobilising many people. It means going out and winning support for our policies.

Nigel recognised that one tactic for winning the party to the left which has been made much of by the media – the reselection of MPs – had not had any great effect as yet.
It is an error to assume that most constituencies have hard left majorities in them, allowing reselection or deselection at will. There are some people in the Labour Party who thought mandatory reselection would have a dramatic effect. But I have never thought that. The left simply hasn't been strong enough.

In one sense I think there is a mood for compromise. The Liberal/SDP Alliance poses a major threat to the Labour Party. There are certainly no easy assumptions about Labour winning the next election. Indeed, I would go so far as saying that it is extremely unlikely that Labour will have an overall majority at the next election.

So there is some kind of battening-down the hatches in a pre-election period. There is also of course the local council elections next year which a lot of people are worried about. But that is not the reason why MPs are not being deselected.

There is a very real problem. But to say there is a mood for compromise is not to say there will be a capitulation. Historically compromise has always meant that the left capitulates. We are not going to capitulate.

There is a danger that if we continue with inner-party struggle it could actually benefit the right, because they could use that to isolate the left from the centre. After the last election there was an alliance between the left and the centre. But that has now broken down. The centre are now more in alliance with the right. To use Gramsci's phrase, we were then in a war of manoeuvre, we are now in a war of position.

I would argue that the left needs to pay much more attention to developing realistic, not in the right wing sense, but more thought out policies. The left needs policy on social policy questions as well as on simple 'yes, no' issues like the Common Market or not, whether you have the Bomb or not. That seems to me the kind of battle one can have with the right, without it being able to isolate the left from the centre of the party.

The discussion moved on the question of what the Labour left in the local authorities can do.
The situation facing local government is very serious. We are in a cleft-stick – there is no easy obvious way out. Some councils did try to mobilise mass support. On the whole those mass campaigns have not been successful.

To some extent the Tories are winning the local government offensive at the moment. They have clearly won in Lothian. The dilemma then is the extent to which Labour continues in the local government machine when it's not been able to force a successful confrontation with the Tories at national level. Should we just opt out into opposition and throw the whole system into total confusion and attempt to build mass campaigns outside the councils chamber? Many councils are beginning to come round to that conclusion. Derbyshire County Council has already stated that. I think other councils will as they are forced to make cuts or make massive rate increases hitting the domestic rate payer.

Nigel finished by talking about the weakness in Labour's support revealed by the rise of the SDP.
One of the things the LCC pointed out in our analysis of the last election was the crushing ideological victory that Thatcher scored the first election since 1945 where there had been a swing towards the *politics* of a party.

Labour's electoral base has been declining steadily since 1951. If you look at the statistics it is the increase in the third party vote which has led to subsequent Labour victories. The Labour Party is facing a crisis towards which it has been heading for many years. The Liberal/SDP has actually exposed that.

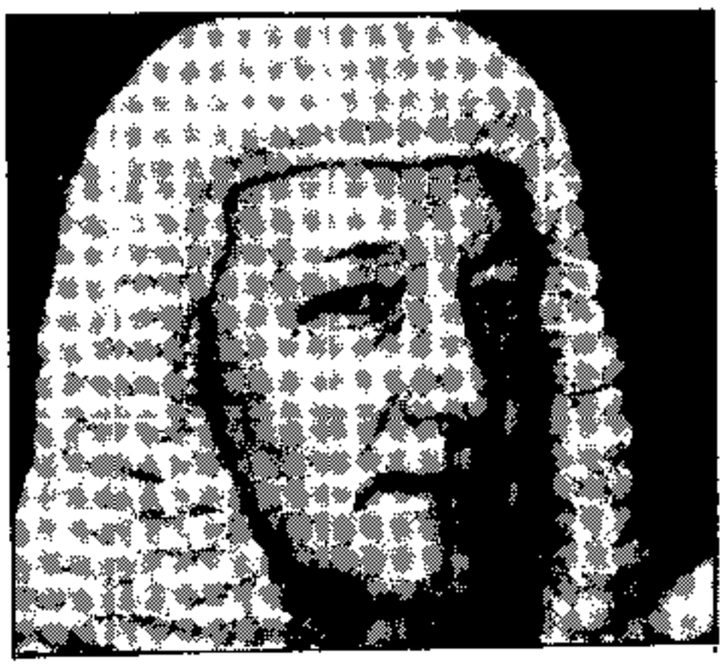
So how does one rebuild support? I think that will require some kind of fundamental re-thinking. We can't assume electorial support any more. We now have to go out and win active support. That means an ideological offensive.

Labour certainly has to look at the militant minorities, but there is something to be said about having a much more feminist perspective of the world, or the kind of policies the ethnic minorities need, and only really look towards the Labour Party for. These seem to form some kind of constituency which can be brought in. We have to develop the right kind of practice towards them.

But that of course doesn't substitute for the organised working class. The number of trade unionists that have not voted for Labour but for the Tories has risen dramatically in the last few years. Some of that may well switch to the SDP and Liberals.

The long, sordid tradition that leads to Denning

When we went to press it was still unknown whether the House of Lords would overturn Lord Denning's judgement on the GLC's cheap fares policy. But one thing was clear—it was the decisions of judges which mattered, not the outcome of elections. **Mark George**, a socialist barrister, tells how this is far from the first time judges have made the law.



Denning's judgement was as clear an example of judges making political decisions as anyone could imagine. It showed how the judges can actually make the law.

For, apart from Acts passed by Parliament, "statute law", English law is also made up of the "common law" – the collective decisions of the judges going back over hundreds of years. It is true that on occasions the most politically unacceptable decisions of the courts have been overturned by an Act of Parliament but that can take years and in the meantime the judges' decision represents the law of the land.

Political intervention by the courts is nothing new. Lord Denning may be the current most active exponent of the art but he comes from a long and sordid tradition of ruling class warriors in judges robes.

At the beginning of the 20th century the senior judges tried to undermine the right to strike which has been legalised in 1875. In 1901 the House of Lords decided that union blacking of a supplier's products was illegal and that the union officials could be sued for conspiracy to injure him. Then in the Taff Vale Railway Co. case, also in 1901, the House of Lords held that the trade unions could be sued for losses sustained by employers as the result of strike action.

These decisions were a serious blow to trade unionism, and they caused major political upheaval resulting in 1906 in the Trades' Disputes Act which restored protection to the unions.

More recently, in 1964, the Lords delivered a judgement strongly reminiscent of those of the early 1900s. A BOAC employee left the union which had a closed shop agreement with BOAC. Union members threatened strike action if he was not removed which management duly did. He then sued the union members for conspiracy, and the House of Lords declared the action of the union members unlawful. This new attack on the right to strike was only reversed when the new Labour government passed the Trades Disputes Act 1965.

The Thatcher govevernment has attacked the right to picket effectively. Its action, however, is only a culmination of a number of legal decisions of the last 20 years which made pickets liable to arrest for offences like obstruction. In 1960 a picket's conviction for obstruction was upheld in the High Court after a police officer refused to allow more than two pickets on each entrance to the factory. In 1966 the High Court held that pickets who sealed off the roads leading to a factory were guilty of obstruction. In 1972 the House of Lords upheld a conviction of a picket who prevented a vehicle from entering a site for obstructing the highway.

Political preference

The following year the police prevented pickets approaching a coach carrying workers out of a site. In the ensuing scuffle a picket was arrested for obstruction and convicted.

The impact of such decisions was greatly to limit the lawfulness of picketing. They made it much easier for the police to prevent effective picketing and indicated the extent to which the judges were prepared to go in backing up tough police tactics.

The judges are in a position to interpret the law in such a way as to favour their own political preferences.

The Tameside Council case of 1976 is an example. The Tories won control of the local council and informed the Labour Secretary of State for Education that they did not intend to implement the plans of the previous Labour Council to re-organise its secondary schools along comprehensive lines. When the Secretary of State ordered them to do so the council went to court and although they lost in the High Court, both the Court of Appeal and the House of Lords ruled in favour of the council. The legal reason for this decision was that the minister had no reasonable grounds for acting as he did. Behind that, however, it is easy to see that the judges were concerned to maintain grammar schools and put a spanner in the comprehensive system.

Undoubtedly, the most blatant example of the involvement of the judges in making political decisions was the National Industrial Relations Court (NIRC) established under the Industrial Relation s Act 1971.

More recently, however, it is the 'ordinary' judiciary which has conducted the attack on the right to strike and picket which began in the ruling class hysteria surrounding the picketing at Grunwicks in 1977. Then followed a series of decisions which anticipated many of the provisions of the Employment Act 1980 relating to picketing and which no doubt encouraged the Tories to move to implement their proposals shortly after the 1979 election. Often the courts have said that it is for Parliament to change the law and not the courts. But the various decisions are a vivid illustration of the power of the judges to make law when they choose in anticipation of any legislation by parliament.

By ruling that secondary picketing and other basic solidarity action was not "in furtherance of a trade dispute" Denning prevented SOGAT members at Express Newspapers from blacking extra copies when journalists on the *Daily Mirror* were on strike in 1977 and he prevented the blacking of the Press Association during the 1978/9 journalists' strike.

He had the same concept in mind when he declared the picketing of a private steelworks illegal in the 1980 steel strike. Although in that case the House of Lords quickly reversed Denning's decision, no doubt aware that the position would be changed again by the Employment Act, Denning was able to destroy the momentum of the strike at a crucial point.

The response of the leadership of the unions to these judicial attitudes has, all too often, been to bow to 'the rule of law'. But the judges are a powerful arm of the ruling class, and they, as their decisions show, have no doubt at all about where *their* loyalties lie.

The alternatives to Walesa

At the Solidarity congress in October there were divergent views within the leadership as to the way forward. Three candidates who stood aganst Lech Walesa for the presidency of the union received, between them, 45 per cent of the votes. But what did they stand for? Karla Weber looks at the arguments that have been taking place.

The Polish union, Solidarnosc, has united very nearly the entire Polish nation. Peasant and student organisations proclaim their alllegiance to the working class movement by using its name. The intelligentsia, if not actually in the union, hover round its edges as advisors.

There is no doubt that Solidarity is more than a trade union, but being so ubiquitous it can hardly fail to contain a very broad spectrum of political ideas. The birth of Solidarity was an example of unparalleled unity. Now, inevitably, the various currents within it have produced not only internal debate, but also quite bitter fights between its various factions.

While opposition to Walesa is quite widespread it is by no means coherent or organised. Thus he was opposed by no fewer than three candidates for the leadership of the union, although his three opponents had much in common.

First, the general consensus. There is no one who openly advocates the overthrow of the present regime. Thus the ideas of national renewal, ultimate cooperation with the state, the necessity of economic belt tightening, are universal. The aspiration to 'self-management' is also generally accepted. There is little evidence of controversy surrounding the issue, except in the degree of militancy with which real control should be pursued.

The disagreements are over union internal democracy and militancy vis-à-vis the state. Many of the criticisms from Walesa's opponents were very pertinent, yet not one of them seems to have seriously looked to victory in the union elections, to have offered an all round alternative strategy.

One likely reason is an unwillingness to launch into a disruptive faction fight which could damage the union. The conditions are still so harsh, the penalty for failure so great, that arguments against rocking the boat still carry a lot of weight. Disrupting unity is one of the charges against Andrzej Gwiazda, the most serious of Walesa's opponents – a charge which probably lost him a lot of votes. Solidarity members tend to minimise any differences. Even as Karol Modzelewski was resigning as the union's chief spokesman earlier this year over Walesa's cancellation of a general strike without reference to the union's national commission, he insisted: "It is incorrect to speak of divisions in Solidarity . . . There is no better course for the union than to support Lech Walesa."

Yet the dangers of allowing a charismatic figure to rise so far above the heads of other union leaders must now be apparent to many Solidarity oppositionists.

In addition many Polish workers are suspicious of politics, and, especially, of parties. This too makes it very difficult for any group to organise around an alternative programme. For too long, the words 'faction' and 'party' have been associated with thievery, repression, arbitrary decisions and incompetence. By contrast an apolitical appeal seems dignified and honest.

Marian Jurczyk was the most popular runner up in the election, achieving nearly three times as many votes as his nearest rival. When asked whether he was in favour of a government of national salvation he replied:

> "I've never been a politician. I'm a trade union activist. I want to defend the working people. I want them to get decent wages for their work and I want them to live a decent life. That's my aim."

It would be unfair to say that this sadly naive response sums up all of Jurczyk's politics. He wants to insist on rank and file control over the union leadership. He wants a more militant line taken by the union, with fewer compromises and retreats. He wants free elections to the Sejm (Polish parliament) and a government subordinated to it. However, he shares such views with the other candidates. It was his 'honest Joe' image, contrasting with the image of the other candidates as radicals and politicos, which seems to have accounted for his popularity.

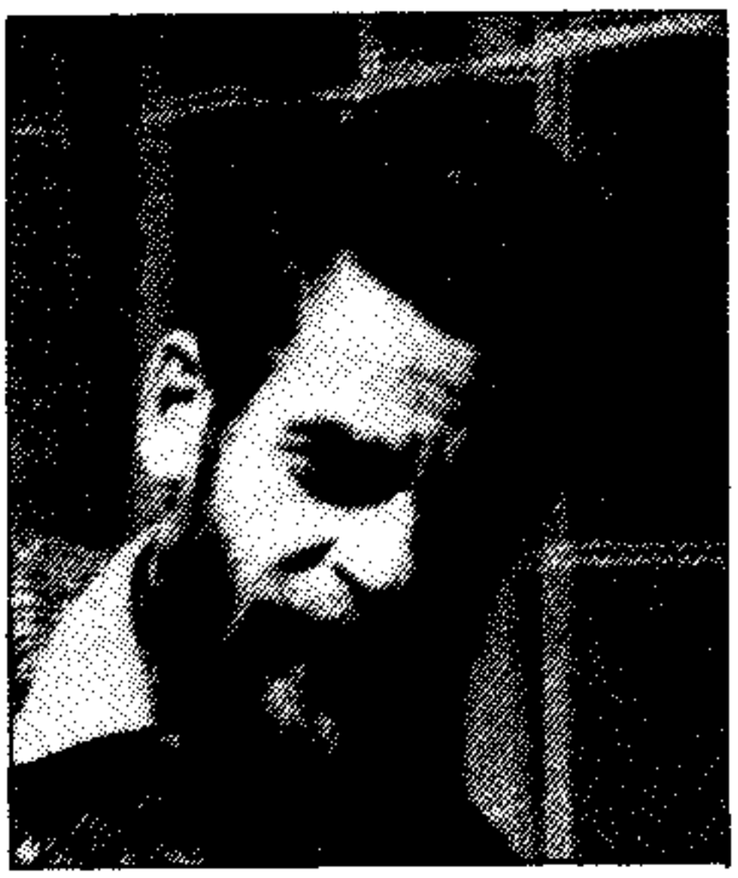
Jurcyczyk's lack of sophistication is disappointing in view of the fact that he is a veteran of the Szczecin shipyards, having been on the strike committee in 1970. Moreover, Szczecin is also the home of a union publication called *Jednosc* (Unity) which has published some very apt Marxist analyses of the Polish situation:

> 'Between the apparatus on one side and labour on the other, a deep class conflict exists which causes antagonisms and conflict in the social life of our country. There remains the class struggle of the Polish proletariat whose aim is social control over the nationalised means of production and, through that, strengthening the force of the entire people's labour.
>
> "Up to now the only effective disposer of the socialist means of production is the politico-state and economic apparatus, acting as a whole with a collective monopoly, as de facto private owners. It influences all spheres of life as well as the most important – control over the use of force, the militia, army, court and prison apparatuses.
>
> "On the left of the power apparatus is the world of labour with its own needs and aspirations which run counter to those of the former. The world of labour's needs and aspirations are authentically represented by the independent, self-governing trade union, Solidarity, organising in unions both party and non-party people."

Marian Jurczyk addressing a Solidarity memorial meeting for the dead of 1970.

Jan Rulewski became nationally well known when he was one of the union activists severely beaten up by the police in Bydgoszcz. He has since gained a reputation as a radical.

His most interesting contribution to the pre-election discussion was an anti-Russian speech which broke a taboo, giving voice to the resentment and hatred of Russia which underpins the Poles' excessive nationalism. It cost him many votes and he came bottom of the poll, but it was much more than an anti-Russian speech. He placed the Polish state in the international context and,



Andrzej Gwiazda

although he concentrated on Poland's relationship with Russian imperialism, what he said could easily be extended to her relationship with her Western imperial creditors.

> "The mass media will argue that I have gone beyond the limits of union activity. Ladies and Gentlemen, the problems of the union have to be seen in a wider perspective. We have to examine foreign policy and no one can lawfully deny us the right to express opinions on this, as foreign policy is connected to economic matters and arms production. It is easy to prove that our activity, our control and formation of public opinion on foreign policy issues mean the control of state budgets, of how much is spent on armaments, and how much on minimum benefits for the seven million Poles who are starving."

The faction centred around **Andrzej Gwiazda** is probably the best defined as a group. Nicknamed 'the constellation' (from the Polish meaning of Gwiazda's name, 'star') their relationship with Walesa's followers is very bitter. Gwiazda himself explained his low vote in the poll by alluding to the number of foul smears and rumours circulating about him.

Like Jurczyk and Rulewski, Gwiazda has attacked the lack of democracy in the union, but his attack has been more central to his politics and much sharper. Speaking of Walesa's 'dictatorship' he said in July

> "A dictator who does not have a a police force or an army at his disposal is reduced to maintaining his popularity and his good relationship with the authorities. In order not to risk his position he has to pursue the politics of co-operation and move towards ever greater concessions, until a rebellious reaction and insubordination appears among the workforce. Then, in order not to lose popularity and in order to maintain his dictatorship he has to turn about and lead the rebellion.
>
> "This results in politics catastrophic to both the union and the country. Necessarily it is a chaotic politics,

Inside the system

At the recent CP Congress something like 40 per cent of the delegates clearly liked the idea of the Russians going into Poland to smash Solidarity. When pushed as to why, individuals would say to you that talk of Poland joining the Inernational Monetary Fund showed that 'Solidarity was counter-revolutionary'. What they forgot to mention was that only a few weeks before one East European country had actually joined the IMF – Hungary. Who rules Hungary? A man called Janos Kadar. How did he get there? He was put in power by Russian troops who 'crushed the counter-revolution' there in 1956, killing 20,000 Hungarian workers in the process.

People who wonder why the Russians have not yet moved into Poland may consider the following news items of the last few weeks:

* On November 16 Leonid Brezhnev told the central committee of the ruling party in Russia that 'food supplies have become the central problem of the present Soviet five year plan'.

It was shortages of food that led to strikes 18 months ago in Russia's huge auto-plants at Gorki, Togliatti and Karma River.

On the same day it was reported that 'food shortages have provoked a wave of strikes and demonstrations in Roumania.' The biggest stoppages were on 16 and 19 October in the coal field at Jiu Valley. The strike occurred despite the fact that the miners were met with harsh repression after their last stikes four years ago.

This time the strikers held Emil Bobu, a leading figure in the regime, hostage until the country's president, Ceausescu agreed to meet them. Ceausescu is treated in his country's media as the country's greatest ever national hero – but when he arrived in the mining area, 'he received a hostile reception and young people threw stones at him'.

All Czechoslovakia's problems were, of course, solved with the Russian invasion of 1968. That is why the country's ruling Communist Party leadership spoke recently of unprecedented difficulties and warned that the economic situation will worsen in the next year. This year industrial growth which was supposed to be 4 per cent has turned out to be 1.7 per cent only.

A recent statement by one of the Russian imposed leaders, Vasil Bilak, that 'unpopular measures' needed to be taken for the sake of increased defence spending, led to 'massive hoarding' of meat, sugar, rice, wine and even detergents.'

Bilak claimed that it was better 'to live in modesty than die in affluence.' Many of the people who heard him seemed to have felt that a better slogan would have been 'food not bombs'.

But it is what is happening back in the USSR that must be worrying Brezhnev most. On 23 October there occurred the worst outbreak of 'civil disorders' in 25 years, according to the *Financial Times* correspondent in Moscow. 'Thousands of Soviet citizens besieged the local Communist Party headquarters and fought pitched battles with the army for three days in Ordzhonikidze, a regional capital in the north Caucasus... Bricks and clubs were hurled at police and soldiers attempting to disperse the crowd with tanks.'

The demonstration against police brutality and corruption only ended when Solomentsev, the prime minister of the Russian Federation rushed to the city and promised to meet people's grievances. But then a strike followed which paralysed public transport in the quarter of a million large city.

'Food not bombs'

Observers noticed that 'as the demonstrations grew, many of those participating seemed consciously to be imitating scenes from films about the Russian Revolution.'

Could it be that Brezhnev is afraid of getting bogged down in a war in Poland when he might need his army nearer home? Could he be afraid that going into Poland might encourage similar developments in Hungary and Roumania, Czechoslovakia and the Caucasus? Could it be that he too has seen the films of 1917? Or are any such suppositions just 'apologies for counter-revolution'?

The popular press in the West often rejoices at the signs of crisis in Eastern Europe. Look, they say, that proves that our kind of capitalism is the only way to run things. The alternative for them is food shortages, with people being forced to give up meat, eggs, cheese and green vegetables for bread and potatoes.

Next time you hear that story, think of the latest Ministry of Agriculture National Food Survey for 1981. This reveals that consumption of food per head in Britain this year was 2 per cent less than last. And there was 'an increase in the sales of cheap, filling foods like bread and potatoes at the expense of milk, cheese, butter, red meat and eggs'.

It is not only in Eastern Europe that 'food not bombs' seems an increasingly appropriate slogan.

lurching from one extreme to the other. It is much more erratic than the politics conducted by a democratic organisation, a politics which can change with the rhythym of fluctuating influences of fractions and differing groups.

"We have everyday examples of this. Walesa, who is presently devoting all his efforts towards suppressing strikes and formulating demands, has agreed to support the strikes at the ports and the airline (LOT) in the face of their determined stand simply because he knew his popularity among these workforces would suffer."

Gwiazda has also drawn attention to the fact that "a dictatorship in the union is a necessary (and sufficient) condition for the absorption of Solidarity by the system." In this way he has drawn a link well recognised by British trade unionists looking at the TUC, the link between collaborationist policies and the bureaucratisation of the union and its possible future absorption and neutralisation by the ruling class.

Victimised unionists

Gwiazda's account of the ground lost by Solidarity over the past year is honest. In every sphere, the right to publish its own papers, the right of access to the media, the defence of victimised unionists, the right to information about the economy so that workers can form sound judgements in the sphere of self-management, the union has made no progress or has lost ground.

"I think it is a mistake," he says, "to think that it is possible to pacify the authorities by making concessions . . . We will not avoid conflict by retreating, concessions can only lead us closer to the ultimate conflict." These views are shared, not only by Rulewski and Jurczyk, but also by many of the rank and file.

Although Gwiazda has said that the workers should 'take control', it seems that he is referring to the management of the economy rather than to political control. He is still articulating the reformist consensus: ultimately a compromise with the government is possible, but not a compromise which gives ground already gained, since there is no prospect of stability while the basic needs of people are not fulfilled and secure.

Even though a reformist, Gwiazda seems to be a man whose ideas could carry the movement forward and who would perhaps move to the left in the light of further experience. His chief weakness seems to be an inability to organise within the union.

> "I do believe", he has stressed, "that if ten million people decide for some reason not to overthrow the government, then a thousand leaders, however bloodthirsty, will not be able to do anything about it. Conversely, if ten million people want to overthrow the system then even the most collaborationist leaders will be unable to prevent it.

Fine. Reds under the beds do not cause revolutions. But it's poor stuff in a situation where what is desperately needed is an organisation to argue and win workers to a specific way of moving forward instead of sliding back. A personal friend of his once commented , "Andrzej is no good at pushing himself forward."

Just how desperate is the need for an alternative leadership in Solidarity can be seen from Walesa's own election speech. Popular though he is, many delegates were appalled. He seemed to be a desperately lost and tired man. Like one mesmerised by a cobra, he seemed capable of talking only of defeat, a theme to which he returned again and again.

> "I am worried that we badly underestimate our partner. We have too much self confidence and at the same time fail to notice problems, troubles and methods by which we can be defeated."
>
> "I mean that we should remember that winter is coming, they can exert pressure on us, and very cunningly so. Simply turn off the taps if we don't show proper respect for them."
>
> "Our problem is that we do not talk often enough amongst ourselves, that we do not look at the partner who is well equipped, who tactically, step by step and in an organised way is attacking our credibility and society's trust in us. This is a deliberate action leading to victory, but not our victory."

Never has the need for a political party been greater. The Polish state understands this. For the first time since the upheavals it has raided a meeting in Kuron's private apartment — because, it claimed, it was being held to organise a new political group. Kuron's group would not be a *revolutionary* organisation – yet that is what is required.

Jacek Kuron: The state now feels confident enough to raid his home.

How Bourguiba got his ninety-eight per cent

Tunisia had her first 'democratic elections' early last month. This was of considerable importance for Tunisia and the Arab world, even if the elections were the expected farce. **Abu Samed,** a Tunisian militant, looks at the background.

Ever since the so-called independence given by France to her local henchmen in 1956, Tunisian peasants and workers have been strongly politicised and have rejected the government's policies. Immediately after independence they refused to accept the treaty drawn up by France or to surrender the arms they held to the military. This lead to massacres of workers. In the 1960s, they rejected the regime's 'collectivisation ' of the land which produced the robbery of the peasants for the benefit of the big landowners. There were uprisings in the poorest areas of Tunisia, some of them armed, so the regime and their backers in the White House had to make a scapegoat of the economics minister and put him on trial. Unions were suppressed, leaders imprisoned, and the ruling party split between those favouring out and out repression and those who felt they would last longer by allowing a degree of political liberty.

The revolutionary movement began to show itself and was viciously repressed. Every year saw a series of trials both of Marxists and nationalists: 202 militants of the 'Tunisian Worker' group were tried in 1974, 66 more in 1975. The student movement also had its share of resistance and consequent repression: the first independent revolutionary group of Trotskyist militants, formed from a split from the banned pro-Soviet CP, were tried and imprisoned in 1968.

Though revolutionaries rejected any association with the regime and its institutions, they realised the need to fight within the unions' within the working class' though these unions were often government-run facades. The workers became more and more radicalised throughout the 1970s and their demands became clearer: an independent workers' movement, effective representation, improvements in conditions, pay rises and the right to strike.

In the face of the increasing class consciousness, the regime formed its own militia to intimidate and attack the workers. This proved to be a failure. In 1977 there was an enormous wave of strikes – led by the workers themselves without the support of the pro-regime union leaders, who had signed a social contract agreeing to a five year ban on strikes, increased production and a wage freeze.

Wildcat strikes across the country followed with resulting repression. Staggered by the militancy of the rank and file, the union leaders did a quick about face and backed the workers' demands. A new government union organisation was created and rejected by the working class.

On January 26 1978 the workers replied to the government attacks in the best possible way: a general strike. 400 workers and students died that day, a curfew was imposed, the elected union leaders replaced and imprisoned. The new union organisation (UGTT) was blacked and the opposition went underground to reorganise strikes and other resistance. Those sacked after the general strike were financially supported by their fellow workers and the students stayed on strike for a further month, when the regime closed the colleges and arrested the student leaders.

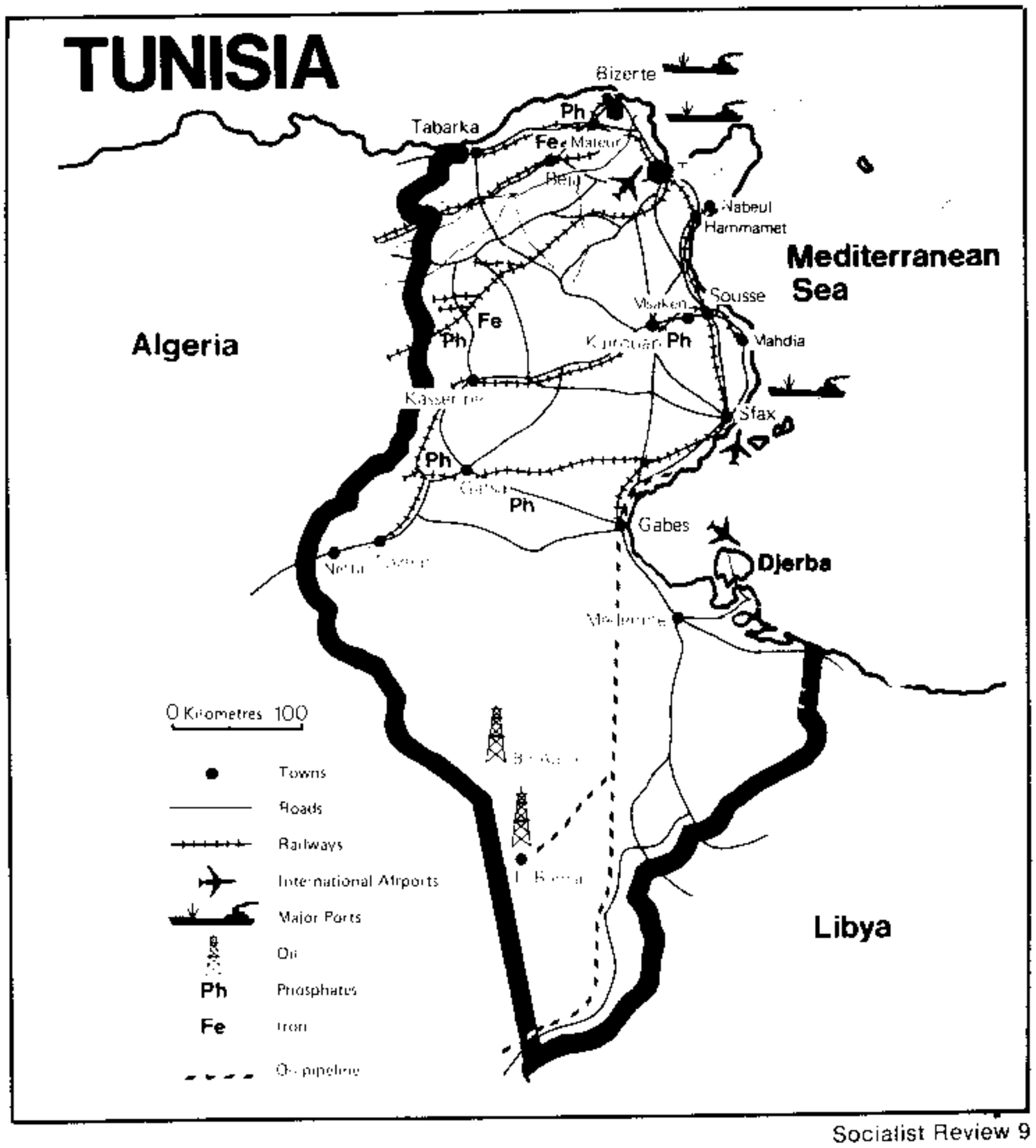
On the second anniversary of the general strike there was an uprising in the south western town of Gafsa, backed by the local people and carried out by returning exiles. The Tunisian army and French paratroops took a week to put it down. In the face of widespread anti-government feeling, the prime minister was replaced, the political prisoners released on certain conditions and an independent trade union movement allowed to exist. The President, Bourguiba, announced that any opposition party gaining 5% of the popular vote would be legalised. Elections were to take place on 1st November 1981.

The elections were a farce designed to defuse the situation and allow the regime to survive. Some 'opposition' parties took part, the Democratic Socialist Movement run by a fomer home affairs minister, the Popular Unity Movement Political Bureau run by a former economics minister, another split from the ruling Destouvian (Constitutional) Socialist Party, and the Tunisian CP. The union bureaucracy formed a coalition with the ruling party.

The election campaign saw more activty from the regime's militia than the opposition: breaking up meetings, threatening assassinations and attacking opposition supporters. In the polling stations the opposition observers were barred.

The results, not surprisingly, showed the regime with 98% of the vote, winning all 136 seats. No party had gained the required 5% to be legalised, and the DSP remains the only legal party. Throughout Tunisia demonstrations condemned the fraud.

The elections provide a valuable lesson to those who believe in the possibility of democracy coming through parliamentary processes. They are a slap in the face for those who expect any change from the regime. The only way forward in Tunisia is through the unity of workers, students and peasants in militant and ultmately armed struggle against the allies of western imperialism and capital.



'Actions injurious to the national economy'

The first priority for the left in relation to Nicaragua must be to oppose Reagan's threats to the country. But that should not lead to the mistake, made so often in the past (Russia, China, Algeria, Cambodia to name but a few cases) of viewing everything that happens inside the country uncritically. Recent events show that it is by no means moving unambiguously in a socialist direction. Dave Beecham tells what has been happening.

On 21 October, the Nicaraguan authorities arrested 28 people. Four of them were officials of various employers' organisations, all members of COSEP, the Nicaraguan equivalent of the CBI. The other 24 were leading members of the Communist Party and the CP-dominated union CAUS.

All were detained under Nicaragua's public order law and emergency regulations, issued earlier this year. These make it an offence to publish information that might 'incite foreign governments and/or institutions to take actions or make decisions that are injurious to the national economy.' It was made clear when this decree was issued that such action would include strikes.

Nicaragua's emergency regulations provide for brisk decisions. You have 48 hours to prepare your defence, and you are sentenced after a further 48 hours. When the cases came to trial three of the business leaders were convicted, one freed. The three received 60 day prison sentences.

Of the union and CP leaders, who included the general secretary and two members of the Council of State, only four came to trial. Three were convicted and one was freed. So far a triumph for even-handedness. The difference was in the sentences. Eli Altamirano, CP general secretary, and two CAUS lay officials got 60 days plus 29 months. It is true that there was a difference in the gravity of the offences. The three businessmen had taken offence at a statement from the leader of the Nicaraguan 'junta for national reconstruction', Daniel Ortega, that businessmen who opposed the Nicaraguan revolution would be strung up from the lamp-posts. They published an open letter in protest, saying that the junta was leading Nicaragua to disaster with a 'Marxist-Leninist adventure'.

Officially at least, the arrests of trade unionists and Communists was for saying the opposite – that the government 'was diverting the revolutionary process to a capitalist line'. They also called for what they quaintly described as a 'worker and peasant government' – an obviously dastardly act in revolutionary Nicaragua.

Their real offence was not words, however. The junta's paper *Barricada* finally came clean at the beginning of November. The guilty men had 'incited and participated in the takeover of the Plasticos Modernos factory' in Managua. In other words they'd organised a factory occupation.

The Sandinista junta has absolute control of the armed forces.

The Chile experience

It is far from clear whether the CAUS members actually did what they're accused of. But the factory was occupied by members of their union.

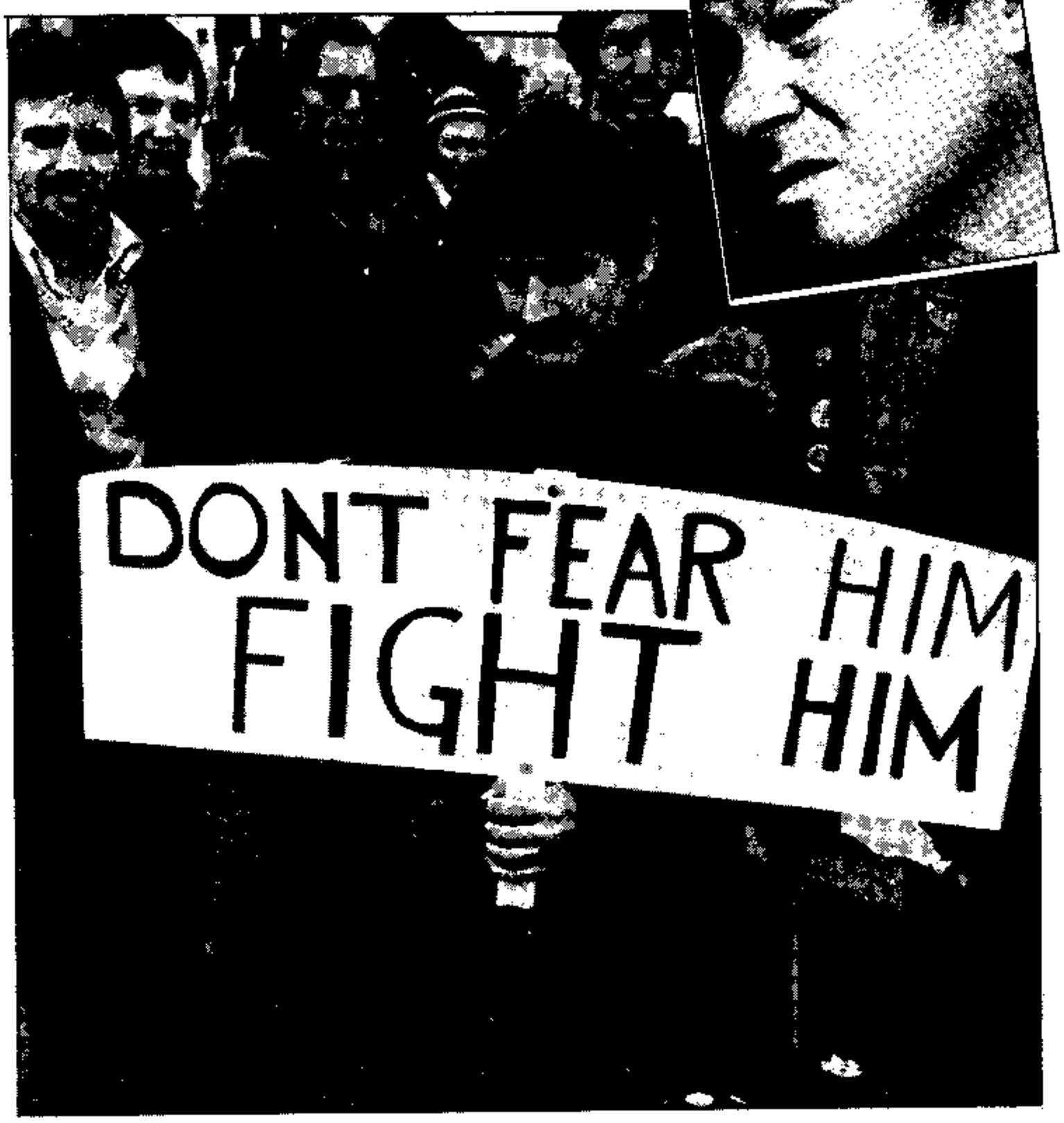
There does not seem to have been any significant protest inside the country about the arrests and sentences (and precious little outside – after all, Reagan doesn't like Commies, other Communist Parties think the Nicaraguans are ultra-left, and quite a lot of 'revolutionaries' want to cover it up).

Whatever the 'special circumstances' and 'objective factors' that may be advanced to justify three year prison sentences for those organising factory occupations, the simple fact is that the Nicaraguan junta is proceeding along more or less the same class lines an the leaders of the Allende government did in Chile in 1972/73 before the coup – antagonising the business sector but moving harshly against the left.

There the similarities with Chile stop – the Nicaraguan junta has total state power and absolute control of the armed forces. Its repression against the left is therefore more powerful and its concern about a workers' upheaval greater because Nicaragua is much weaker economically than Chile was. It is one of history's many little ironies that in Chile it was the CP that was doing the repressing of workers' struggle – in Nicaragua it's the CP that's being repressed. Be that as it may the logic of both processes is similar: oppose workers' self-activity, some things are just too revolutionary.

P.S. Thse readers who think that a government can't be all bad if it jails both businessmen and Communist Party leaders are being disgracefully sectarian!

Leyland: Down but then out



At the beginning of November it looked, briefly, as if the most amazing thing was going to happen. The workers in what the press treat as the biggest lame duck, Leyland, seemed set to lead the whole class in an onslaught on the 4 per cent pay limit being imposed by the government and the CBI. For one day the company was completely strike bound, with pickets that recalled the miners strike of 1972 or the steel strike of 1980 rather than the passivity that normally accompanies car industry disputes.

The strike did not last beyond the second day. To find out why – and to find out why key groups of workers struck again over conditions a week later – **Chris Harman** talked to three SWP shop stewards in Longbridge.

They began by stressing the preparedness to fight that existed in the factory prior to the strike.

'In the fortnight before we had a continual barrage of letters and propaganda off the management. Yet if anything the determination got stronger as time went on. People's feelings got all aroused, partly due to threats we were getting. I've never known the feeling as good as in those two weeks, and there didn't seem to be anything the company could do right.

'There was the most thorough preparation we've ever seen for a strike there. The stewards put out printed sheets, half of which was information, the other half a list of things people could do to help the strike – picketing, whether on nights or days, supplying tea and sugar, getting their wives involved – for them to tick off and supply their names and addresses. Rotas were drawn up.'

This showed that: 'Quite a number of stewards are beginning to learn the lessons of past setbacks. There's been a fair drop in the number of stewards we've got in the plant since the sacking of Robbo two years ago, with a higher percentage of the stewards who do remain prepared to have a go. We're not in a situation where anyone could take a steward's job because they thought it was the first step to being a foreman or anything like that. In taking a steward's job now you're putting your neck on the line.'

'At some of the gates on the Monday there were over a hundred pickets. The evening shift was very well covered as well. There was probably two thousand of the workforce actually participating in the pickets on the Monday and the Tuesday. That's out of a workforce of 14½ thousand.'

Lost momentum

What destroyed this momentum was the deal stitched up between trade union national officials and the company on the Saturday night. On the Tuesday, workers at Longbridge and most other plants – although not at Cowley – voted two to one to accept the deal.

'You can still see the effect of the reliance on officialdom. So many of the arguments in relation to strikes now revolve around the issue of whether it will be made official or not. It was only a minority – although the size of the minority surprised me – who accepted the argument that we go on strike and if the officials back us that's a bonus.

'Many of the people who did vote for a return to work have been apologising to me since for doing it. They say, what could we do, we didn't see how we could win when the officials have done this deal etc.'

'People realised that in order to defeat the Tories' pay policy and the likes of Michael Edwardes – who hasn't lost a battle yet over Leyland – we would have to generalise the strike. The fact of challenging the Tories and the involvement of Len Murray, Michael Foot and these people only served to reinforce the idea that we were talking about a national issue for the working class.

'People went along to the park thinking that we didn't have enough going for us without the massive official support from outside to win the dispute.'

One factor that reinforced this feeling that they weren't strong enough to win was the way Jack Adams put the stewards' recommendation to continue the strike.

'I don't think it would have made a decisive impact on the vote, but there's no doubt the way he presented it did help the vote to go for a return to work. It was agreed the day before at the leading stewards meeting that they wouldn't bullshit the workers, that they'd give a proper presentation to them of what happened at the meeting between the officials and management at ACAS on the Saturday.

'But they would also be putting the recommendation of the leading stewards that the strike continue and the reasons for it. What happened was that Jack Adams leant over backwards to give a fair representation of the officials' case, and his presentation of the leading stewards argument for

the rejection of that case was low key.

'Jack Adams and quite a high percentage of the leading stewards are very concerned about their relationship with the officials as well as their relationship with the shop floor, and they are trying to keep a very careful balance between the two. That's a relic of the old participation system, where the link up with officialdom and looking to a higher level of leadership reflects itself particularly through the senior stewards.'

In terms of the officials, it was not only the right wing leaders of the engineering and electricians union who effectively sabotaged the strike. The 'left' leaders of the TGWU were not that much better.

'Kitson didn't come out for the deal. But his attitude wasn't really much different from that of Chapple and Boyd. I saw the union leaders on *Weekend World*. If anything the attitude which was adopted by Kitson had a worse effect than the attitude that was adopted by Ken Cure. Everything Kitson said was ducking away from any sort of positive approach. He wouldn't say go back to work and he was saying if you stop out we'll continue to make it official. But he was putting it in such a way as to give the impression that it would be a complete waste of time.'

'The T&G over the last couple of years has always wanted to appear more closely involved in backing their members than the other unions. Rank and file members have got more control and have more influence in what goes on inside the T&G than in the AUEW or the EEPTU. But what Kitson did in this dispute, was to allow a whole number of T&G policies to effectively go by default.

'The so-called 'compromise' deal involves a new arrangement of the trade unions inside Leyland, with a severe sapping of any power the shop stewards have got and a no-strike clause. The T&G had a policy of being opposed to these things. Yet they went through on the nod in the so-called improved offer. Kitson overturned a whole year or two years' work by the senior shop stewards inside BL by allowing this so-called improved offer to go forward.

'Leyland have not only got away with a 10 per cent wage cut, but have managed to shove in every piece of legislation they were looking for over the last 18 months or so.'

'The new procedure agreement wipes out the role of the shop steward and institutes a type of work council system where you've got representatives sitting in joint committees with management responsible for dealing with any sort of negotiations. It's like the old Whitley council system.'

The vote at Cowley went the other way than at Longbridge. The three stewards gave their views on this:

'Basically, Cowley felt more secure. They were in as good or even a better situation than Longbridge were last year. They've got the Acclaim, and the reorganisation means the Rover plant being shut down and jobs being moved across into Cowley. It looked to them as if they'd got a secure future. They've got weapons they can fight with, since the company can't afford to lose the Acclaim now.'

'Longbridge isn't as secure as it was last year. The Allegro is definitely known to be finishing at the beginning of next year. The Mini is working at a quarter of the capacity it was working at and there's doubt about how long it will carry on. There's only really the Metro – and now people are beginning to have their doubts about the golden future the Metro promised. To people in Longbridge it looks now like just another in a wide range of similar cars. So there's great feelings of apprehension about the future at Longbridge.'

Bell to bell

But why were people who were frightened to keep up the wages strike back out of the gates a week later over what would seem to be a less important issue?

'On the surface of it it looks ridiculous that workers accept a 10 per cent wage cut and then walk out a few days later over the rest break thing.

'But we faced the same position last year. At Easter the workforce was faced with this ultimatum "accept this 92 page document – if you start back after Easter you will be deemed to be accepting it". People did start back. Yet within a few days they were fighting it.

There was the dispute over togging up allowances for certain groups, which was very much a minor issue. But it was an issue that everyone could see. They were faced with it every day, it was a real genuine issue, and they thought that they were the only ones who knew what it was about.

'National negotiations on national wage claims and procedure agreements tend to wash over the heads of workers. But when it comes to a question of actual working conditions, daily then they know what it's about and they are quite prepared to accept that no-one else knows what it's about, and they are prepared to fight on it.

'Each time they've tried to introduce part of the 92 page agreement that affects working conditions drastically, they've had resistance. Usually one part of the plant has been isolated, they've been out a couple of days, they've got broke and they've gone back. They haven't gained the support. That's the difference this time basically.

'It's still confined to one area of the plant. But a lot of other workers have been laid off and the feeling is still relatively solid.'

'In some areas of the plant the company hasn't really imposed the 92 page document yet. In other areas, where they have been working flat out from bell to bell, the people really feel that the imposition of the rest allowance cuts on them was just the final straw.

'It's very little to do with tea breaks. We don't have tea breaks as such. They're called relaxations allowances or rest allowances for a specific reason. You need the rest allowance to recover from the work and to have a chance of surviving. In the breaks, which only last 15 minutes on the track, you have to go to the toilet, get yourselves some tea, go and get yourselves food if the canteens are open. For a bloke whose working himself into the ground to keep pace with the track these rest allowances are the only thing that keeps you sane. So it's not a tea break strike. That's the important thing.'

'It is a fatigue allowance. I was reading an article on Taylorism that some Phd fellow wrote. He was talking about the Bedoe system. Built into the timing on the job is the system of fatigue allowances. They calculate on the very cold scientific basis that the optimum work that they can get out of people spread over a period can only be reached if there is rest from fatigue. So the rest allowances are actually part of the calculation in getting the maximum efficiency out of a worker.

'Without adequate breaks, the level of absenteeism rises. It reflects itself in the bloke who can't get in on the Friday or the Monday.'

'But the company think they've got the answer to that with the way they operate the disciplinary scheme. Half the people in our area have got written or further warnings on their necks at the moment.'

'The management are taking the Bedoe system to its ultimate, breaking down the fatigue allowance calculation by whipping out all the old people and the sick people and so on. When people come back after being sick, and sign on back because they're fit for lighter work, they've been telling them, "We've got no work for you, go back on the box or take your redundancy". They're trying to get rid of the old, the sick, the disabled and just to keep the young people. With three million unemployed, they don't think they have to worry about keeping people for a lifetime. They just want the young sprinters.'

'It's the law of the jungle up there. Only the fittest survive. If you're not prepared to supply the amount of energy they need, they get rid of you.'

The pensions people did a survey a couple

of weeks ago, and they reckon that in Longbridge there's only two people who will reach retiring age in the next twelve months.'

The danger for the rest allowance strike at the time of the interview was that only part of the plant so far is affected – the body and assembly lines, as opposed to the part supplying engines for Cowley.

'Any strike can't stand still. It's either got to escalate or its going to stagnate and deteriorate.'

Unfortunately, it was a fortnight before the senior stewards agreed to try to get the other sections out.

'At first they tried every bureaucratic manoeuvre under the sun to prevent a resolution for this going through the joint shop stewards. At the first meeting at the beginning of the dispute we put a resolution in, but we weren't allowed to move it because it hadn't been on the table for five days. At the second meeting, our resolution was talked out by another raised at the meeting. At the third meeting we found they'd moved round to our position – two weeks too late.'

The result was that a large section of the plant was not touched by the first two weeks of the strike.

Demoralisation

'In the track areas, on the body side and the assembly side, the argument was put successfully on the first day on the night shift that though management weren't imposing the cut in rest time on them yet, they had to take action. The works committee advice to continue working normally didn't have much effect.

'But in the power and train area – which produces engines for Cowley – there weren't the people there to put these arguments. The easy option was taken, so they found themselves working until such time as management feel the opportunity is there to impose what they want.'

The strike so far had been very passive.

'The overwhelming defeat and the overwhelming demoralisation that came out of the defeat on pay has had its effect on the people who would normally be arguing for picketing the gates, for taking action and activity. They just haven't had the energy to argue for those policies. The only people who've actually argued for them have been committed revolutionaries – basically the SWP and our contacts. And we are far too small to swing major issues like starting picketing.

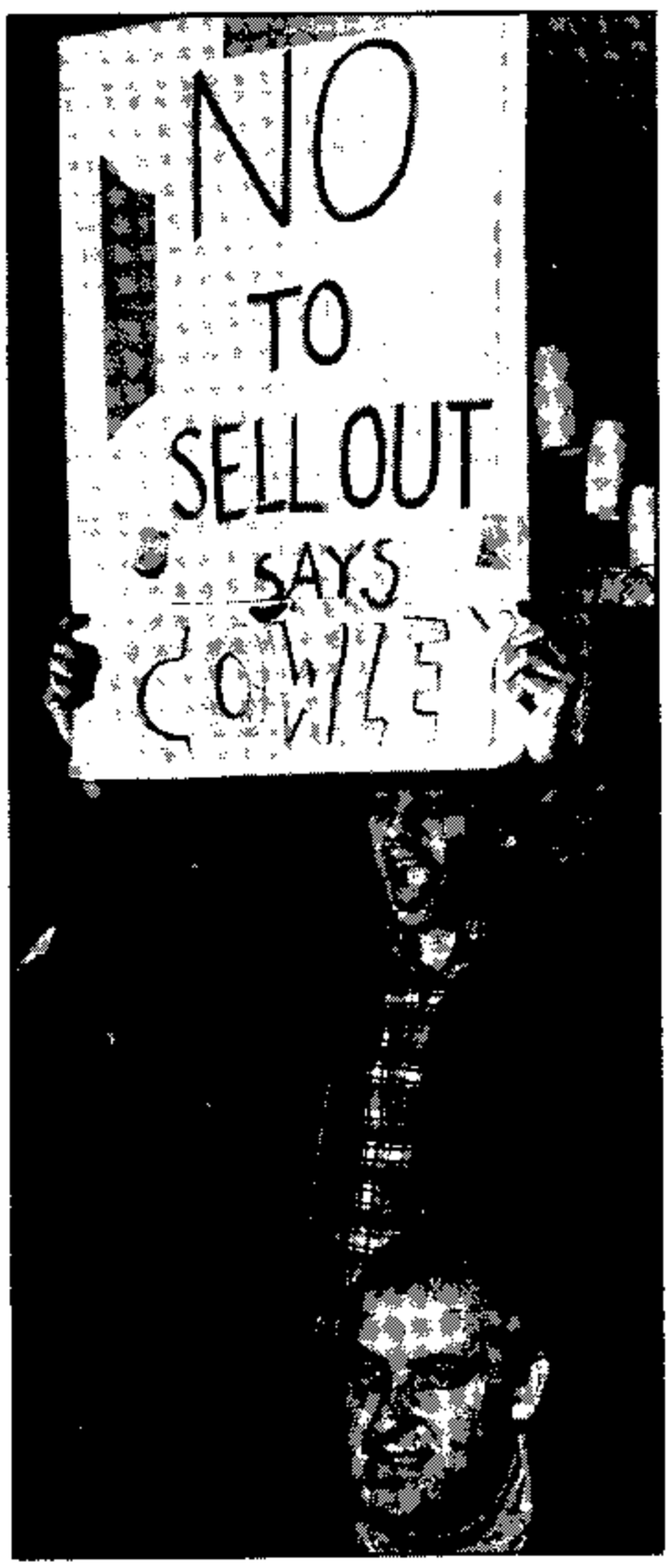
'There's no cars being produced, and so people have felt "why bother picketing?" It's a very passive strike.'

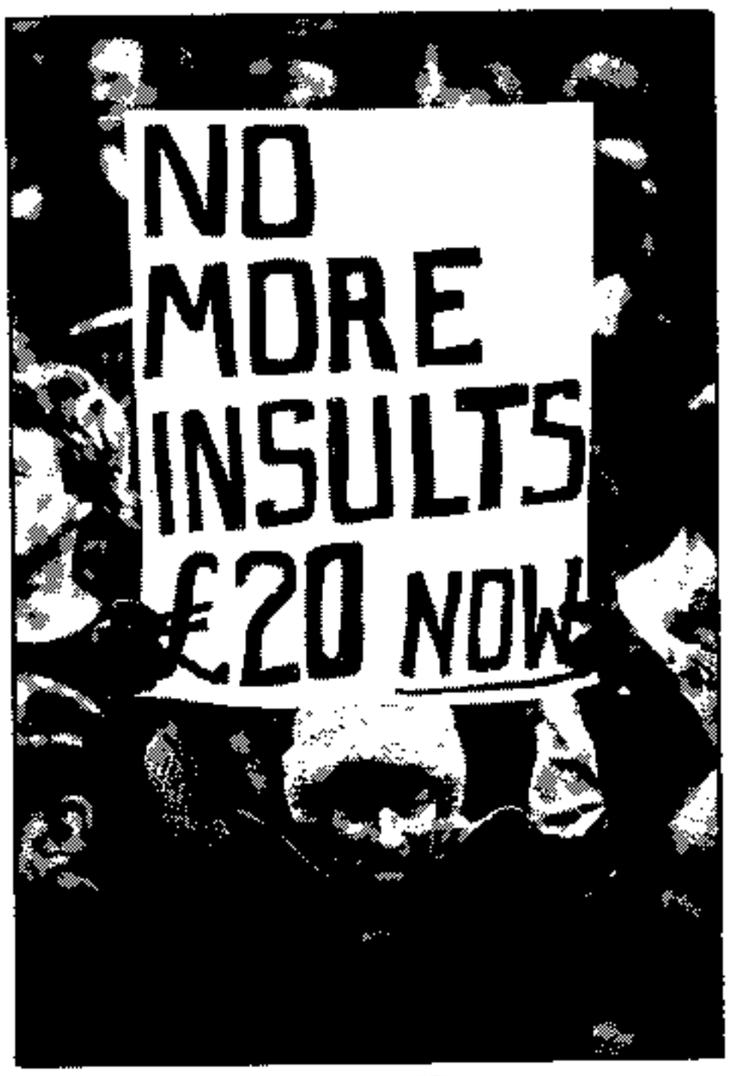
Yet despite this:

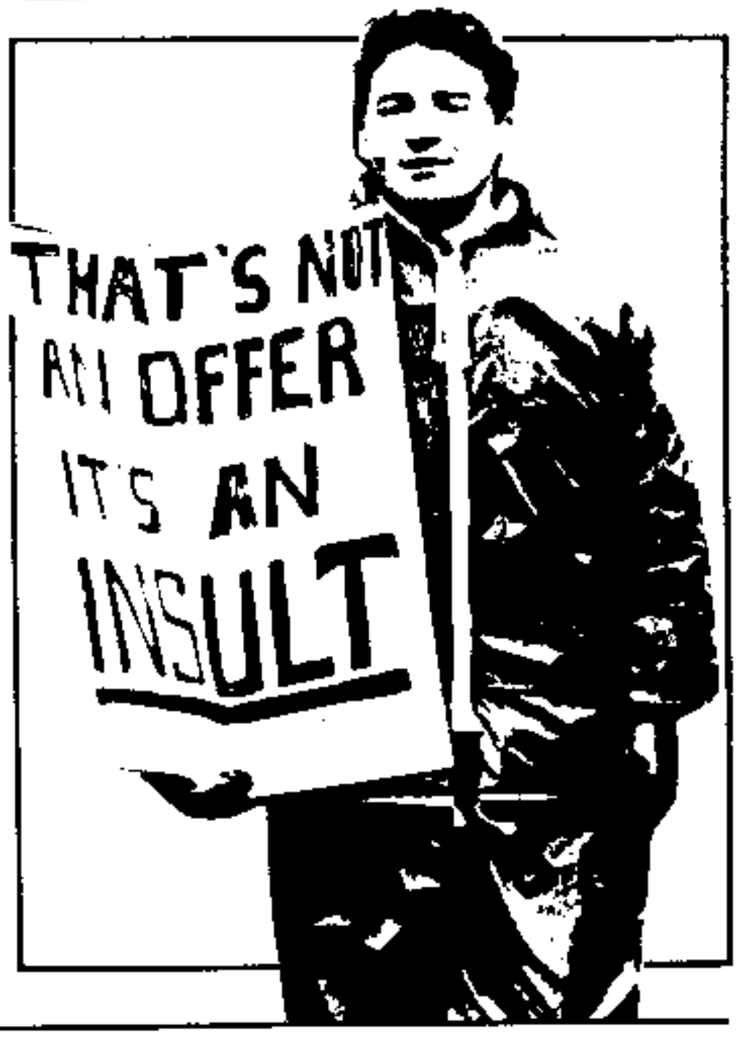
'It's got to be pointed out that the present strike is the longest major strike in Longbridge for a good few years.'

'It's the longest strike I can recall, going back to 1953, which was the 13 week strike.'

The battle over pay in Leyland may have joined 1981's long list of defeats and catastrophes. But the one day of mass picketing and the subsequent rest break strike show that there is a minority of workers prepared to fight, despite everything. And that means Thatcher and Edwardes cannot expect to get their way for ever.







So many of the arguments in relation to strikes now revolve around the issue of whether it will be made official or not. It was only a minority—although a surprisingly large minority—who accepted the argument that we go on strike and if the officials support us that's a bonus.

Reaping a bitter harvest in the engineers' union

The latest batch of election results in the AUEW contain few surprises. They confirm the trend which was highlighted in 1977 when Terry Duffy, until then an unknown from Wolverhampton, beat Bob Wright as successor to Hugh Scanlon.

Last year the trend was speeded up when Duffy stood for re-election and romped through on a first ballot (taking more votes than all the other candidates combined) to put him in the job for life.

This time round there were four elections for places on the seven-seat Executive Council. Again two of these were won outright by the 'moderates'. Jack Whyman demolished Roger Butler, one of the strongest Broad Left contenders from Southall District, for the London and Home Counties seat (13,581 votes to 6,706). In the North East Jim Murray, convenor at Vickers and leading exponent of 'Workers' Plans' was hammered by George Arnold (12,934 votes to 4,895). The other two EC elections for the South Wales-West Country areas and Midlands-North West go to a second ballot which the right should win comfortably.

So far, so bad. But it doesn't get much better. Out of a total of seven elections for Divisional Organisers, four were won outright in the first ballot by the right wing – wiping out the hopes of key Broad Left candidates Derek Robinson and Ron Halverson in the process. To rub salt in the wound Robinson was beaten by Terry Duffy's brother, Dennis, in perhaps the most symbolic election of the lot. The vote was 9,064 to 4,325 – another clear majority of about two to one. Halverson went down by 4,224 votes to 2,874.

Curiously, the headline in the *Morning Star* which reported the results read: 'Left holds ground in AUEW poll'. Later the article admitted, 'the left was disappointed at the low votes declared for accomplished candidates... but no left positions were actually lost to the right'. Ron Greenwood might need this reporter in Spain.

Hardening attitudes

Inside the same issue of the *Star* there were three different analyses of the election results. The first two, completely contradictory, came from Ken Brett who topped the poll in the 'battle' to find a replacement for John Boyd as general secretary. First, he said, 'My emergence as the top candidate of the poll is indicative that members appreciate my record as assistant general secretary for 13 years, which they recognise as the necessary prerequisite for a competent general secretary.' But then, he went on, 'The maximum effort of all progressive members must now be harnessed to combat the machinations of the right wing forces and its agents in the media to *reverse* the result of this ballot.' Why stop now, Ken, when you were doing so well?

Brett, in fact, has virtually no chance in the second ballot when the votes of Gavin Laird (54,708) and Gerry Russell (21,805) will combine to destroy his first round vote of 55,143 votes.

However, the other, and much more serious, verdict on the results came from Derek Robinson who claimed his own defeat was the result of a 'fraud'. He had, he said, been 'guaranteed' at least 7000 votes but came out with less than 5000. So what happened? Did his own supporters exaggerate the 'guarantees' they could win from the members or did 2000 votes go down the pan at Peckham Palace?

Well, there is no shortage of evidence, of course, to show that procedures for counting ballot papers at Peckham Road are a farce. But that, in itself, is only a minor propaganda point. A little bit of fiddling at head office can no more explain a set of ballot results than it can make sense of the much more serious defeats workers have suffered in the last few years, at BL and elsewhere.

The 'fraud' charge only stands up in the sense that nigh on everything John Boyd does is 'fraudulent'. It would be rash to expect anything else from him. The sacking of Derek Robinson himself is one example. There's the Esward and Hughes case, the regular sell-outs of workers fighting back as at BL, Plansee, Laurence Scott and many more. The censorship of Brian Kelly's election address. Blatant manoeuvres on amalgamation. Abuse of the union journal. The bumping of Norman Atkinson. Attacks on AUEW conference delegations. All of these things are a 'fraud'. But Boyd gets away with them, despite all the gnashing of teeth from the left, because the balance of forces, unfortunately, is still in his favour. And the election results show it.

The reasons why are not hard to find. Engineers have been hit as hard as any group of workers by redundancies, short time working, attacks on union organisation and erosion of shop stewards power and influence. To hold any organisation together in the present industrial climate is a monumental, uphill struggle – and all the pressure is on to 'keep the head down'.

This is not a situation in which militants can expect massive victories, *especially* in major elections. Public humiliation at the hands of Boyd we need like a hole in the head. However, a solid minority does exist inside engineering, as elsewhere, which grows increasingly bitter with the treachery of the present leadership. That minority, and it is very small even if you include all the various factions which exist, must make its focus around every factory struggle which does take place.

Never is the difference between 'left' and 'right' so clear than when a group of workers are involved in struggle. Through solidarity work in support of disputes like Staffa Products or Laurence Scott, spreading the struggle around the country, a fighting opposition can be rebuilt on much stronger grounds than the electoral sands of the past.

Recent strikes at BL and at Rolls Royce in Scotland, and a number of smaller disputes, give much more cause for optimism than any of the AUEW ballots. That is where our future strength lies.

John Campbell

Derek Robinson's charges of fraud only stands up in the sense that nigh on everything John Boyd does is 'fraudulent'.

Are the Tories finished?

The government's loss of a safe 17000 majority seat at Crosby followed on from some bitter criticism at the CBI conference at the beginning of last month. But its record is not simply one of failure fro a ruling class point of view. Dave Beecham takes a closer look.

'Mad Monetarism' is a favourite phrase of the Labour left, union officials in particular. It lets them off the hook of having to explain what Thatcherism is about, what the serious aims of the Tory government are and, above all, what the employers think they can win from the crisis.

The fact that there is an economic and political logic to the government's strategy and the employers' offensive threatens anyone who believes in reforms or parliamentary roads . . . or reconstructing the Labour Party. The central aim of the employers is to shift a proportion of 'national wealth' from wages to profits, using the economic downturn to raise the level of exploitation, so that British capitalism is in a much stronger position to compete internationally in a recovery than it was during the recession of the mid-1970s.

The issue for the employers is productivity – which as *Socialist Review* observed in September is a central part of the draft social contract, *Economic Issues Facing The Next Labour Government*, agreed between the TUC and the Labour Party.

The Problem

But they may not get it. The problem was well described in an article in the *Investors Chronicle* last June:

> 'An upturn is unlikely till next year and by then some of our slimmed-down companies will be close to starvation. Second, when demand does eventually pick up there will be considerable short-term productivity gains for the survivors. But management must then be able to resist the inevitable pressures to increase wages faster than productivity and to re-employ some of the 3,000,000 plus workers who will still be without jobs. This will be difficult. For the upturn will quickly bring about a profits bonanza, and workers who have been forced to accept low wage increases in the recession will want a large slice of the cake.'

It was this question whether companies were 'slimmer, fitter and tauter' to use the Tory phraseology that dominated the CBI's national conference at the beginning of November.

The issue was no longer whether they could shout loud enough for the government to hear their protests about interest rates, the National Insurance Surcharge etc. They were discussing the fact that some reflation of the economy was necessary, and whether they could cope with the strains. In particular had they made enough gains on the shop floor, in terms of conditions, speed-up, use of machinery and so on, so that they could either resist or ride the pressure for higher wages when it comes? Not in 1981 or at the start of 1982 but, in their view, at the back end of next year.

Pay in 1982

One speech especially at the CBI captured the mood. It was made by Ronald Utiger, chairman of British Aluminium, Tube Investments managing director and something of an unknown 'cadre' of the ruling class.

The gist of his argument was as follows. The monetarist argument has confused economic debate - there should now be 'a *gradual* recovery not a rush' enabling greater productivity and lower pay settlements to be built on.

Above all (he said) there should be a balanced recovery: Tory policy has been knocked off course by events in America; selective government investment in industry is required along with action to reduce employers costs rates, energy and national insurance. 'Simplistic arguments' against a change in strategy should be rejected and it should be accepted that 'some risks have to be taken' because 'the present situation has equally big risks - a vicious circle.' Finally, Utiger moved to his key point, the notion that 'any recovery will mean we *lose control over pay*':

> 'Think carefully about this argument it is a danger common to *any* recovery at any time. Are those who use this argument really saying that we have got to continue in the present situation forever in order to control pay? *I cannot believe that this conference can accept that.*'

There are several points to emerge from this.

The struggle at Leyland has been just a dress rehearsal. The real battle on wages has yet to come. The employers and thus the government are most concerned about what happens in, say, 12 months time, when they think unemployment will not be working as effectively to frighten workers into submission.

Secondly, the intelligent ruling class view is that 'pure' monetarist policies have had it. There has to be state intervention: the economy 'is not a street-market' (to quote the chairman of Dunlop).

Next: they are very worried about a sudden upturn. They do not believe they can control it. They are also concerned about alienating the union bureaucracy too much, especially with any big new legal attack on the unions. On the other hand they are aware that controlling militants will be very hard in any upturn. So they are seeking changes which, ideally, allow *them* to choose the battle ground (as with the Employment Act) and which *enable* employers to take the offensive.

Hence the likely move, for example, to legalise victimisation by making it lawful to select strike leaders for the sack. The move to permit employers to sue unions for civil damages would be in the same vein. The big employers do *not* want to tackle the closed shop head on, nor do they want to make agreements legally binding. Both these moves might bring them up against their ultimate allies, the union bureaucracy.

Productivity Offensive

Behind all these hopes, fears and desires lies the main issue – productivity, and in particular whether the employers can get more out of workers in the same, or shorter, time; whether they can run their expensive machinery more continuously, for longer periods, in order to compete with their international rivals. They have overall problems, but in individual cases there has been a highly successful offensive: in companies like Rolls-Royce, Perkins Engines, and parts of GKN.

The battles the employers are really concerned about also show their priorities. The importance of the Longbridge relaxation time dispute has not been that it's Leyland macho management out to 'get the unions', but that it's symbolic of the current offensive that companies want to claw back time and want to intensify work, because if they don't do it now they will lose the opportunity.

The strategy of the more intelligent employers faced with cuts in the working week to 39 hours has, therefore, been to use it to bring in wider changes: a new shift system, elimination of breaks with machines run continuously, changes to machine manning, even wholesale moves to completely new

working systems and new bonus schemes with cuts in hours beyond 39 a week, so long as workers can be made to work more efficiently.

At the same time, and on a much wider scale, there has been non-replacement, cuts in numbers of indirect workers, introduction of self-supervision, elimination of staff back-up, introduction of VDUs onto the shopfloor etc.

Some of these changes, unlike the BL stick-wielding approach, have been quite cunning: for example, the moves at Rolls-Royce and elsewhere to a 4½-day week, with a half-day Friday, in return for longer shifts on the other four days and the fact that maintenance is no longer done at weekend overtime rates.

Enter The Social Democrats

How far is the offensive down to the Tories? The employers themselves are divided on this. This year's CBI conference witnessed a real break with slavish devotion to the Conservative Party.

Instead of a pep talk from a Tory minister, they had a panel of speakers, with the Tories in a minority. The most quoted politician at the rostrum was Shirley Williams. Favourable references to Tory policy which two years ago would have got wild cheers were now greeted with a stony silence, or a contrived ripple of applause. Indeed when one speaker referred to the Thatcher government having given back to management the right to manage, there were a dozen delegates desperately applauding to make it appear the CBI backed the hard-line strategy. In contrast a resolution calling for a national plan to help school-leavers was passed by 2 to 1.

Nevertheless it does not appear that the Tories have forfeited the support of business – despite having done more to harm British capitalism in some senses than Tony Benn could hope to do.

A recent *Sunday Times* article, which reported that Leslie Murphy, merchant banker and sometime Labour chairman of the National Enterprise Board, was whipping up boardroom support for the SDP, rather emphasised the *lack* of a break between companies and the Tories. Not a single company was mentioned as financing the SDP, though several anonymous individuals were pronounced 'sympathetic'.

This is not really very surprising. For a start the Tories have deeply infiltrated the places where these decisions are made. Secondly, these people fear the unknown.

Lord Weinstock

Thirdly, they think there is more to be got by nudging the Tories into policies they approve of – especially now that the Tories must be nearly as frightened of the Social Democrat/Liberal Alliance as Labour is.

But though the CBI conference did not overtly 'break' with the Tories, it marked a major switch in emphasis. For the first time in fifty years there is a real alternative *ruling class* party, untainted by any messy associations with union votes which put its collaboration in doubt.

The Problem Of Cadre

The existence of the alternative gives the centre of the Tory Party and the mainstream of the CBI a much greater authority. It means that there is a much greater chance of the 'moderate' Conservative policies winning through in the latter part of the government's term of office. What the employers do not have, however, is any great confidence in their ability to deliver the goods. There is a problem of cadre.

One of the striking things about the collection of senior managers and directors that makes up the CBI conference is their age groups. There are a few youngsters, who do not figure in the major policymaking; there is a large 'middle-group' content to go along with the mood for the most part (one year 'bash the unions' – the next year 'help the unemployed'); and there is a third group, almost entirely at the top table.

These men are over 55, and by and large over 60. They represent an age-group which grew into positions of authority beginning with the last war – in most cases because they were trained in the state machine – the bureaucracy, the services, arms manufacture, the government scientific establishment. They are a very strong, forceful and relatively homogeneous group, which takes in a good section of the ruling class intelligentsia, the economic establishment etc.

But their feeling is one of weakness. There is no sign of any *new* group – what other reason can there be for someone as basically insignificant as Michael Edwardes exerting such an influence.

It is striking how old the senior men of the CBI and industry are, and how there is a void of talent beneath them. The replacement for Sir John Methven, Sir Terence Beckett, almost immediately fell ill. He in turn was 'replaced' by a stop-gap 'eminence grise', Sir Arthur Knight, the retired chairman of Courtaulds and the NEB. All the keynote speeches at the CBI's conferences are made by men near or beyond retirement age.

Worse still (for them) is the realisation that the last great restructuring of a major piece of British *private* capitalism was at GEC in the 1960s. The success on that occasion depended not on one man, Weinstock, but on a team of between a dozen and twenty senior managers who all had the same approach, and the same training. Today the restructing of crucial sectors of (state owned) capital, British Steel and British Shipbuilders, depends on single Herculean figures imported by Thatcher – in these cases MacGregor and Atkinson.

These are rather subjective standards by which to judge the ruling class. They are nevertheless their standards. Their theme is

Sir John Methven and Sir Norman Beckett: former director generals of the CBI

international competitiveness – and they are competing against ruling classes either with a new, emergent, generation of cadres, or with a system that actually provides for the movement of the top business cadre between the state and private industry (the former includes Germany, France, the US; the latter, Japan).

The Tories Can Win, If . . .

It is very important for us to realise that there is a serious ruling class strategy contained in Tory policies. Some of their mistakes – over interest rates, the value of the pound, inflation – were partly a result of their ideology, but only partly. In reality, they have been 'blown off course' (as Harold Wilson once claimed he was) by international events. You can't really have pure monetarism in one country, any more than you can have Bennism – unless you have a ruthless dictator at the same time.

All the same despite the Tories' mistakes, they move into 1982 with the following advantages. They have reached 3 million unemployed without a major sustained protest. They have cut real pay without very much resistance. State owned industries – BL, Rolls Royce, British Aerospace, British Steel, British Shipbuilders – are being successfully rationalised with relatively little opposition so far. They have been able to retreat from dangerous confrontations with the miners, dockers, firemen etc and have gained backdoor concessions, while at the same time clobbering the weaker sections – hospital workers and civil servants. They have forced a lot of companies into a position where *they* have had to rationalise. They have succeeded in shifting the balance of power for the time being, and may yet succeed in shifting it further with the new Tebbit Bill.

But they have not crushed workers. The employers have only been able to get some productivity improvement in some factories. They have had to rely on trade union officialdom to get them off the hook on half-a-dozen separate occasions. They are internationally weak.

The fact remains that Thatcher still has two years to an election (a year if she chooses the spring of 1983 which is possible) and is faced with a Labour 'opposition' that seems already to have conceded the battle – especially the left, who don't quite know where the battle is. That is a pretty good position to be in, with the devastation that the Tories have presided over, and to a degree actively encouraged.

And what couldn't they do with another five years?

The curious origins of Christianity

'Away in a manger, no crib for his bed,
'The little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head.'

Thus a famous Christmas carol, and it is important to remember that there lies an ancient religious core behind the orgy of commercial exploitation, the rituals of gluttony and drunkenness, the statistical rise in marriage breakdowns, and everything else we are about to endure. Whether the Nativity of Jesus Christ is the final cause of modern celebration or merely a convenient excuse for the collapse of some of the more objectionable of our social constraints, it is one of the few occasions on which modern British socialists have their attention drawn to the problems posed by religious belief.

It is therefore worthwhile asking what we know about the origins and history of what is still today the official religion of the British state. For a long time any such inquiry was an enterprise fraught with extreme dangers. Church and state together offered extreme discouragements. Torture and murder awaited believers who differed from the established churches merely on points of doctrine, let alone for those who questioned orthodoxy in its entirety.

The rise of modern capitalism, however, needed a vast expansion of scientific enquiry. It became increasingly difficult to stop the procedures developed to aid profitable activities such as navigation from spilling over into the investigation of Christianity itself.

There were still attempts to resist this process. Shelley was expelled from Oxford University in 1812 for writing *The necessity of atheism*. And when Bruno Bauer tried to write a critical history of Christianity in 1840, he was immediately expelled from his professorship in theology at Bonn University. Eventually, however, resistance became a hopeless task, and by 1862 the Anglican Bishop Colenso could publish his view that the Book of Genesis could not be taken as literal history.

Our main source for the origins of Christianity is the Bible. Since this is the work of self-confessed propagandists, it would be very useful to find some independent evidence. If we could find in the records of the time some information about Jesus or about his teaching, from a writer not influenced by Christianity, then we could give that a great deal more weight than the works of those who had an axe to grind.

But such sources are hard to find. As Gibbon ironically remarked two hundred years ago:

> 'During the age of Christ, of his apostles, and of their first disciples, the doctrine which they preached was confirmed by innumerable prodigies. The lame walked, the blind saw, the sick were healed, the dead were raised, demons were expelled, and the laws of nature were frequently suspended for the benefit of the church. But the sages of Greece and Rome turned aside from the awful spectacle, and, pursuing the ordinary occupations of life and study, appeared unconscious of any alterations in the moral or physical government of the world.
> 'Under the reign of Tiberius, the whole earth, or at least a celebrated province of the Roman Empire, was involved in a preternatural darkness of three hours. Even this miraculous event, which ought to have excited the wonder, the curiosity, and the devotion of mankind, passed without notice in an age of science and history. It happened during the lifetime of Seneca and the elder Pliny, who must have experienced the immediate effects. Each of these philosophers, in a laborious work, has recorded all the great phenomena of nature, earthquakes, meteors, comets and eclipses, which his indefatigable curiosity could collect. Both the one and the other have omitted to mention the greatest phenomenon to which the mortal eye has been witness since the creation of the globe.'

Some non-Christian sources do contain evidence. The writings of the first century historian Josephus speak directly of Jesus. He wrote:

> 'Now about this time there arose Jesus, a wise man, if indeed he may be called a man. For he was a doer of marvellous acts, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with delight. And he won over to himself many Jews and many also of the Greek nation. He was the Christ. And when on the indictment of the principal men among us Pilate had sentenced him to the cross, those who before had loved him did not cease to do so. For he appeared to them on the third day alive again, the divinely inspired prophets having foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And until now the race of Christians, so named from him, is not extinct.'

But Josephus was an educated and orthodox Jewish priest, and his work was largely concerned to record Jewish history after the community in Palestine had been shattered by the Romans in the year 70. Faced with the above passage, which clearly states that Jesus had the attributes of a god, we have a problem. For a strict monotheist to call Jesus a god was a horrible blasphemy against Jehovah. Further, if Josephus recognised Jesus as a god, and one who fulfilled the prophecies of Judaism at that, then why should the remainder of the book not be marked by this momentous discovery?

One explanation, favoured by many Christians until very recently, would be that Josephus shared with the Jewish people in general a malignant rejection of the truth of Christianity explicable only in terms of some inherent vileness.

Fortunately, there is a more rational explanation of the passage. We know, from Christian sources, that the copies of Josephus circulating in the third century did not contain this passage but that those of the fourth century did. The passage is therefore what scholars would call a 'later Christian interpretation': plain people like us would call it a blatant forgery.

This sort of thing pervades the study of the whole question. Quite apart from the accidental ravages of time, the evidence has been doctored time and again. It is therefore very difficult to prove, from non-Christian sources, the historical existence of Jesus. Contemporary opinion seems to be prepared to accept at least the probability of his existence, but can say very little more.

The fact of Jesus's existence, however, is of minor importance, since what is at stake is the nature of his teaching and the question of his relationship to god. For this, we have to turn to Christian writings today called the New Testament. But these cannot solve the problem either, since we know, for certain, the following things about them:

– they were collected long after the events they describe.

– they were written long after the events they describe and are not the works of their traditional authors.

– they contain demonstrable errors.

– they contain two different fundamentally contradictory accounts of Jesus.

Let us look at these remarkable facts in turn.

We know from Christian sources that there were a mass of documents circulating in the first two centuries after the life of Jesus. It is not until 180 that Iranaeus, bishop of Lyon, starts to argue that there are four gospels, and only four, which deserve to be taken seriously. These now form the ones in our bibles and are called the 'canonical' gospels. Some of the others are collected in the 'Apocrypha' and are accorded no serious status by modern Christianity. The principles as to what should be kept in the canon and what left out was taken by interested parties more than a century after the formation of the early Christian church.

We can say with a fair degree of certainty that the canonical gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, were composed in the period between roughly 70 and 150. They are not, therefore, contemporary records of the events they claim to recount word for word, but are the product of the early Christian church.

Matthew, Mark and Luke are known as the 'synoptic' gospels, because they contain a great deal of common material, often the same down to the phrasing, which means that they must have had a common source, now lost. Matthew and Mark have additional material in common, again probably from a lost source.

The gospel of John is quite different, both in the story it tells and in the philosophy underlying it, and so must have been written independently. Of the four, the original version of Mark is probably the earliest, but has been much altered since.

We find some obvious errors if we look at the content of these works. Luke, for instance, claims that the home town of Jesus was Nazareth but that he was born in Bethlehem. Matthew, more simply, just gives Bethlehem as point of origin. Luke tells a nice little story to fit his two towns together: that Jesus's family lived in Nazareth, but had to move to Bethlehem, the home of their ancestors, for the purposes of a Roman census. But there is no record of the existence of the town of Nazareth before the third century, when it was site of Christian pilgrimage. And, still more damning, the vast and cosmopolitan Roman Empire did not require its subjects to return to the home of their ancestors for the purposes of a census.

In fact, the probability is that the location 'Nazareth' is the result of a process of corruption by which the name Nazarene, applied to a Jewish sect of the time, was misinterpreted as referring to a place.

'Even the most elementary study of the gospels reveals that there are two quite different bodies of doctrine present within them.'

It is open to a Christian to reply that all of this is true, as it is, but that it tells us only that the gospels are unreliable as evidence, have only the status of heresay, are much corrupted and contain minor errors. What matters is their substantial teachings, which could still be true despite the fallibility of human transmitters.

Unfortunately, this line of argument is a disastrous one for Christianity. For, even the most elementary study of the gospels reveals that there are two quite different bodies of doctrine present within them.

Take the simple, but vital, question of the antecedents of Jesus. Matthew and Luke alone give an account of Jesus's family tree, although they differ as to who exactly begat whom. But they both also retail the story of the virgin birth which renders all of those antique Jewish erections quite meaningless, since Joseph had nothing whatsoever to do with the conception of Jesus. Despite this, Luke, for example, repeatedly refers to Joseph as the 'father' of Jesus and to Joseph and Mary as his 'parents'.

John tells quite a different story. For him, there is no messing about either with elaborate genealogies or virgin births. The 'word' has always existed, and it descended on Jesus when John the Baptist saw the dove fly out of heaven.

The later books do not help us much either. Revelations, for example, has very little to say about Jesus and is mainly concerned with an imaginative account of the fall of the Roman Empire. Paul, on the other hand, occasionally mentions Jesus but shows no knowledge or interest in his life and teaching, claiming to have gained his own insights by direct revelation.

If we return to the question of the birth of Jesus, we find the key to these two distinct traditions. The lineage of the house of David is important, indeed vital, to the Jewish tradition of prophecy, in which the Messiah had to fulfill a number of conditions. The virgin birth, on the other hand, relates to a philosophical tradition, partly of Greek origin, which looked to a divine being for salvation. The Jewish Messiah was a man; the 'Word made flesh' was a god.

The defence of their local god, Jehovah, was, for the Jewish masses, one of the ways in which they struggled against the burdens imposed by local rulers who made deals with foreign masters.

The traditions were quite different. The Jewish tradition was not remarkable in being monotheistic; that was quite common in the ancient world. It was remarkable in being a *popular* monotheism.

The geographical position of Palestine meant that it had always been part of the border country between the great despotisms of antiquity, and so its population had never been crushed in the way that the peoples of the valleys of the Nile or the Euphrates were. An independent state had stuttered along, allying itself with this or that empire as the chance came.

The Jewish tradition was thus one of popular revolution. Time and again it proved the rallying point for the revolt of the masses. Its Messiah was very much of this world, smiting kings and oppressors, and ushering in a millenium of real material benefits for the people.

Faced with the coming of the greatest of the empires, the Romans, this tradition boiled on. Between 66 and 70, it led to a great revolt, culminating in a heroic defence of Jerusalem against the legions of Titus and a final suicidal defence of Masada on the Dead Sea. The Jewish Jesus, along with John the Baptist and many others, was one of the organisers of this tradition. The 'Hosannahs' with which he was welcomed to Jerusalem originally meant 'free us'.

The divine Jesus was quite another matter. His enemy was not the Romans but death. His kingdom was not of this world. He preached salvation in another and better world.

For this other tradition, slavery and oppression were light matters to be borne patiently in the hope of salvation and resurrection. This was not a tradition of revolt but of acceptance. It was the religion of those who had been crushed by the chains of a slave empire and who had no will left to fight back with the sword against their conquerors. It was a tradition which compromised with this world and its powers, and which made no distinction between slave and master, rich and poor, on the road to salvation.

At the formal level, these two traditions were irreconcilable. Generations of atheists have amused themselves pointing out the two threads in the bible. And generations of Christians have laboured in vain to reconcile these opposites. We cannot say with certainty which represented the actual teaching of Jesus, but all of the weight of probability points to the Jewish Jesus of revolt. The divine Jesus is a later addition by people who had neither the courage nor the opportunity to carry through the teachings of a revolutionary.

In its historical context the matter is relatively simply resolved. The teaching of the Jewish Jesus was part of the great wave of anti-Roman agitation which originated in Palestine but spread, through the Jewish communities of the Mediterranean cities, to the poor of the Roman Empire prior to the great rising of 66. After the crushing of that revolt, and just at the time our gospels were starting to take shape, that teaching was modified to take account of new conditions, this time of despair rather than of hope.

A vital part of this process was to break away from the Judaic tradition. Consider what the Law meant, not as a set of formal rules, but as a social programme in a slave empire. A compulsory day of rest for everybody is a concrete slogan for a slave. A prohibition on usury is a revolutionary slogan for a poor peasant labouring in debt. The code we find today in Deuteronomy and regard as mere ritual was, in classical antiquity, a set of ideas which led the mind of slave and slave-owner alike to thoughts of revolution. Against that tradition, the developing Christian church doctored the records, and imported a new and different tradition in which the law was nothing.

The composite which emerged had very little that was original.

From existing Jewish prayers it compiled what we know today as The Lord's Prayer. From existing Jewish teaching it compiled what we know today as The Sermon on the Mount. From pagan tradition it took the communal meal of wine and bread which we know today as Holy Communion. From the Samaritans it took the notion of the Holy Spirit as a dove. From the Syrian Adonis, the Phrygian Attis, the Greek Dionysius, the Egyptian Osiris and the Persian Mithras, it took the common idea of the virgin birth. From these religions, too, it took the ideas of the death of the god and his resurrection, of immortality and of the god's birth at the winter solstice. Even the symbol of the cross came from the worship of Osiris.

In all of these borrowings there was little unique about the new church. For an empire which lined the Appian way from Rome to Naples with crucified slaves after the suppression of the Spartacus revolt there was little to note in one more such incident.

But one borrowing was crucial. The popular nature of Judaism had given it an organisational form quite different from the formal cults of official religion. Christianity took over this vital ingredient and thus changed itself from a transitory cult to a permanent church.

At first, this church was a very democratic one, without hierarchy and without even doctrinal agreement. Many of the documents which are today studied as sacred texts were originally written in early faction fights.

Social conditions in the Roman Empire were favourable to the growth of religion. The Roman Empire had turned the Mediterranean world into a vast prison camp ruled by a single despot. For those prevented by terror from any part in the things of this world – especially the slaves but also the free women – the idea of another world was a powerful one. As the church grew, it attracted wealth and, with it, a hierarchy. Onto its stubborn organisation, the church grafted a stable bureaucracy.

As the vast Empire decayed from within, ruined by its own success, the church became more and more the sole reliable organisation. While it grew, it remained a minority religion, largely urban in character: our very word 'pagan' originally meant 'country dweller'.

But the church moved further and further towards paganism, too. The doctrine of the trinity, over which much blood and ink were shed, conceded the point of polytheism to the ancient mysteries. The cult of the Virgin conceded the point of the mother goddess. The transformation of local gods into saints concluded the adaptation. Soon idols were admitted to the church in the form of images and holy relics.

Thus a church which had been born in revolt and which had survived intermittent persecution came to conquer the Roman Empire. In 317, the emperor Constantine, battling against rival candidates, adopted Christianity, although he postponed his baptism to just before his death. Although it was to be more than sixty years before the Christians got their way and were officially allowed to persecture non-believers, the church was now effectively part of the state and its future was assured.

But we might ask who had conquered whom? In 366 there was a conflict over the succession to the seat of Peter between Damasus and Ursinus. Damasus became Pope by the simple expedient of hiring gladiators; 137 dead bodies were counted in the cathedral after his victory. And over what were they fighting? The crown with which Damasus was awarded was the crown of the ancient priests of Jove, and the chair upon which he sat was the holy chair of Mithras.

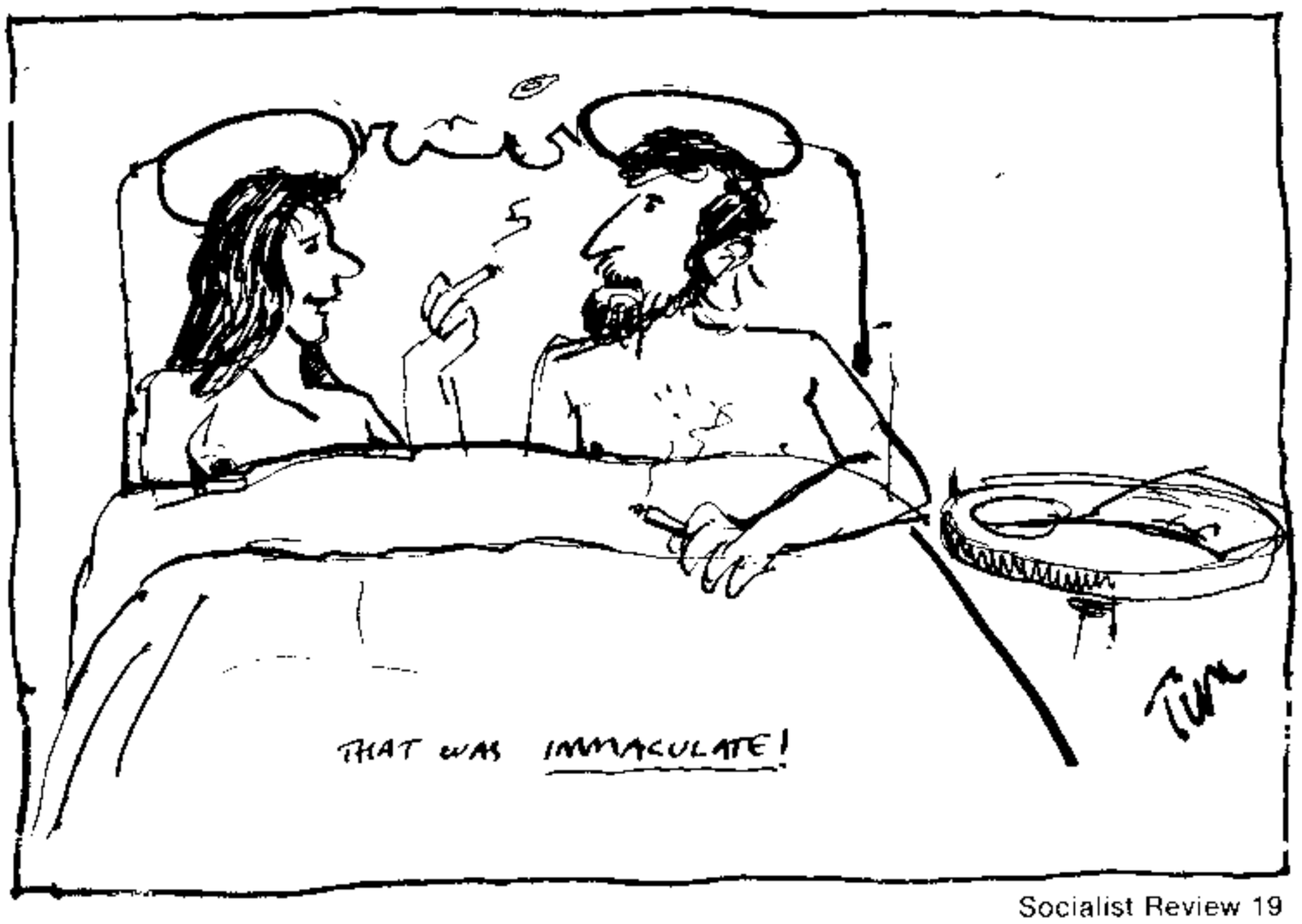
There is nothing in the record of Christianity to differentiate it from any other religion. Even in its early history, it meant many different things to many different people. Since then, the same form has stretched even further to fit new times and new needs. At times the face of the other world has been the excuse for inaction in this world. At other times the original revolutionary impulse has been reborn in millenial movements struggling for freedom.

In all its forms it answers to the needs of men and women burdened and heavily laden. It gives them an ideal of happiness which is not present on this earth.

To end with a famous quotation:

'Religious suffering is at the same time an expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of heartless world and the soul of soulless circumstances. It is the opium of the people.'

Colin Sparks



Why I'm Joining the Labour Party

Tariq Ali

For a long time **Tariq Ali** was probably Britain's best known revolutionary. Now he has decided to leave the International marxist Group and apply for membership of the Labour Party. Here he argues with us that his decision is a correct one—and **Pete Goodwin** and **Chris Harman** reply, restating our case for building an independent, revolutionary party.

'Neither to laugh nor to cry, but to understand' (Spinoza)

In a letter to *The Guardian* (23 November 1981) Chris Harman suggests that by joining the Labour Party I am abandoning Marxism and repudiating the core of my remarks made during the 'debate of the decade.' If this were true then, of course, there would be no point in argument. I could be easily denounced as another in the long line of revisionists, social-traitors, renegades, etc, and that would be that. But Chris Harman is fully aware that matters are not so simple.

When I first came to Britain in the mid-sixties one of the first left papers that I found being thrust down my neck was *Labour Worker* (if I recall correct the seller was Ian Birchall) which was littered with articles bearing the signature X or Y or Z with the Constituency Labour Party they belonged to mentioned in brackets.

True that was a long time ago and we have seen many changes since that time. One of these is that the far left is stronger than it was. But are we *qualitatively* in a different league?

I think not. Even if all the far-left groups were united they would still not be as strong (especially in terms of a proletarian cadre) as was the Communist Party of the twenties.

The point I am trying to make is the following: we are confronted with a crucial strategic choice today and if the wrong decision is made (as it was at the recent SWP conference) then there is a real danger of isolation, reinforcement of a ghetto mentality and objective pressures in the direction of becoming a sect.

I have always been in favour of a strong collaboration with the SWP and its predecessor and *my* attitude has not changed because I have left the IMG. It remains the same.

The debate between us revolves round analysing the important developments taking place in British politics.

Socialist Review as well as other journals on the left (including the Labour left) tended to dismiss the formation of the SDP as an irrelevance. In 'Gang show on the road?', you refused to accept the challenge being posed to the traditional bureaucratic leadership of the Labour Party. You wrote:

> The apparently impressive showing for the centre party in opinion polls is almost certainly not going to be translated into any electoral success. Just ask the simple question: can Jenkins or Williams stand anywhere against sitting Labour MPs and win seats? The answer must be ten-to-one against success for them.

The string of SDP successes in local elections in Labour strongholds is an ominous pointer in another direction. You subsequently corrected your misestimate and the last issue of *SR* accurately described the class character of the SDP. It should have made an additional point, namely, that the SDP electorate has a multi-class character. Unfortunately it has received tens of thousands of working class votes. In reality what is taking place is the emergence of a purely bourgeois alternative to the Tories.

It is the defection of a representative layer of the Labour right to form the SDP that confronts the labour movement with its most severe crisis since the thirties. The traditional leadership is assailed from the right by the SDP and their supporters in the Parliamentary Labour Party, and from the left by a rank-and-file led by Tony Benn.

This crisis won't blow over quickly. It has deep roots in British capitalism's paralytic disorders and the prolonged experience of the Wilson-Callaghan Labour governments. What is really taking place is that the entire tradition of Labourism is being called into question on the left as well as the right.

The Character Of Bennism

Many of the points made in *Socialist Review*'s special issue on Bennism in July are uncontroversial. But you are wrong in relation to the likely impact of a Bennite programme on the ruling class.

The central characteristic of Bennism is that, while it is undoubtedly a left-reformist current, it is *not* at the present time an expression of the left bureaucracy of the Labour movement. The hysteria which greeted Benn's decision to stand as a deputy leader from *left* bureaucrats is well-known.

What this crucially important fact indicates is that the movement can either continue to move leftwards or become a left cover for the bureaucracy and a future Labour government. In my opinion the activity of socialists is not unimportant in determining the direction such a movement takes.

Left programmes can be anathema to the dominant sections of the ruling class without playing a reactionary role at any given moment in the class struggle. The Bennite programme possesses both these features.

The Bennite programme is left reformist in its aims and methods: it does not involve the expropriation of the capitalist class or the replacement of the capitalist state by a proletarian one. Consequently its strategic methods are rooted unambiguously on the grounds of the bourgeois legal and parliamentary order. The apex of Bennism is legislative action by a Labour government backed by strong popular support and implemented by the state bureaucracy under mass pressure through the established legal-constitutional methods.

At the same time, Benn's programme of reforms will meet fierce resistance from the capitalist class and its state bureaucracy, partly because of the socio-political content of the measures themselves – which would hit sections of the capitalist class – and more importantly because of the popular political impact of Bennism which could throw up powerful working class currents on the left and throw the bourgeoisie on the defensive.

It is the closed and oligarchic character of the British state that makes Benn's radical-democratic reforms of the apparatus extremely frightening for the ruling class. Abolition of the House of Lords would certainly not cure unemployment (Denis Healey often makes this point!), but it would weaken the undemocratic bourgeois system of political domination and weaken the system of patronage which has served both the bourgeoisie and the labour bureaucracy so well over the past six decades.

The Bennite movement is a current in ferment, wide open to serious programmatic and strategic discussion and, in general, in favour of alliances with extra-parliamentary forces. At the same time it takes the battle inside the Labour Party very seriously and has little sympathy for ultra-left or anarcho-syndicalist ideas.

Benn's support for measures of rank-and-file democracy initiated by the Campaign for Democracy in the Labour Party was of key importance in helping to push through the reforms inside the party. His *opposition* to the right-wing policies of previous Labour governments (as Paul Foot has pointed out in *Socialist Worker* he has moved closer to our view on that particular question *since* the 'debate of the decade') and his vigorous championing of conference decisions has created a new situation inside the Labour movement.

The size of Benn's meetings in right-wing Labour strongholds like Newcastle and Leeds during the deputy leadership was incredible. Neither the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign nor the Anti-Nazi League had meetings of that size in provincial centres. Two thousand in Newcastle and four thousand in Leeds turned up to hear Benn despite

the most horrendous campaign of press and media villification. The bulk of them were active trade unionists. Many had not been to a political meeting for decades.

It is perhaps difficult for some to accept the fact that a political tendency inside the Labour Party can be *reformist* without being *bureaucratic*. The key to this lies in the fact that the great bulk of the politically conscious and advanced workers in Britain today are also *reformist* in their outlook.

This makes it possible for a reformist political tendency to remain closely linked to the advanced workers in the present phase of working class development, to express their aspirations and raise their level of struggle, without breaking with an overall reformist programme. In the long run, of course, such a combination would become impossible. What is more it needs to be stressed that Bennism has become a mass political force by firing at the right rather than the left, drawing wide new layers into the struggle for socialism and galvanising the base of the Labour Party.

It is true that in periods of opposition the bureaucracy as a whole traditionally shifts to 'the left' in order to repair damaged links with the base and to revitalise the old electoral machine for a new drive to win the next election. A key element of these left manoeuvres is that they have never involved trying to actually unseat the right in the PLP and the leadership. The right tolerates this verbal leftism in order to ensure that Phase Two of the manoeuvre can work. Phase Two occurs as the next election approaches. Left and right miraculously unite around an election manifesto with left phraseology and a battery of escape clauses which *de facto* give it a rightist substance.

This first 'compromise' is necessary for the party's electoral unity and it leads to the second 'compromise' once Labour has won the election: a compromise between the right wing leaders and the state bureaucracy. The game then starts again.

This time, however, the bureaucratic dance has been less sure-footed. The key problem Benn poses for the left bureaucracy is that he threatens to break up this dance. Bennism threatens to replace a left manoeuvre to restore the rightist leadership's authority with a left opposition to that leadership – an opposition going right through the next election and blasting away from Day One of a new Labour government or a new coalition which might attract the PLP right wing.

There is an important difference between Benn and previous leaders of the Labour left. In terms of a closer relation to Marxism both Bevan and Cripps were far more to the left. Cripps' pronouncements in the thirties were far more radical than anything Benn has so far said. Bevan was a genuine working-class leader, who in his early days reflected an intransigence in defending the struggles of his class. The trajectory of both Cripps and Bevan was from left to right. Cripps became the exponent of austerity measures; Bevan deserted unilateralism and became a paid performer at Beaverbrook's house parties in the country.

Benn has been radicalised through his experience in office. He has moved from the centre right to the left and the evolution is by no means complete. He has understood that Labour's only serious electoral chance lies in turning the entire organisation into a gigantic lever of popular political mobilisations, championing the causes of all sectors of the oppressed and offering a governmental perspective of real change.

The rapidly changing political map of Britain is, of course, a reflection of the social and economic crisis. I would understand the SWP position much more if they had failed to see the setbacks suffered by the working class since 1974. But, in my opinion, the SWP's estimate of the level of consciousness and combativity inside the working class is far more accurate than that of other groups on the left. That is why the attitude to the Labour Party is puzzling and can only appear to be a question of defending the SWP's own apparatus.

The dialectic is of partial conquests: it is better to keep what we've got rather than risk losing it for something bigger of which we are not so sure. The current approach seems to be a combination of 'the worse things get the better' and 'don't be contaminated by the Labour left, but build the SWP. For an organisation which has, in the past, derided such an approach this is not sufficient.

I am still confident that as the crisis continues to reshape British politics (in particular after the next elections) the SWP will change its orientation and perceive the crucial importance of developments in the Labour Party in repoliticising the most advanced layers of the working class. Then a new form of socialist unity will seem the inevitable choice.

Tariq Ali

Why you are wrong

Chris Harman and Pete Goodwin

Tariq's argument for joining the Labour Party rests on an analysis 'of important developments in British politics.' We think the argument is wrong.

First, because there are some serious flaws in Tariq's analysis of current political developments.

Second, and more fundamentally, because even if he were right on every point about current developments, that still leaves a yawning gap at the end of his argument.

We will start with current developments. Tariq makes a lot of the growth of the SDP. Of course he is right that earlier this year we grossly understimated their electoral prospects. Now, after Warrington, Croydon, Crosby, and a host of council by-elections, we are more than ready to eat humble pie. Tariq is right that the SDP does pose a desperately serious electoral threat to Labour.

But he is wrong about the likely consequences of this for Labour. He (and, he claims, Tony Benn) 'understand that Labour's only serious electoral chance lies in turning the entire organisation into a gigantic lever of popular mobilisations, championing the causes of all sectors of the oppressed and offering a governmental perspective of real change'.

The SDP threat will therefore, in Tariq's view, make it in the interests of even the most craven electoralists to move left. Hence his optimism about continued advance by the left in the party.

All the evidence, however, points to the SDP threat having exactly the opposite effect. It is reinforcing the traditional calls for party unity. To Tariq and us, Michael Foot may sound pretty pathetic when he claims to speak for 'the sick and tired brigade'. But he is getting an increasing echo.

Clearly Foot already has the 'soft lefts', the Kinnocks and the Silkins, sewn up. But the pressure for 'unity or else we'll throw away the election' is already making inroads into the 'hard left'. The Labour Co-ordinating Committee declares a moratorium on discussing whether Benn should stand again for deputy leader. Bennite GLC councillors mutter about Ken Livingstone opening his mouth at the wrong time. One could give a lot more examples.

Above all there is the fairly miserable record of the reselection conferences. Tariq should read the interview with LCC secretary Nigel Stanley we publish in this issue. As Nigel makes clear 'there is a mood for compromise.' The nearer the election gets, and the more the SDP threat firms up, the more that mood will eat into the Bennites.

But it is not just the SDP threat that will tame the Bennites. It is also the trade union bureaucracy. Traditionally the trade union bureaucracy has been the power behind the scenes in the Labour Party, emerging more openly when the party is in difficulties. Things are no different today.

Not even the extreme right wing of the union bureaucracy shows any serious sign of decamping to the SDP. The union bureaucracy has now got what it wants in the Labour Party in terms of Michael Foot as leader and the Alternative Economic Strategy (TUC style) as policy. A large chunk of it would no doubt be quite happy to see Denis Healey fall under a bus tomorrow. But above all it wants unity round Foot (or if he can't do the job Silkin or Shore).

Tariq would probably agree with this. But he underestimates its importance because he believes that Bennism 'is *not* at the present time an expression of the left bureaucracy of the labour movement'.

Of course, not every Bennite is a trade union bureaucrat. But Bennite politics is very closely linked to the left trade union

bureaucracy. It draws some of its strongest support from middle levels of bureaucracy. It does not organise in opposition to its upper levels. It may be that sometimes it goes 'too far' for some of the top 'left' union leaders. But these now have a weapon, in terms of the ballots that delivered the NUPE and FBU votes to Healey, that they can use against the Bennites if they try and 'go too far' again.

The Bennites have two choices. Either they can take the struggle into the rank and file of the unions, which means not just fighting on Benn for deputy but on day to day economic struggles which most certainly would bring them into vicious conflict with the left bureaucrats. Or they can compromise. All the traditions and ties of the Bennites indicate that most of them will choose compromises although occasionally rebelling against its consequences with wild, but shortlived, swings to the left.

One other point about current developments. For all its real importance, the growth of the new Labour left still leaves the Labour Party an electoral machine, with a low level of participation in its month to month activities and dominated by the politics of committee and manoeuvre. Calls for a 'mass campaigning party', from for instance Peter Hain, have not made more than the tiniest dents in that.

So we think Tariq has seriously misestimated the prospects for the Bennite Left in the Labour party. For the reasons we have given we believe that the vast majority of the Bennites will be willingly or unwillingly drawn into the 'bureaucratic dance' once again. That they will, however grudgingly, unite behind a leadership centred on Foot-Shore-Kinnock et al, in which honoured seats are kept for Healey and Hattersley (and Benn if he behaves). This process is already well under way.

But suppose it is we who have got this wrong. Suppose the Bennites do continue to 'blast away' and suppose they blast their way through to a Bennite leadership of the Labour Party. And suppose that this transformed Labour Party wins an election and forms a government. And suppose that it does indeed start pushing through a popular, radical reformist programme.

What happens then?

As Tariq quite rightly notes, this will upset the ruling class. In the London clubs and at society balls, in officers messes and at legal dinners, there will be open talk of resistance. The *Telegraph*, the *Mail*, the *Express* will shriek bitterly. There could even be abortive attempts by sections of the ruling class to unseat the government immediately.

But the bulk of the ruling class – the most experienced capitalist class in the world – will react rather differently. The inner enclaves of the Bank of England, the CBI, the treasury, the big banks, will endeavour to work out a coherent strategy for dealing with the government. If indeed it has popular support they will disown any premature attempts against it.

Instead they will put it quite bluntly to the radical ministers that they will cooperate with them – providing the cooperation is reciprocated.

Resistance

In this way they will embroil the government in their own tentacles, progressively reducing its opportunities for radical action at a later stage. Meanwhile, they will expect that as the 'normal' symptoms of capitalist crisis continued to express themselves – aggravated by the lack of confidence of big sections of capital in the government – unemployment will grow, prices will soar, the government will lose its popularity, and the ground will be prepared for a more direct ruling class assault upon it at a later stage.

This scenario is not based upon idle speculation. It is based upon past experience of radical reformist government coming to power with mass backing. It is what happened, for instance in Germany when the Kaiser's rule collapsed in November 1918. The great industrialists, the state bureaucrats, the officer corps, were prepared to cooperate with a 'socialist' government that had just banished the emperor (not merely the House of Lords) – and for the first few weeks there were not only right 'socialists' in that government, but men like Emile Barth, a leader of the Berlin revolutionary shop stewards, compared with whom Tony Benn seems like a member of the Primrose League.

But the 'socialists' had to pay a price for this cooperation. They had to turn against their own followers, with Barth, for instance, denouncing workers who went on strike for 'besmirching the revolution with wage demands'.

A similar scenario was played out in Spain in the summer and autumn of 1936. In most of the major cities that made up the Republican zone at the beginning of the Civil War, power lay with workers organisations. Who more natural to come to head the government than Largo Caballero, a former socialist minister, like Benn, swinging very much to the left as a result of his experiences in office, boasting his agreement with *State and Revolution* – and gaining from the Tariqs of 1936 the title of 'the Spanish Lenin'.

What remained of the state machine and the bourgeoisie in the Republican zone had little choice but to cooperate with Caballero. This did not, however, prevent them laying down terms for their cooperation. Caballero had to agree to an ending of the 'excesses' carried through by the workers movement, to the condemnation of 'wild expropriation' of property, to the imposition of discipline in the Republic's armed forces, the placating of those foreign powers who might conceivably support the Republic.

The example of Chile is much more recent, and people should need no reminding of it. However, a certain amount of rewriting of history has been taking place on the left of late, and certain points have to be emphasised. For two years the Chilean bourgeoisie *did* collaborate with Allende –in order to entrap and deal with him at a later stage. In return 'all' they demanded was that Allende do the reasonable thing – condemn strikes like those of the copper miners that were 'damaging the country' and recognise the 'constitutional' and 'non-political' character of the armed forces. This Allende gladly did – he was after all a reformist, who believed in reforming institutions, not in revolutionary change.

The end result in each case was far from the revolutionary outcome Tariq implies is inevitable. In Germany the left socialists were forced out of office after eight weeks, the right socialists after 18 months. In Spain, Caballero and the left socialists were allowed to remain in office eight months, before giving way to progressively more right wing governments. In Chile the generals literally did support Allende as a rope supports a hanging man: in September 1973 men who had sat in his own ministries and maintained discipline in 'his' armed forces organised the bombing of his presidential palace, and the murder of tens of thousands of worker activists.

Is there anything in Bennism to indicate that it would, if left to itself, lead to a different outcome?

Tariq claims Bennism is a 'reformist' but 'not a bureaucratic' current. If it ever comes to power, it is its reformism that will matter. For it means that even if it treads on a few House of Lords corns, it will, willingly,

'Comrade Allende, why don't you defend us! asks a Chilean striker

collaborate with the main sections of capital. For this is something already written down in black and white in its programme.

Amazingly, Tariq nowhere refers to the actual ideas propagated by the Bennites. Yet these are explicitly collaborationist ideas. What else is the Alternative Economic Strategy than a scheme to pressurise big business into working with the government and the unions? What else does Tony Benn mean when he talks about 'the democratic tripartite principle'? Why else continual harping on about 'planning agreements'? Why else do none of the 'hard' Labour lefts call for more than 25 per cent public ownership and then go on to argue that their programme of economic nationalism will benefit *all* of British industry (including the 75 per cent that would continue to make profits for private capital)?

Tariq writes (in *City Limits*, 27 November) that 'at the last Labour Party conference a new socialist party could be seen struggling to emerge from the shell of Labourism'.

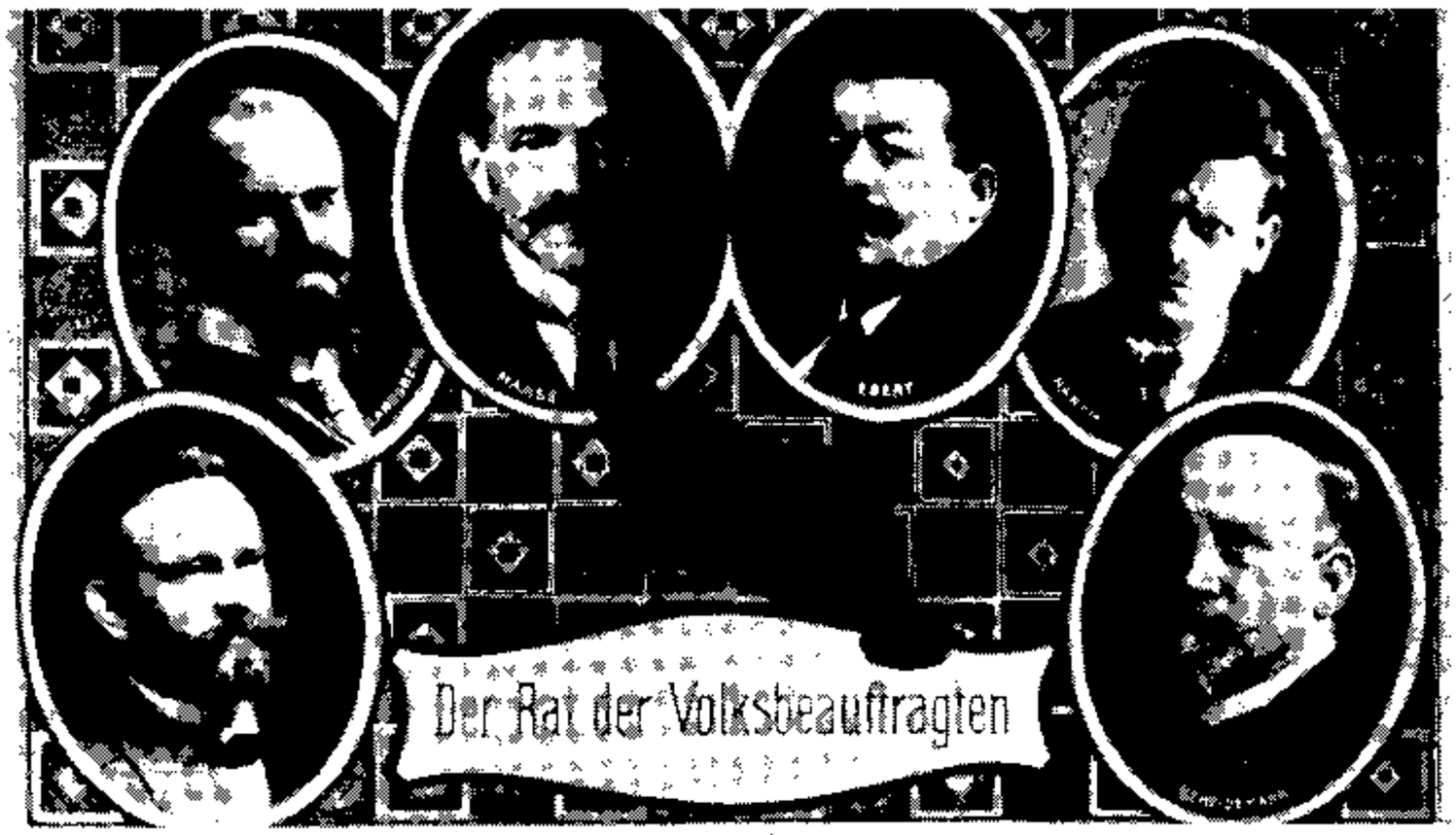
But as a revolutionary of 14 years standing, he should recognise that even if he is right, it is a *reformist* 'socialist party' – one whose ideas would lead it to fall straight into the trap of collaborationism that destroyed the left socialists in Germany, Spain and Chile physically as well as politically.

Control

Collaborationism is not something which we can merely foresee happening in the distant future. Where the labour left hold control of local councils, you can see it in the here and now. Livingstone's GLC has seen no way to improve London's transport services other than imposing increases in the rates – a regressive, anti-working class form of taxation (as Jim Kincaid showed in *SR* of July). At the same time, its 'solution' to unemployment in London is to pay a left academic £25,000 a year (again out of workers' rates) to 'attract' private industrialists to invest in the city. Is it surprising that it is seen as sufficiently distant and remote for a proportion of working people to vote social democratic? What happens with Bennism in one city, can happen just as easily with Bennism in one country.

It is, of course, true that as a hypothetical left Labour government runs into trouble, there will be bitterness among its supporters, with arguments about alternatives, and even wild talk from ministers. But that is not at all the same thing as the bulk of its supporters – let alone its key figures – moving over automatically to a politics that goes beyond collaborationism in time to prevent disaster. People do not move over to see the need for revolutionary measures against capital merely as a mechanical reaction to the failure of reform.

There has to be a pole of attraction arguing for quite a different sort of politics – a pole that exists in every workplace, every shop stewards committee, every locality. And the argument to be effective cannot be



Emile Barth, leader of the Berlin revolutionary shop stewards, sandwiched in between right wing Social Democrats, Ebert and Scheidman, in the German Council of People's Representatives.

a purely ideological one. It has to be an argument in *practice* as well as theory, basing itself upon working class struggles against the effects of collaboration, organising these struggles, giving them direction, showing that in the self activity of workers there is an alternative to what the left parliamentarians offer them.

Tariq will, no doubt, claim that it is possible to build that alternative pole of attraction *inside* the reformist party. Yet all past experience shows otherwise. The left inside a reformist party spends its time arguing with the leaders in the membership meetings and committees. It does not go out to organise workers in the factories and housing estates for immediate struggle *against* those leaders. That is why, although there have often been cases where large sections of reformist parties have split off in a revolutionary direction *after* reformist policies have led to defeat (Germany and Italy in 1920-21), there is *no case* of the left within a reformist party being able to develop an independent revolutionary politics in time to prevent defeat.

Things can be no different with the British Labour Party. The experience of nearly 80 years is that revolutionaries who join it with the best intentions soon get entrapped into its structures, seeing the battle to pack out GMCs and selection conferences as more important than those on the factory floor.

The very structure of the Labour Party ensures this. It is built upon the separation of the political and the industrial – of politics and workers' struggle. Being 'practical' in Labour Party terms means using the affiliated trade union bodies to *support* what you are doing in parliament, the local council or the GMC, *not* proving the relevance of your political beliefs by leading the day-to-day struggle of workers. Tariq will be as much subject to this logic as anyone else. We can say with certainty that the longer he remains in the Labour Party, the less he will resemble the revolutionary we used to know.

Tariq has one argument left to him. The revolutionary left has become a 'ghetto' (his phrase in *City Limits*), 'qualitatively in the same league' as it was back in 1967 when we used to produce *Labour Worker*.

Things may seem like that to someone who has been in the IMG, which with 500 members is still little bigger than IS (as the SWP was called) was then. But it does not at all seem like that to us. The SWP is a small party with only 4,200 members, and we have only grown slowly over the last couple of years. Nevertheless, we manage to have a presence in 90 per cent of the workers' struggles that takes place – if not leading them, at least providing fraternal advice that makes sense to many of those involved. That is a *qualitatively* different situation to 1967.

The place our members spend their time is not 'the ghetto', but the picket line, the shop stewards meeting, the anti-Nazi demonstration, the student occupation (although Tariq does not seem to notice it, such things still occur), the CND activity. In all of these we can work alongside and discuss with people who are influenced by Benn – but without suffering the constraints which inevitably impede the arguments of socialists who join the Labour Party.

Bennites

If Tariq had chosen to join the SWP rather than the Labour Party, he would have been *working alongside* Bennites, but *arguing* against them, he would have been agreeing with them on the need for a better world, and then arguing that only revolutionary action, not reselection or deputy leadership elections, could get it. He would have been insisting that the road to revolutionary action starts now, with every act of workers resistance, however meagre, and he would have become obsessed with the tactics and strategies needed to lead that resistance to victory – something the Bennites hardly think of.

As it is he mutes his criticisms of Benn – he does not mention his nationalism or his faith in class collaboration – as if you need to drop arguments of principle in order to fight alongside people against common enemies.

Well, we have not needed to drop such arguments. We hope, even at this 11th hour that Tariq will think again about following a course that leads to doing so.

The Lothian medicine comes south

A half day strike of teachers and local authority workers in London was due to take place on 1 December in protest at the new Tory proposals for reshaping local authority finance. But few workers outside local authority employment understand their significance as yet. Gareth Jenkins explains.

Among Labour-controlled councils the name of Heseltine evokes a mixture of anger and panic. For good reason. The Tory Environment Secretary's proposals, now speeding through parliament and likely to be on the statute book by early December, put an end to some of left Labour's most cherished illusions about their ability to achieve reforms at local government level.

Once they are in effect, local councils will lose virtually all their autonomy and have to act as mere tools of national government. This means that Labour councils will be forced to act as rubber stamps for Tory policies. What has already been imposed in Scotland – where resistance from Lothian Regional Council collapsed ignominiously – is now being copied south of the border.

At the heart of Heseltine's legislation lies a complex web of controls designed to stop 'profligate' local councils in England and Wales from using the rates option to pay for services that would otherwise be cut as a result of the government starving them of funds.

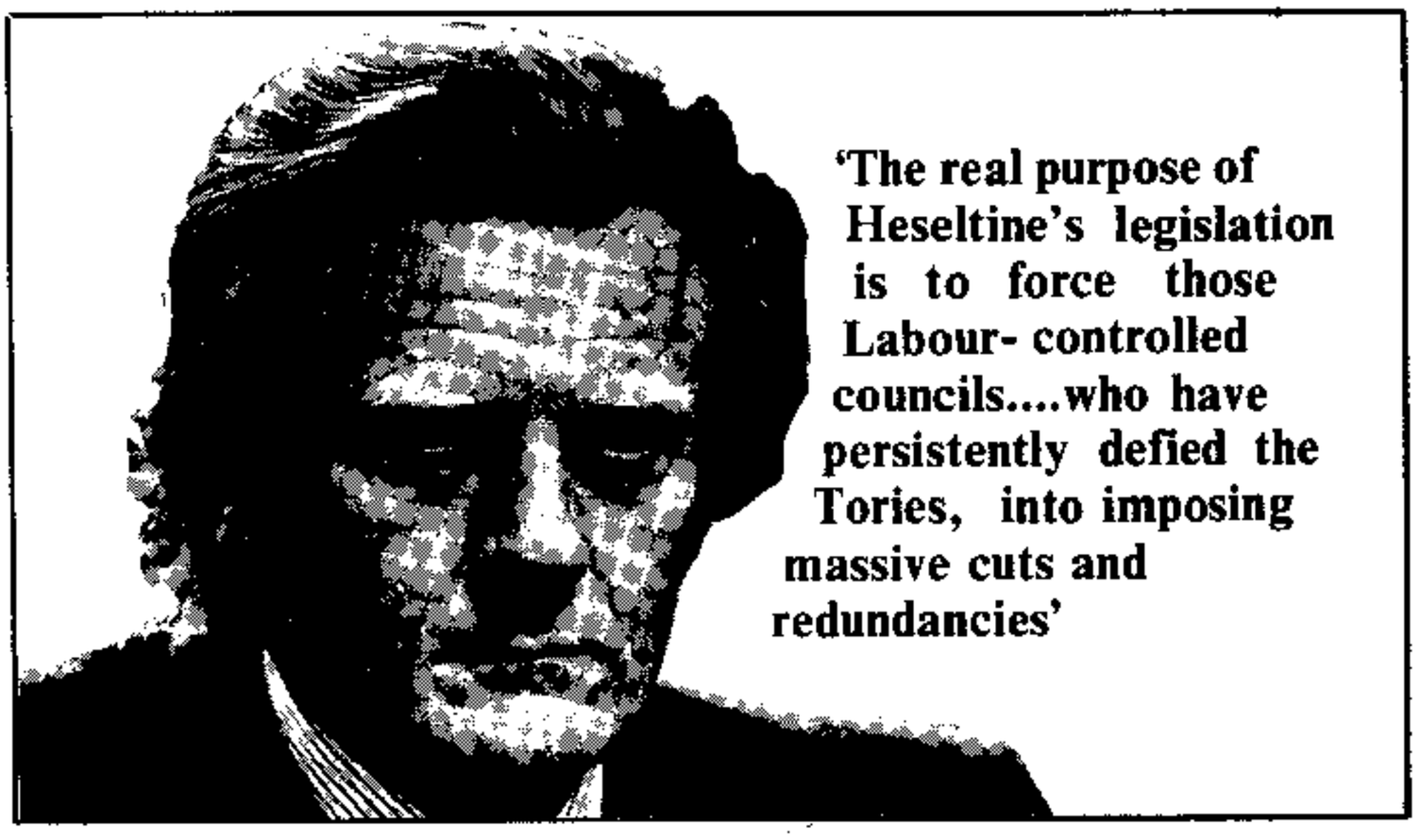
The Tories, of course, have made no bones since coming to office about their intentions. Most councils, under threat of future financial penalties, have toed the line; but some, most notably Lambeth Council (under Ted Knight), and now the Greater London Council, led since May by Ken Livingstone, have opted to resist cutbacks in jobs and services (and indeed to go for some expansion) by raising extra revenue via the rates.

Ken Livingstone, in particular, has argued (see *Socialist Review* 1981:6) that rate increases, far from simply passing the cuts on, have a progressive, redistributive element that acts in defence of working class interests. On that basis, the GLC went ahead with its manifesto promise to slash London Transport fares and paid for it by a supplementary rate demand which came thudding through people's letterboxes just over a month ago.

Undoubtedly it was paid for too in terms of the Labour Party losing the Croydon parliamentary by-election and the St Pancras GLC by-election. The SDP have been able to capitalise on the pervasive discontent about yet another burden on living standards (in some cases, rates becoming larger than rents). The Tory government – after reducing grants to the GLC so as to make the supplementary rate twice as high as it needed to be – taking steps to close off the rates option once and for all.

What the Heseltine legislation proposes is as follows. First, a cash limit will be placed on each local authority's expenditure. On the basis of its own unit-cost analysis of items of expenditure (for example, the average national cost of educating under-fives), Whitehall will calculate annually what it reckons each authority needs to spend, to which it will then add a percentage 'tolerance' to take account of local factors. (It is obvious, by the way, that this hits the large urban centres hard as their needs are likely to be much greater than the shire counties.)

This 'Grant Related Expenditure', as it's called, then forms the basis of all subsequent operations. Authorities will still be able to fix rates in the traditional manner, but only as a proportion of the Grant Related Expenditure (with central government providing the remainder via the Rate Support Grant).



'The real purpose of Heseltine's legislation is to force those Labour- controlled councils....who have persistently defied the Tories, into imposing massive cuts and redundancies'

Any local authority whose expenditure is far larger than that warranted by the government's own estimate, ie any authority that has *not* cut back on jobs or services, is then faced with a huge problem: how does it bridge the gap between what it wants to spend and what the new proposed legislation allows it to spend?

Traditionally, as we have seen, it could levy a larger or a supplementary rate, thus making itself less dependent on central government grants.

This is where the next stage of the Heseltine proposals comes in. Authorities will be permitted to raise a first supplementary rate; but it will be limited to a percentage of the initial cash limit. They will also be permitted a second supplementary rate, but only if they meet tight conditions (Heseltine wanted a legalling binding referendum with the questions written by the government, but is likely to be forced by Tory backbench pressure to use some other device). Both supplementary rates will also fall very heavily on domestic ratepayers, since industrial and commercial ratepayers will be largely exempted.

If at the end of this local authorities still can't balance the books the Secretary of State is empowered to step in to decide what cuts should be made and to vet the following year's budget.

The real purpose of this legislation is to force those Labour-controlled councils, mostly in London, though also in other places, like Sheffield, South Yorkshire, Manchester and Merseyside, who have persistently defied the Tories, into imposing massive cuts and redundancies.

Having championed a radical, yet constitutional, version of municipal socialism, left Labour council leaders now realise that they are on a hiding to nothing with the new legislation. They also realise that their credibility will sink to zero if they go along with its operation. Ted Knight, for example, admits that the scale of cuts in Lambeth would entail the sacking of at least a thousand employees, together with catastrophic reductions in all the services. Rents would rocket, repairs would slow to a trickle. That would be electoral suicide – but so too would the scale of the supplementary rate rise required to defend services under Heseltine's proposals.

Ken Livingstone, leader of the GLC, writing in *London Labour Briefing* November 1981, calculates:

> 'Those councils most above the new Tory guidelines would have to double the rates next year for domestic ratepayers or make cuts in services on a scale which would lead to the loss of a quarter of a million jobs.'

Even if the GLC overcame Lord Denning's ruling, London Transport fares would rise by at least 85 per cent and GLC rents would shoot up by £6 a week. The GLC would have to sack thousands of firemen, transport workers and council staff. The Inner London

Education Authority would have to increase class sizes, close more schools, chop provision for the under-fives, as well as cut a deep swathe through the post-school education sector. Redundancies among teachers would be enormous.

With the rates option firmly sealed off, left Labour leaders realise that they have no choice but to stand and fight. But how? No firm proposals to counter Heseltine have yet emerged.

One idea floating around is resignation and handing over to the Tories to do their own dirty work. A more favoured strategy, however, as put forward by Ken Livingstone, seems to be to stay in office, refusing either to make cuts or to increase rates. That of course means an extra-constitutional dimension to the struggle, one which involves trade unions and community groups in a massive campaign starting now to defend services and jobs.

A variant on this strategy, put forward by Ted Knight, involves a referendum run by local councils, seeking support for a position of no cuts, a freeze on rates and more government cash, as a way of strengthening their position against central government. The role of the trade unions here is to fight alongside their Labour councils in the context of the referendum campaign.

That left Labour leaders are talking seriously of fighting and of trade unions as vital in that struggle can only be welcomed. We in the SWP have always argued that a successful opposition to cuts has to be based on rank and file activity in the workplace. However, what is going to be the nature of the partnership between council and trade union? The experience of the short-lived campaign in Lothian has some important lessons for us.

The first is that the local council is an *employer.* Its officers act as any management would in relationship to its workers. It is they who want to keep costs down, ensure discipline, haggle over conditions, etc, etc.

As far as the local community is concerned, the councillors may think of themselves as wonderfully progressive (indeed, they may be), but the public image is that of a distant bureaucracy, by turns benevolent and oppressive (more often the latter as living standards fall and every rent and rate collection is a greater burden on tenants). Having operated on the basis of a 'leave-it-to-us' paternalism, it will be difficult, to say the least, to build a defence of services on an opposite basis.

Take the instance of rates: if you've spent the last few months screwing extra rates out of tenants on the grounds that that is the best way of preserving community facilities, it stretches credibility to turn round now and say it is better done by *not* increasing the rates.

The community cannot be used like a stage army, battered one moment, courted the next. Any campaign aimed at winning public support will be weakened by evasiveness on such issues, and a defence of the council's past record is likely to give the press and the right a field day in exposing all the contradictions. That would especially be the case with anything like a Ted Knight-style referendum, which epitomises the passivity inherent in any town hall led campaign (the experience of referendums for 'progressive causes' has in any case been uniformly disastrous).

In reality the leadership of any community campaign to defend council services will have to be based not on the town hall but on such organisations as tenants' associations.

Their capacity to fight, however, will depend on the confidence of the trade union campaign. And that brings us to the second lesson of the Lothian experience, in many ways the crucial one. When council leaders talk about trade unions, do they mean the leadership and official structures, or the rank and file? When they talk about defending education, for example, do they look to the Executive of the NUT or to the militants in the union, who the Executive has spent so much valuable energy victimising for fear of being pushed into anything like an active resistance to cuts?

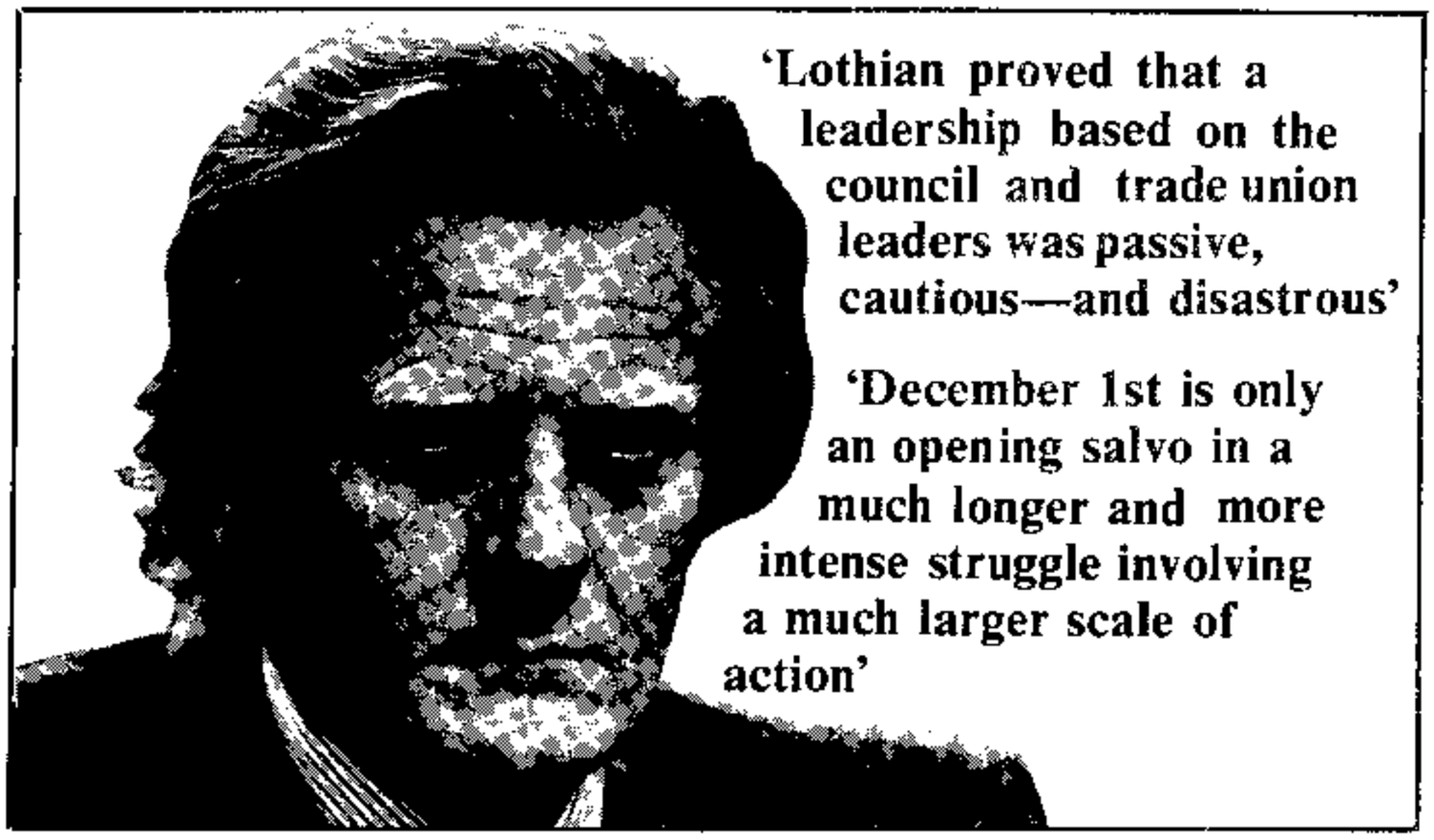
The answer should be obvious. But the problem is that they are likely to have an exaggerated respect for 'official channels'.

Just as the councillors and the council officers see themselves as the 'official' leaders of the community, so the regional trade union officers and officials see themselves as the 'official' leaders of the trade unions. Their interests tend to converge; they meet on a regular basis for negotiations, far away from the realities of the workplace, the council side reassuring the trade union side that it is doing the best in difficult circumstances, the trade union side agreeeing not to rock the boat for fear of getting something worse. Inevitably, the rank and file are going to be suspicious of any defence of services which makes out that past cuts from 'comrades' in the town hall are superior to those from the class enemy at Westminster.

Lothian proved that a leadership based on the council and trade union leaders was passive, cautious—and disastrous (for details see *Socialist Review* 1981:8). What initiatives for action were carried were the result of rank and file leadership in the teeth of opposition from the officials. The absence of large scale resistance was then used by councillors as an excuse for making the cuts wanted by the Tories.

If the resistance to Heseltine is conducted in the same terms, with left Labour councillors and trade union bureaucrats assuming the mantle of leadership, then we can expect the same conclusion. The key to stopping this is for rank and file militants to take advantage of whatever official campaigns of opposition to Heseltine come into being in order to strengthen organisation in the workplace for when the crunch comes next year.

But the existing 'political' campaign led by the London teachers' union, in conjunctions with the ILEA, points to some of the problems. It sees defence of local government as paramount (ie defence of our employers) and therefore tends to play it ultra-constitutionally so as to alienate no potential respectable support. For the same reason, it is tied to the parliamentary timetable. Consequently, the half-day strike action called for December 1st (after a lot of pressure: our allies in the House of Lords wouldn't understand it) is being seen as a last ditch effort to stop Heseltine's proposals becoming law. Since it won't succeed, presumably the campaign dies at the same time.



'Lothian proved that a leadership based on the council and trade union leaders was passive, cautious—and disastrous'

'December 1st is only an opening salvo in a much longer and more intense struggle involving a much larger scale of action'

Our perspective must be that far from being a last ditch effort, December 1st is only an opening salvo in a much longer and more intense struggle involving a much larger scale of action. But if, as seems likely, the kinds of campaign now being proposed by Livingstone and Knight are to be tied to electoral considerations, referendum politics, and the like, then the prospects are gloomy. It's down to us to convert them into 'industrial' campaigns, geared not to the tempo of town hall politics but to the rhythm of struggle in the workplace.

Centrism: more than just an insult

No serious sectarian slanging match is complete without the use of the word 'centrist'. It is, for instance, one of those terms of abuse used by the smaller left sects in relation to the SWP and to each other. Not surprisingly, many people who are new to left politics regard it as an obscure bit of jargon they'd prefer to do without. Who cares whether one group of 200 people calls another of 300 'centrist'?

Yet, as **Ian Birchall** explains at certain points in history the term designates a very important phenomenon. When it was first used by revolutionaries at the end of World War One it applied to organisations with hundreds of thousands of activists. When it was used again, by Trotsky, at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War, it characterised a party (the POUM) bigger in Catalonia than the Communist or Socialist Parties (which merged), with five thousand armed militiamen.

So what is a centrist?

> 'Centrism is the name applied to that policy which is opportunist in substance and which seeks to appear as revolutionary in form. Opportunism consists in a passive adaptation to the ruling class and its regime, to that which already exists, including, of course, the state boundaries. Centrism shares completely this fundamental trait of opportunism, but in adapting itself to the dissatisfied workers, centrism veils it by means of radical commentaries.'

That is Trotsky's definition. Revolutionary in form, opportunist in substance.

So, for example, Tony Benn, who makes no claim to be a Marxist, is not a centrist. (He's a middle-of-the-road reformist pretending to be a left reformist.) But many of Benn's supporters are centrists – they use the rhetoric of class struggle, even to criticise Benn, yet in practice end up reinforcing Benn's positions.

Marxist terminology

The substance of Marxism lies in three things: the historical role of the working class, the need to smash the state machine and the need for a vanguard party. And it is on these points that the centrist, despite a rhetorical and sometimes erudite commitment to Marxist terminology, will turn out to be ambiguous.

'We need the working class, *but* there are other social forces to be reckoned with in modern society.' 'The state has to be radically restructured *but* this needs parliamentary action backed up by mass struggle.' 'We need a revolutionary organisation, *but* democratic centralism is hopelessly out of date.' 'We need a revolutionary organisation, *but* trade union militants can't be subjected to total party discipline.' When you find yourself listening to language like this, it's probably a centrist talking.

Centrism, as a serious political phenomenon, is not a question of naïve or dishonest individuals. It is a product of a society in crisis.

People do not go to bed one night as reformists and wake up the next day as revolutionary socialists. As people move between two radically different views of the world, they often stop off at half-way positions, holding a variety of confused or inconsistent views. Of course, certain centrist leaders will seek to exploit such confusions and inconsistencies in their own political interests. But the vast bulk of those who make up centrist organisations or currents are a vital part of our audience – it is our job not so much to denounce their inconsistencies as to try to clarify them.

The problem of centrism in the socialist movement first became of vital importance in the First World War. The war drove a deep wedge between those who put loyalty to their own nation first, and those who continued to argue for proletarian internationalism.

But among the *opponents* of the war two camps soon emerged. On the one hand were those like Karl Kautsky, whose knowledge of the Marxist classics was so great that before the war he had been known as the 'Pope of Marxism'. He now argued that what was needed was to end the war by negotiation, so that the old International, including pro-war and anti-war elements, could be cobbled together again.

The other camp, including Lenin, argued that there could be no turning back. The war had shown a fundamental divide between those who wanted to smash the bourgeois state and those who didn't. So Lenin called, not for peace negotiations, but for turning the

Spain 1936. the POUM stood for a government composed exclusively of working class organisations. But when the other left parties rejected this it entered a coalition with bourgeois representatives.

war into revolution. In this three-way line-up, Kautsky and friends came to be known as 'the Centre'.

In the period immediately after the war, when millions of workers were determined that a similar catastrophe should never occur again, the ranks of the centrist organisations grew rapidly. Towards the end of the war Kautsky and others were expelled from the German Social Democratic Party and formed the USPD (Independent Social Democratic Party). By 1920 the new party had 800,000 members, as against 50,000 in the German Communist Party.

This caused deep problems for the international revolutionary left, united in the newly founded Communist International.

The Russian Revolution was extremely popular with workers all through Europe, and many of the old-time politicians who had thoroughly disgraced themselves during the war were trying to climb back into favour by jumping on the pro-Russian bandwagon. The Communist International had to take a very tough line towards the centrists, especially the centrist leaders —otherwise the new revolutionary International would have been taken over by parasites and has-beens.

Revolutionary crises

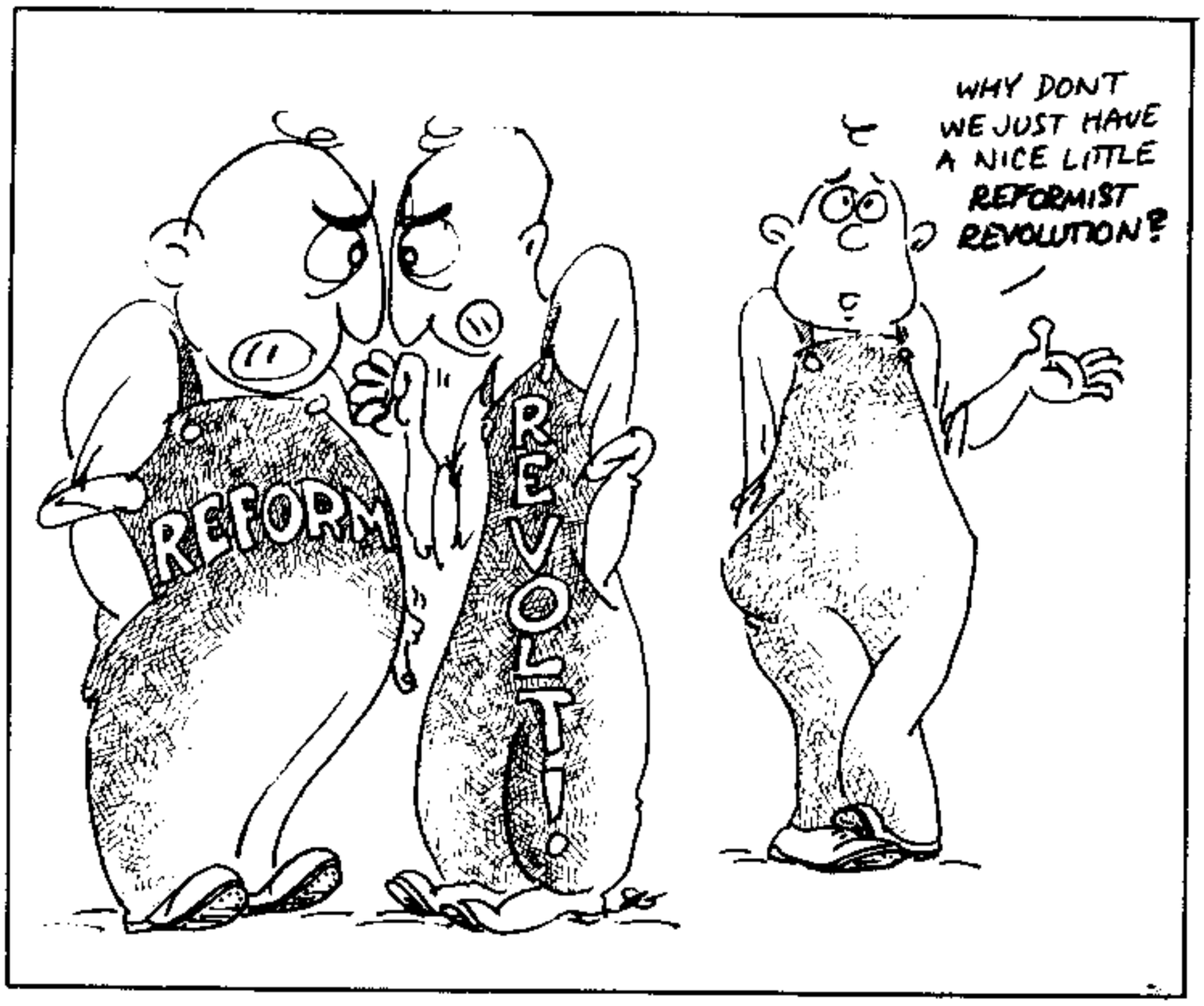
The International drew up a set of twenty-one tough conditions designed to keep out centrists. As the president of the International, Zinoviev, put it: 'Just as it is not easy for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, so, I hope, it will not be easy for the adherents of the centre to slip through the 21 conditions.'

Centrism grew very rapidly – only to fall apart just as rapidly. In October 1920 the USPD debated its attitude to the Communist International. After hearing a four-hour speech from Zinoviev delegates voted to join it; 300,000 members did so and merged with the revolutionary Communist Party. Within three years the remaining rump of the 'centre' round Kautsky collapsed back into the Social Democratic Party.

In subsequent revolutionary crises the role of centrism has been similar.

At the beginning of the Spanish Civil War in 1936 the POUM was a serious contender for the leadership of the Spanish working class. It had significant working class support and a leadership with a creditable revolutionary anti-Stalinist past.

Yet the inconsistent politics of the POUM led to disaster. It failed to make a head-on challenge to the influence of reformists and anarchists in the trade unions and in the army. It stood for a government composed exclusively of representatives of working class organisations—but when the other left parties rejected this view it entered a coalition with bourgeois representatives. The POUM opposed reformism but failed to fight it. And as a result it cut its own



throat -and left the Spanish workers to face a defeat that would last a generation.

In more recent times the experience has been pathetic rather than tragic.

In 1960 the French PSU (United Socialist Party) was founded by members of the Socialist Party disgusted with their leaders' support for the Algerian war and capitulation to Gaullism. In its early years it took some principled and courageous initiatives in favour of Algerian independence. But the party consisted of a bunch of quite divergent political groupings and used the excuse of 'internal democracy' to avoid a clear decision between them.

Its relations with the leaders of the CFDT trade union meant that it never organised its trade union militants on a fractional basis. In the general strike of May 1968 many PSU militants played a key role; but the party as a whole had no impact because it could not make up its mind whether it was developing the embryos of workers' power in the factories or organising a come-back for former prime minister Mendes-France.

In the early seventies, when the Socialist Party started to rebuild on a new basis, a large part of the PSU went over; a former PSU leader, Michel Rocard, now heads the most right-wing tendency in the French Socialist Party. The PSU lingers on, as a kind of 'Beyond-The-Fragments' rump, unable to make up its mind whether to campaign against the Mitterrand government's sell-outs or to negotiate to join it.

Just because centrism is a half-way house, any centrist party or current will contain a variety of groups moving in different ways; some moving from revolution to reformism, some from reformism to revolution—and some staying where they are because they prefer to fish in muddy waters.

So, relating to centrists requires a certain amount of subtlety. Blanket denunciations are easy, but winning those who are moving the right way needs a bit more skill. We can't all recruit three hundred thousand new members in four hours, like Zinoviev, but we can try.

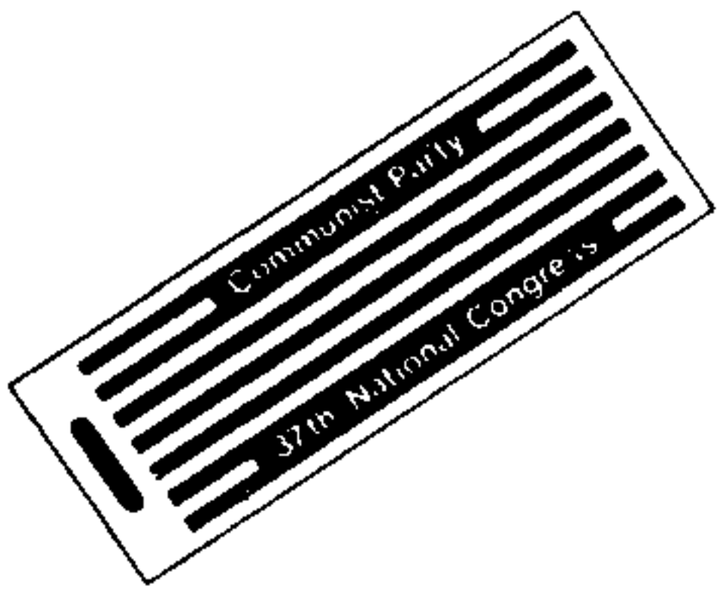
Above all, the question of centrism varies according to the ups and downs of the class struggle. When masses of workers are moving to the left, then centrism presents enormous dangers. For if centrists take the lead of the movement, they will fudge the issues and deflect it from the path it should follow. But if the masses are moving to the right, then the task is to attract those few centrists willing to swim against the stream.

Leninist dogmatism

In 1920 the Communist International put up the barriers against centrists who found it fashionable. But by July 1921 Lenin was criticising 'exaggeration' in the fight against centrism.

In today's situation there is little danger of the SWP being swamped by a flood of centrists seeking to join us. We have to meet, debate and work with centrists as part of the process of building an organisation. But at the same time total clarity about centrism is necessary.

A study of history, from Kautsky to Rocard, and an insistence on the basic principles of Marxism, are necessary to forestall the danger that when a revolutionary upsurge comes, the centrists will make the running. And for that we need a party with a clear programme and a trained cadre. Just the sort of Leninist dogmatism any self-respecting centrist would have nothing to do with.



Still no stopping the decline

The most striking feature of last month's Communist Party congress was the strength of the pro-Russian opposition to the party leadership. It made the running in the two most heated debates of the congress, on the *Morning Star* and Afghanistan. In each case it got the votes of about 40 per cent of the delegates (the pro-invasion amendment on Afghanistan lost by 115 votes to 157).

How is it that the pro-Russians are apparently gaining strength, thirteen years after the party condemned the invasion of Czechoslovakia and more than four years after the pro-Russian split to form the New Communist Party?

The answer begins with the crude figures of the Communist Party's decline.

The CP completes its annual membership count every July. In July 1973 membership was 29,900. By July 1979 it was 20,599. Years of social contract and collaboration by the union leaders who the CP promoted had cut membership by nearly a third.

But even more significant is what has happened over the last two years. By July 1981 membership was down to 18,458. The CP had lost another 2000 members during two years in which the Labour Party was growing and the Labour left making, on the face of it, unprecedented gains. When you remember the central place 'left advance' in the Labour Party has for the CP then that is really catastrophic.

We have argued for a long time that the Communist Party has ceased to have a rationale for a separate existence. Since its politics are indistinguishable from the Labour left and a 'Labour government of a new type' is at the centre of its strategy, then isn't it logical to shut up shop and join the Labour Party? What was once simply a matter of logic is now a question of harsh political reality as the CP declines and the Bennites grow.

Even the few special assets the CP has, a traditional concern for industrial organisation and 'theory', are now devalued. Broad Lefts in a number of unions are now run quite happily solely by Labour lefts and the Bennite camp is awash with 'theoreticians'.

This logic of liquidating into the Labour Party did make a couple of appearances at the congress – at least in veiled form. Two resolutions were put, one to launch a campaign for affiliation to the Labour Party, the other to try and avoid CP standing election candidates against Labour. The fact that each got support of a quarter of the delegates is an indicator of the frustrations. So were some of the speeches for them, like this:

> 'Our votes get lower and lower and our comrades more and more demoralised . . . For the past 25 years we have had delusions of grandeur believing we can negotiate with the Labour Party from a position of strength.'

However, even had the motions been passed that would have resolved nothing. Everyone knows that the Labour Party would simply turn down affiliation. And avoidance of standing candidates against Labour could easily mean not standing candidates at all – not a happy situation for a party one hundred per cent committed to the parliamentary road.

If the arguments for the motions were valid, that did not provide a strategy for an independent CP. Rather it meant winding the CP up and going en masse into the Labour Party. If the CP as such rejects this conclusion, many of the members have already voted with their feet – from a large chunk of the Eurocommunist intellectuals, to trade union activists like Jimmy Reid or the ex-CP members who formed the Labour Party's first factory branch at Timex in Dundee, to even a few pro Russian elements now grouped around the paper *Straight Left*.

Bureaucratic inertia

As members peel off, inevitably a higher proportion are left who adhere to the one feature which can provide a rationale for the party's continuing separate existence – being pro-Russian.

The only other thing to keep the party going is the bureaucratic inertia of the leadership, people whose lives and prospects are totally bound up with the continued separate existence of the party. The message they give amounts to little more than 'Carry on regardless' and 'Try harder'. And because that is the message, CP congresses are peppered with stunningly blind pronouncements like this one from general secretary Gordon McLennan this year:

> 'The main resolution of our last congress analysed why there was a membership decline and made proposals to win resumption of party growth. That analysis was a correct one and still applies'

This after the loss of another 2,141 members!

However continual unsuccessful calls to 'try harder' eventually create bitterness even in the most leaden of organisations. And the pro-Russians are there to give voice to it.

Nothing reveals this more than the fate of the *Morning Star* circulation campaign.

Falling *Star* sales have gone hand in hand with declining CP membership for years. In 1980 another 1,232 daily readers were lost and editor Tony Chater announced to the CP executive in January 1981 that 'at stake is the very survival of the paper'. A make or break campaign was launched with much ballyhoo to get 3,000 extra readers by the end of 1981.

Yet by the time of the congress ten months of make-or-break campaigning had resulted in a further *decline* of over 400. What made things even more galling was that sales were actually declining during the People's March!

Tub thumping optimists

Not surprisingly this produced a very bitter debate. One area blamed another for not pulling their weight.

'I wish all comrades worked as hard for the *Morning Star* as the comrades in West Middlesex do' (from a West Middlesex delegate of course). 'In 1980 national circulation declined by 1200, but in Yorkshire it only declined by 9' (from a Yorkshire delegate of course)

Circulation manager Joe Berry viciously attacked Eurocommunist critics of the content of the paper for dereliction of duty: 'Dave Cook knows nothing about factories . . . Steve Hart didn't organise a campaign round Fords.' Even the tub thumping optimists were weighing in against one section of the delegates or another.

But there was a line up in this mutual recrimination. The leadership was proposing 'Carry on regardless', which meant simply shifting the 3000 extra sales target from the end of 1981 to the end of 1982! And that despite the fact that a price increase of 4p is now certain! The dwindling band of Eurocommunists, perhaps 50 delegates, continued to press their case that the content of the paper needed to be changed by broadening out. The pro-Russians with more than 100 delegates argued that strong party branches were essential to building the circulation of the paper and that greater priority should be given to industrial coverage and the 'achievements of the socialist countries'.

The pro-Russians really mauled the Eurocommunists. The Euro amendment would 'open up the paper to trendy lefties and drop outs', it promised a 'visual chat show', if it were passed 'we will have lost our paper, it will no longer be ours.' And although one Eurocommunist supporter described the present paper as 'dull and boring' and 'a chore to read', in general they were largely defending the paper as it is now. It was the pro-Russians who wanted to change things.

Clearly the leadership did not have the positive support of the majority of the congress. And it was openly split on how to get it. In his introduction editor Tony Chater had described the Eurocommunist amendment as 'arrant nonsense' but by the end of the debate the executive speakers claimed they supported it – on conditions which took any teeth out of it whatsoever!

So the leadership got a three-to-two majority against the pro-Russians. But only by blocking with Eurocommunists who have very little faith in the paper. The Eurocommunists in turn were too weak to press for any real change in the paper and therefore ended up simply defending it against the far stronger pro-Russian camp.

What is also notable about this debate, and others, was the complete absence of any left and right polarisation in it. Pro-Russians, leadership and Eurocommunists were all completely agreed on the strategy pursued during the People's March – bishops and all. No-one complained when Pete Carter boasted that 'the Trotskyists' and the 'Labour left' had failed to turn it into 'a Thatcher bashing, anti-Tory exercise'.

In the Peace debate, there was much argument about taking a 'class' line, but this was simply a codeword for a pro-Russian line. If anything the pro-Russians were *more* in favour than the Eurocommunists of working with the multilateralist World Disarmament Campaign as well as with CND. Even the 'greater emphasis on industry' in the *Morning Star* proposed by the pro-Russians amounted to no more than an objection to 'trendiness' and, in the case of one speaker, objection to coverage of gays!

Given that much of present CP politics, as exemplified in, for instance, the People's March, is to the *right* of most of the Labour left, then the absence of any even mildly left criticism of it at the congress is another powerful indication of how the party has become a sect.

The congress ended with two of the leadership's recommended list of candidates for the new executive committee being defeated. It is the first time that has happened. And it shows just how narrowly the leadership scraped through. Neither leadership, nor pro-Russians nor Eurocommunists can have gone away from the congress very happy.

What is certain is that the decline will carry on over the next two yeas at at least the same pace as over the past two. A number of quite likely events could greatly accelerate the process. A Russian invasion of Poland would clearly rip the party wide open. The collapse of the *Morning Star*, which surely cannot be far off, would be traumatic. But even if those two disasters are somehow averted by the next congress the pro-Russians could be in a majority. That would signal the exit of even more members and the completion of the party's transformation into a sect.

Pete Goodwin

A possible arena for useful socialist debate

In the summer issue of *Socialist Review* (1981:7) we reported on the initiative of a number of socialist intellectuals to set up a Socialist Society. At the time we commented that the enterprise was basically worthy of support, but that the project was somewhat woolly and that various contradictions had remained unresolved.

Since that time a Steering Committee has been regularly meeting to prepare for the launching of the Society. It has not resolved the contradictions, but has produced some concrete proposals for action.

The basic aims of the Society would be to provide a framework for theoretical and polemical discussion of socialist ideas. In practical terms various proposals have been floated.

Firstly, it is intended to produce a series of pamphlets on the key issues of the day. The first two, on the SDP and on NATO, are already being written.

Secondly, there have been negotiations with publishers with a view to producing a series of books on current problems, either by single authors or based on seminars at which a variety of viewpoints would be put forward. Suggested titles include the state, the economic crisis, Northern Ireland and the family.

Thirdly, it is proposed that the Society should have local organisations which would set up meetings, classes and conferences on current and theoretical topics.

The proposed political basis of the Society could not be explicitly Marxist, though it would call for support for public ownership and the radical transformation of the existing state. Clearly this leaves open the possibility of collapse into being a left cover for the Labour left (and not-so-left). There are no guarantees that the Society will not go down the same drain as the left clubs of 1959-60, the Centre for Socialist Education of 1965, the May Day Manifesto of 1967 and the National Convention of the Left of 1968. But if the Society does get off the ground, it will be a modest gain for the left, offering an arena in which it may be possible to have clear and sharp political debate without sectarian abuse.

The Society's main audience will probably be among left intellectuals, and its chance of succeeding depend in part on the particular problems of the left intelligentsia in this period of industrial downturn and political upturn.

Since 1968 there has been a substantial enclave of self-proclaimed Marxism within the British academic system. Though this generated some interesting work it remained on the margins of struggle – indeed for many the Althusserian mystique offered a positive justification for the separation of theory and practice. But now the situation is changing.

The academic left is under attack, not only in the form of an ideological backlash, but more fundamentally in terms of the massive cuts that the government is implementing in higher education. On top of this there is the rise of Bennism and the collapse of Eurocommunism as a viable tendency. A further factor in the recent development of the academic left has been the proliferation of publishers and caucuses in specialised areas – radical philosophers, socialist economists etc etc. There is a need for some sort of coordination between such bodies.

The Socialist Society may, then, respond to some of the needs of the present period. It make no pretence to be an alternative party; its present Steering Committee contains members of the Labour Party, CP, SWP, IMG, Big Flame and non-aligned individuals. Its existence will not change one iota our task of building a revolutionary party rooted in the working class. But the battle of ideas is one part of that task; and if the Socialist Society provides an arena for that battle, we should welcome it and help it to develop.

Charmed circle

If that is to happen two dangers must be avoided. Firstly, the debate must be open and wide-ranging. The books and seminars must be must not be confined to the charmed circle of established contributors to such journals as *New Left Review*. They must draw in those who have been involved in the real struggles of the last few years.

The trade union presence must not be limited to a few tame left bureaucrats. With the collapse of Eurocommunism, it is a fitting time to debate some of the basic issues of socialist theory – reform or revolution, the nature of the capitalist crisis and of the 'socialist' countries. The anti-Leninism currently fashionable on the academic left must not be allowed to ostracise any currents from the debate.

Secondly, the majority of those currently involved in preparing the Socialist Society belong to the Bennite current, or at least to those who give critical support to Benn. In itself that is no problem. If one of the aims is to provide a forum for debate between revolutionaries and the Labour left, then we can hardly ask for the Labourites to be excluded. But there is the constant danger that, in the cut and thrust of Labour Party factionalising, the Society will be diverted from its original purpose and turned into just one more in the array of Tony Benn fan clubs. If that happens, then the Socialist Society will be just one more footnote in the history of British centrism.

A conference has been called to launch the Society, to be held at the Institute of Education (Malet Street, London WC1) on the weekend of January 23-24. This will be open to all individuals sympathetic to the aims of the Society. It will consist mainly of workshops to discuss practical areas of work, with one main plenary session to adopt a constitution and membership charter, and to elect a Steering Committee. The Conference fee will be £5 (£2 for the unwaged) and there will be a creche. For further details and registration write to WGSS c/o 7 Carlisle Street, London, W1V 6NL.

Ian Birchall
(Member of Provisional Steering Committee)

Kurt Vonnegut

Sugar pills with a bitter coating on them

'There were one quadrillion nations in the universe, but America was the only one with a national anthem which was gibberish sprinkled with question marks...The motto of this nation was this, which meant in a language nobody spoke any more, "Out of Many, One": "E Pluri bus unum".

'The anthem and the vacant motto might not have mattered much, if it weren't for this: a lot of citizens were so ignored and cheated and insulted that they thought they might be in the wrong country, or even on the wrong planet...

So begins Vonnegut's book *Breakfast of Champions*. Many people think that Vonnegut is a science fiction writer. In fact, his deepest concerns are with the present, with the American present in particular. His interest in science is not a technical one, but a moral one, occasionally an explicitly political one. He has written about his own assignment to the 'drawer labelled science fiction':

> 'Years ago I was working in Schenectady for General Electric, completely surrounded by machines and ideas for machines, so I wrote a novel about people and machines *(Player Piano)*. And I learned from the reviewers that I was a science fiction writer. I didn't know that. I supposed I was writing a novel about life, about things I could not help seeing and hearing in Schenectady, a very real town, awkwardly set in the gruesome now.'

There can be no doubt in the mind of anyone who reads Vonnegut that he regards the world today as a pretty horrifying place. Nor that his sympathies lie with the oppressed, the victims of the present state of affairs. His books are, nevertheless, extremely funny. They are funny because they are recognisably faithful to the bizarre, absurd world we inhabit. He writes that the biggest laughs are based on the biggest disappointments and the biggest fears.

That is certainly true of his own work. You laugh, but you know that what you're reading is really happening: scientists haven't invented Ice-9 (the weapon which ends the world in *Cat's Cradle*), but they have invented weapons just as horrific. There is no such place as San Lorenzo, no such person as its dictator 'Papa', but Papa is every dictator of every South American banana republic ground down by imperialism. H Lowe Crosby, the bicycle manufacturer, is every American businessman who sees in terror and poverty a good investment opportunity.

Vonnegut's humour is the humour of 'intelligent people in hopeless situations', the humour of the prison camp, of the ordinary person who finds him/herself powerless in the face of the insanity of the system. One of Vonnegut's favourite jokes is an exchange between two tramps: 'Well, it ain't no disgrace to be poor.' 'No, but it might as well be.'

Vonnegut is a self-proclaimed pessimist. He dates his conversion from optimism based on science and progress to 'the day we dropped scientific truth on Hiroshima'.

He was in Dresden during the firebombing of that undefended civilian city by Allied bombers, and survived through being in a slaughterhouse with other American prisoners. From that experience came *Slaughter house 5*, perhaps his best known book. It is not surprising that he became a pacifist. On many occasions in his work he insists that the war against Hitler was a just one, but that doesn't blind him to the fact that many lies were told about that war by the Allied governments, including the story of Dresden.

From a Marxist point of view there is much which is infuriating about Vonnegut. His books do not contain a consistent view of what is wrong with the world, and what ought to be done about it. There is also a lot of populism and a good dash of sentimentality. But equally there is a great deal of cynicism, too. A critic wrote that Vonnegut 'took sugar pills and put bitter coatings on them.' There's truth in that, but it isn't wholly fair.

There are many recurring themes in Vonnegut's work, and recurring characters and situations as well: the moral irresponsibility of many scientists, the feeling of uselessness which a good part of the population experiences, loneliness, and the importance of a sense of community and of a harmonious culture.

Some of his most interesting writing is collected together in a book of essays and speeches entitled *Wampeters, Foma and Granfalloons.*

One of my favourites is a demolition job on the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, entitled 'Yes, we have no Nirvanas'. Questioned on the issue of civil rights, the Maharishi replies that any oppressed person could rise by practising Transcendental Meditation. 'He would automatically do his job better, and the economy would pay him more, and then he could buy anything he wanted.' Vonnegut comments:

> 'In other words, he should quit bitching, begin to meditate, grasp his garters, and float to a commanding position in the marketplace, where transactions are always fair. I opened my eyes, and I took a hard look at Maharishi. He hadn't wafted me to India. He had sent me back to Schenectady, New York, where I used to be a public relations man years and years ago. Maharishi had come all the way from India to speak to the American people like a General Electric engineer.'

His comments on the American political system are also very incisive:

> 'If I were a visitor from another planet, I would say things like this about the people of the United States in 1972: These are ferocious creatures who imagine that they are gentle. They have experimented in very recent times with salvery and genocide. I would say "The two real political parties in America are the Winners and the Losers. The people do not acknowledge this. They claim membership in two imaginary parties, the Republicans and Democrats, instead. Both imaginary parties are bossed by Winners. When Republicans battle Democrats, this much is certain: Winners will win."'

Vonnegut describes his books as mosaics, in which each little chip is a joke. Don't go looking in his work for a revolutionary critique of American capitalism. What you will find is lots of very good jokes, in the best sense of the word: jokes at the expense of all that is most rotten in society. Jokes which cut through the bullshit to the reality of the 'cruel social machine'.

Finally, anyone who can describe the Republican convention as 'Disneyland under martial law' has to be worth a read.

Sue Cockerill

Disappointing scuttle

Socialism in a Crippled World
Christopher Hampton
Penguin £4.95

I really would like to review this book warmly. Its heart is in the right place. It hates capitalism, it hates Stalinism, and it wants people to be free. Reading it was an old-fashioned pleasure in many ways: no structuralist gobbledygook, lots of hot indignation at the injustices of the twentieth century, and an invigorating insistence that socialism will need to be built out of Blake and Shelley and Dickens as well as Marx, Lenin and Trotsky. But.

That 'but' comes because socialism needs more than hot indignation and a love of Blake's lyrics, and it's a 'more' that the book doesn't and can't supply. What, for example, *is* socialism?

At moments the text hints it might be found in the policies of the Labour Party – we're told of the 'great period of socialist transformation' under the 1945 Labour government, even though a few pages earlier the author notes that the Labour Party 'is committed to maintaining a financial and fiscal system that encourages divisiveness and self-interest.' Then again, it might be Bolshevism, warmly praised in Chapter 2 but dismissed 'beyond all argument' in Chapter 8.

Because the text never arrives at any sharp sense of what socialism means and involves, it's forced into eccentric movement like some sort of electric crab.

Again and again, it scuttles to and fro between despair at Western capitalism and revulsion at the mess of the Soviet Union; in successive chapters it hobbles backwards through history from TS Eliot to Dickens to Shakespeare, lurches forwards to Blake, trips sideways to Shelley, leaps on to Auden and then topples backwards again to William Morris.

As the search for something to stick a claw into and stop the world spinning for a moment gets more frantic, the piles of unanswered rhetorical questions get bigger and bigger – two whole pages of them in Chapter 9, for example, and they are still coming thick and fast in the last chapter. And the hectoring, empty repetitiveness of the style gets more and more irritating. For example: 'Tragedy . . . represents a struggle for survival against the forces of negation, evil, darkness, terror, death, oblivion, and it moves towards catastrophe, obliteration, the defeat of the spirit.'

Why is this? Why is a book clearly written by a generous, sensitive man in the end a mess, a bedraggled bag of symptoms rather than a genuine prescription for cure?

The answer can be found if you look at the text's sense of who it is that is oppressed and who it is therefore that will liberate themselves with socialism.

This group is variously described as 'us', 'humanity', 'community', 'commonwealth', 'mankind', 'individuals' and so on; except in the odd quote from Marx, the book for the most part avoids anything as vulgar as class analysis so that it never faces the question of the role of working-class organisations – parties, trade unions – in building socialism. Similarly, the persistent use of 'man' to mean 'men and women' is not just a verbal flaw that someone on the left ought to avoid - it betrays the fact that the text never even glances at feminism and its part in arriving at socialism in a crippled world. And the same is true of blacks. And the unemployed. And so on.

Granted these absences, what socialism comes to mean in the book is a state of mind. Socialism happens when we get our heads straight, so the author ransacks literature from Shakespeare to Brecht, carelessly abstracting from different societies and different times all the decent, kindly, progressive thoughts he can find. No wonder he was so well reviewed in *The Guardian*.

Socialism, the text implies, comes not from working-class struggle but is the prerogative of a few heroic individuals who have somehow escaped media manipulation and accumulated the right insights. And so we shift from gazing reverently at faded photos of Marx in Chapter 1 to see if they can tell us the old boy's secret, to agonizing in Chapter 2 that maybe the Russian revolution would have been saved if only Lenin had been well enough to address the Twelfth Party Congress.

I'm not enjoying this so I'll stop. If this review sounds sour and querulous it's because I'm disappointed – disappointed because a text which promises so much in the end delivers nothing.

Paul O'Flinn

What produced Solidarity

Poland: The state of the Republic
Reports by the experiences and future discussion group (DiP) Warsaw
Edited Michael Vale
Pluto Press, £4.95

'The last ten years have been characterised by growing stratification . . . The end result being a widening of the income differential to a ratio of 1:20.'

'Social differences are growing. Part of society continues to live with lower than the social minimum income, while another segment consisting of the privileged, has incomes several or even dozens of times the average'.

'Inequality and injustice are everywhere. There are hospitals that are so poorly supplied that they do not even have cotton wool, and our relatives die in the corridors; but other hospitals are equipped with private rooms and full medical care for each room. We pay fines for traffic violations, but some people commit highway manslaughter while drunk and are let off with impunity. In some places there are better shops superior vacation houses, with huge fenced in grounds that ordinary people cannot enter. People see all this and they know that high ranking officials drive luxurious cars . . .'

'There is an increasing tendency to fill posts with "One's own people" – from the younger generation. This is the case not only with leading positions in agriculture or the administrative apparatus, but with all kinds of posts eg publishing houses, institutions of learning and scientific jobs'. 'A recent study shows that a child whose parents have a higher education has 7.5 times the chance of staying within the ranks of the intelligentsia than the child of a farm worker has of entering them'.

The two reports contained in this book could have been entitled 'What produced Solidarity'. They contain graphic details of the state of Poland just before the August strikes of 1980 – the class divisions, the corruption of the bureaucracy, the growing bitterness of the ruled, the economic crisis, the drift towards chaos, the breakdown on

Anti-nuke ammunition

Power Corrupts
Hilary Bacon & John Valentine
Pluto Press £1.50

This is essentially a catalogue of statements made by figures in the anti-nuclear movement and the nuclear industry/government. As such it will undoubtedly be very useful for activists in providing ammunition to back up arguments. It includes such interesting snippets of information as the fact that nuclear waste including plutonium is stored in inflammable tubes made of zirconium (after a while the mind begins to boggle at the insanity of the industry!!)

The book succeeds in the main purpose of showing the range and weight of the arguments against nuclear power, although its impact is considerably lessened by a rather flat approach. It ranges over the hazards of low level radiation, accident, civil liberties, bomb production, waste. This is, however, only half of the picture and has to be spelled out far more clearly in order that the anti-nuclear movement can fight more effectively.

The political motives for developing nuclear power are clear – the securing of nuclear arms production; control of workers in the power industry and removing industrial muscle from the miners; economic control over Third World countries by exporting expensive nuclear technology that brings profit to the directors of multinationals like GEC and political power to the supplying government. As far as government is concerned such motives far outweigh matters of health and safety – even more than usual in the rest of industry under the capitalist system. Unless the anti-nuclear movement accepts this political analysis it will deal only with the *effect* not the *cause* of nuclear power (and weapons). And it is only by defeating the source of the threat that we will finally win a society safe and fit to live in.

Malcom Atkin.

all sides of any sort of faith in the regime.

The reports were based upon the discussion of a hundred odd people from the middle layers of power academics, specialists, managers, planners. They initially met two years ago under the auspices of the regime – but the conclusions were too honest, and had to be published unofficially. The result is a marvellous description of a society that has reached the stage of economic, political and ideological bankruptcy.

This is shown most graphically in the economic sphere. Year after year the rulers of Poland and other East European states boast about the beauties of their central planning. The claim is still accepted by much of the left in the West, who if they no longer talk of socialist paradises, do talk about 'post capitalist societies based upon planning'.

Yet one of those who contributed to these reports tell how:

'We have sham planning and sham fulfillment and even overfulfillment of plans . . . playing this game of pretence and sham has become so universal that no-one, even at the highest levels of power, can distinguish any longer between what is real and what is not'.

Another can argue

'Planning has ceased to deserve the name of planning, coordination has become impossible, while any check on performance is purely illusory.'

A third can point out:

'The economic plans fall far short of the targets set. The flood of erratic and makeshift recommendations and restrictions only adds to the chaos because they bear no intrinsic relationship to one another. . . .'

Yet another notes that every 'five year plan' tends to collapse in its third year, 'Each time the resource balance fails, unleashing a frenzy of corrective measures that freeze resources already invested and concentrate an excess of nonplanned productive energy in areas where, with good planning, only 50-60 per cent of the original estimate would have been needed.'

If any Stalinist (or 'Trotskyist') dinosaur still refuses to accept these claims, they should look at the experience of the last year, where the national output has fallen by 15 per cent or more.

The other side of economic chaos is a repeated failure of the regime to live up to its promises to improve living standards. After 1956 and again after 1970, there were rises in living standards and promises of even greater rises. But 'in each case it was confined to the first few years. In both periods the crisis struck at similar moments . . .' The 'breakdown in the economy and in domestic policy, showed 'astonishing repetitiveness, one is even tempted to say a cyclical nature.'

It is not only wages that have suffered. There has been a continual run down in the social services. In 1960, expenditure on education, health, social welfare, recreation and sports amounted to a third of all capital investments, now it has fallen to 19 per cent. As a result, their schools are overcrowded and teachers badly paid, a third of young couples have no accommodation of their own, 'the number of hospital beds in Warsaw is barely half the European average', and a quarter of essential medicines are unavailable.

The report goes on to show how the crisis has spread out to affect every other aspect of life, so that no-one any longer believes in the goals the rulers profess to hold. Among workers there is distrust and bitterness. Among those who rule over them there is cynical self-seeking, with politicians not believing the speeches they make and journalists not meaning a word they write.

Already when they compiled this report two years ago, its authors could see the likely consequence of the conditions they depicted:

'In such a situation disturbances, such as a spreading wave of strikes, demonstrations or even acts of violence against official institutions, could be sparked off by a quite trivial event'.

The emergence of Solidarity more than fulfills this prophecy.

Yet there are two problems with the account of Poland as presented by the reports. The first is practical: despite their massive documentation of the divisions of Polish society into social classes with quite different material interests, the authors see their goal as being the suggestion of measures that can 'restore provisional trust in the authorities.' The assumption is that reforms are possible that will leave the bureaucracy with its power, but ensure that the power is exercised in a less arbitrary way. Like the present 'moderate' wing in Solidarity, the authors fear 'vacuous rebellion' more than a reconsolidation of bureaucratic rule in a slightly reformed fashion.

This ties in with the second problem: the marvellous factual account of what is wrong in Poland is not linked to any theoretical explanation of the forces that made things the way they are. We are, for instance, told again and again that it is faulty investment targets that lead to the breakdown in planning, to wasted resources, idle factories, half finished construction sites, to a continual chopping and changing in the order given to managers and workers. But we are never told why investment targets are always faulty.

You cannot explain that unless you emphasise what Poland (and the USSR for that matter) has in common with Western states – insertion in a world system of competitive accumulation which forces each capital to invest to the maximum, regardless of the economic chaos that causes. Instead, like all *reformers*, the authors have to believe it is the *peculiarities* of their own country that have produced crisis. In this respect, they are like those people who prattle on about 'the decline of Britain' and peddle schemes to 'restore our national industrial base'.

It is true that in Poland the crisis is further advanced than elsewhere in the East, just as it is further advanced in Britain than in most other places in the West. But the basic causes of the crisis everywhere lie in the state of the world system, not of its individual parts. That is why working class revolution, as opposed to reformist tampering, is the only real way out, East or West.

Chris Harman

Safe but sorry

The Trade Union Directory
Jack Eaton and Colin Gill
Pluto Press £6.95 paperback

The latest 'Workers' Handbook' from Pluto Press is *The Trade Union Directory* – a guide to all TUC unions, published just as Pluto is celebrating its tenth birthday. It is worth considering, therefore, how this book compares with others that Pluto has published for organised workers, because – quite frankly – this book is a great disappointment.

It is more of a handbook for bureaucrats than for activists, giving more on official structures than information that relates to the workplace. While it is meant to help a union member find out about other unions, it wouldn't help an AUEW member at Laurence Scott to get NUM support for the blacking of Arthur Snipe's products from Mining Supplies.

I have shown this book to a number of people and every one of them turned first to the section about their own union. Each of them was highly critical with opinions varying between 'this is a very soggy version of what the union is like' to 'this isn't even a broad left view' to 'this just isn't true'.

So why does a book from such a socialist publishing house not meet the activists' aspirations, especially as Pluto once had a reputation for giving us good workers' handbooks. It isn't that hard hitting books don't sell. After all, the best sellers were Cliff's *The Employers' Offensive* (1970) and Pat Kinnersly's *The Hazards of Work* (1973). These books were primarily written for the rank and file and were sold in thousands by the rank and file. They both had a lasting impact.

A good workers' handbook provides accurate information, a lot of cross referencing and a sharp and critical appraisal of the limitations of trade union officialdom. The point of publishing the material is to turn every reader into a self-active expert, not someone who waits for the local official to sort things out. Readers of *The Hazards of Work* became safety experts and readers of McMullen's *Your Rights At Work* got to know the details of employment law.

But the recent handbooks have been much more aimed at officials, often written by trade union officials, and much less aimed at arming the rank and file. The books on *Pensions* and *Non-Wage Benefits* are the sort of thing you would expect to find on the back seat of a trade union official's Cortina. And the new *Trade Union Directory* will find its palce more easily in a union office than among the members of a joint shop stewards committee.

The irony is of course that the books that are 'safest' in terms of sales through trade union officialdom are the ones that are least likely to sell well. The real best sellers – as the early volumes showed – are the ones that capture the imagination of the rank and file and are simultaneously a weapon against the conservatism of official structures and machines. The new *Directory* is not much more than a description of the machines and will be of little use to those who are trying to change them.

Alex Watson

Capitalism for beginners
by Robert Lekachman and Boris Van Loon
Writers and Readers. £1.95

This book falls between two stools. On the one hand it assumes too much for it to be a good introduction to capitalism, while on the other it assumes too little for it to be an interesting read for someone who already knows a bit about the subject.

This problem is reflected throughout the book. There are some very illuminating sections on the history, and certain contemporary aspects, of capitalism (the Vietnam war, energy crisis etc); but these are interspersed with explanations of Galbraith, Keynes etc which complicate rather than clarify things, and leave only three out of 175 pages to an oversimplified explanation of Marx's crucial 'falling rate of profit' discovery.

What is more, there seems little reason for the order of the sections; and, to make mattes even worse, unlike previous books in the 'Beginners' series ('Trotsky', 'Lenin', 'Nuclear Power' etc) the cartoons and illustrations add little to the text; they actually obscure points in a number of instances.

The book's orientation towards the American market (the third sub-heading is 'Why is there no socialism in the USA?') also aggravates matters, obscuring the relevance of the subject to potential readers in this country.

Overall it's a very sad book; because an attempt has been made (and for all my criticisms it is a valiant attempt) to simplify volumes of turgid text, written by many great, but boring, thinkers, and this attempt has, again unlike the other books in this series, failed.

There are obvious reasons for the failure, the main one being that there are going to have to be a lot of failures before a book is published that can replace the twenty or so classics we now regularly recommend contacts, and buy doubtful friends and relatives for Christmas. But following very close behind that problem is the author; an erstwhile liberal economist moving leftwards, but not far enough to handle the object of this book, and certainly not far enough to make even the most innocuous allusion to reaching a situation where books like this need never be written.
Alan Gibson

Devil dollar

The Dollar and its Rivals
Ricardo Parboni
Verso £3.95

This is a highly analytical account of the international monetary system over the last decade, written by a talented Italian academic, from a semi-Marxist perspective. It's a curious, yet in many ways fascinating book.

The curiosity lies in the author's claim to have a novel interpretation of the crisis. That involves excessive emphasis on what has been happening to the dollar over the last few years; almost total silence on what's been happening to profits and investment; and the ridiculous idea that the crisis has been an 'essentially Euro-Japanese one'.

The key thesis is that US capitalism could avoid the crisis because of the unique role of the dollar as a reserve currency. He argues that the devaluation of the dollar after 1973 forced the burden of adjustment to the OPEC oil price rise onto the European economies in particular (a half-truth at best) and that the devaluation was a deliberate move to maintain US hegemony against its rivals regardless of the consequences (as if there was any alternative to the dollar's devaluation given the weakening of the US economy).

Events of the last two years, with the US economy in disarray, a noticeable global slump, all in the context of a rising dollar, thoroughly undermine Parboni's claims – although you'd never realise it from his new introduction to the English edition (the book was first published in 1980) where he summarises rather well what has really been happening.

Where the book is fascinating is in the light it sheds on the complex operations of the money markets, and the convolutions of government policies.

Parboni is right about the unique role of the dollar, and the desire of the American ruling-class to hang onto the advantages that gives them – preventing any moves towards an alternative system. He is also very acute about the way in which the European Monetary System has helped to reinforce the dominance of West German capital in Europe.

Parboni puts the conflict between different national ruling-classes at the centre of his account which is a refreshing change from most treatises on the subject. He emphasises the connection between those conflicts, monetary chaos, the drift towards protectionism and the formation of new trade blocs, and the nightmare prospect of war.

The danger is that boiled down the book becomes another of the 'its all the fault of the nasty Americans' (with sideswipes at the West Germans) type which is so common amongst the soft European left. In Italy as in Britain that sort of analysis breeds nationalistic responses in the name of defending the economy against the foreign menace.

A useful book then, perhaps the best available on its subject, but deeply flawed. Parboni really should read up on Marx's theory of crisis again.
Pete Green

Starving for the bankers

Crisis in the Third World
Andre Gunder Frank
Heinemann £5.50

This is a companion volume to the author's earlier *Crisis in the World Economy*. It is also a much better book than its predecessor probably because Frank is on much surer ground in the field where he first made his reputation as a Marxist critic of economic orthodoxy.

Crisis in the World Economy was a bit of a mess – a poorly organised collection of newspaper cuttings, official statistics and lengthy quotes from the experts, all mixed up in an eclectic and sometimes incoherent theoretical framework.

Crisis in the Third World suffers from some of the same faults of style and presentation. The enormous quantity of information Frank has gathered together does become indigestible. Yet here Frank's attention is fixed, if not always firmly, on a single target. That is the idea that the question of underdevelopment has somehow been solved – that the 'miracle economies' of Brazil, Mexico, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore etc have shown the way.

The growth of the 12 or so newly industrialised countries (NICs), as they are now known, has certainly been spectacular (more than twice as fast as the average in the West over the last decade). Economists are talking about a 'new international division of labour'. The model of export-led growth, supervised by the IMF, with massive borrowing from the world's banks and complete freedom for the multinationals, is now being held up for the rest to follow.

The great merit of Frank's book is that it shows just how distorted is this image of 'success'. For one thing there are large chunks of the Third World which are regarded as 'expendable' by world capital – where it is deemed a waste of resources even trying to save the bulk of the population. A country like Bangla Desh where 70 out of 76 million people live below the poverty line, has no role to play in this new order – nor does the Sahel region of North Africa, where colonial agriculture destroyed the old

Good idea, but ...

Pluto Big Red Diary and Directory 1982:
The Art of Resistance
Pluto Press £2.50.

Big Red Diaries used to be something I'd look forward to at Christmas time, even if I never bought one, but this years is very disappointing. The best that can be said about it is that it was a very good idea.

It looks as if it was hastily put together by people who weren't very interested in what they were doing. It does seem such a sad waste of a great opportunity. One has only to think of the art of the Russian revolution or the posters of France 68 to see that any book about the art of resistance has a wide range of choice when it comes to striking images. Yet you would not have thought so when you look through this years diary.

The same lack of interest is evident in the text or rather lack of it. Information about the examples of the art shown is restricted to very brief picture captions.

There isn't even an introductory text to explain why Pluto thought it was a good idea to put out a diary on the Art of Resistance. Maybe they didn't think it was a good idea, and the only reason they put out a diary is that they felt obliged to because they put one out last year.
Peter Court.

BOOKS

pattern of subsistence farming and left a legacy of encroaching desert and mass famine.

Where sustained growth has occurred it has gone hand in hand with a polarisation of wealth, intensified political repression, and greater not less vulnerability to the world crisis. Frank devotes a great deal of space to the first two in particular. At times his account, built up out of cold stark official documents, reads like a never-ending horror story.

To give just one example: in Brazil infant mortality rates are rising. In Sao Paulo the workers lucky enough to get jobs after being kicked off the land in the name of the new capitalist agriculture, work twelve hours a day, seven days a week. An estimated 80% of the Brazilian people ('perhaps up to 95%') are excluded from any benefit from the 'economic miracle'.

The money from exports goes to pay for new expensive technology to keep up with the competition, luxury goods for the rich, and, of course, arms in abundance. The generals and dictators are sold their lethal toys to play with in exchange for smashing the unions and the left, and guaranteeing the low wages which the Western multinationals find so attractive. Sometimes as in Iran it gets a bit out of hand.

Elsewhere the debts to the world banks continue to soar. To pay off the mounting interest payments the people must make sacrifices. From Chile to Turkey each bloody coup pushed the credit-rating up a notch or two. The death toll, the legalised murder of starvation, disease, and executions, mounts.

Frank's book has little to say about resistance to all this which is a pity, but then I've barely hinted at the material crammed into the book's 360 odd pages. More seriously his project as a whole does not provide us with the coherent account of world capitalism and imperialism today which we really need. Maybe Nigel Harris's forthcoming book will go some way to giving us that.

Nevertheless *Crisis in the Third World* has to be seen as a worthy effort and will serve this reader at least as a useful work of reference. The final chapter where Frank, quite rightly, dismisses the reformist alternatives of 'national economic development' or 'self-reliance' as a 'snare and a delusion', is worth reading on its own. Frank has no illusions about what's been carried out in the name of socialism, and that alone makes him stand out from most other 'Marxist' writers on the Third World.

Pete Green

Bookshorts

As usual there is a great rush of publications for Xmas. For the festive spirit there is Steve Bell *Maggie's Farm* (Penguin, £2.50), the hilarious cartoons of *City Limits* fame. For the gourmets, Gerard Chaliand *Food without Frontiers: A Big Red Cookbook* (Pluto £2.50), a good cookbook, but unfortunately neither very Red nor Big.

Two new books on Poland: Dennis MacShane *Solidarity: Poland's Independent Trade Union* (Spokesman, £3.50) and Neal Ascherson *The Polish August* (Penguin, £2.50). Both these books are written from a reformist viewpoint, but packed with useful information as the only books in English dealing with events since last August. Their weakness lies in an over identification with Walesa rather than seeing the possibilities of workers' power. Also on Eastern Europe, Bill Lomax, *Eyewitness in Hungary: the Soviet Invasion of 1956* (Spokesman, £2.95) now in paperback.

New editions are out of JAG Griffith's useful exposé of the law *Politics of the Judiciary* (Fontana, £2.50) and of J Bowyer Bell's readable history of the IRA, *The Secret Army* (The Academy Press, Dublin, £5.50) – spoiled only by a shallow addendum dealing with the last 10 years.

The third and final volume of Marx's *Capital* has now been published by Penguin (£6.95) and Franz Mehring's classic biography, *Karl Marx* (Harvester, £7.95) has just been re-issued. Also in this vein by the German Marxist of the 1920s, Karl Korsch, *Revolutionary Theory* (Pluto, £4.95 pbk.).

For a shorter read try *CIS* latest, *Report on Tory Britain 81* (CIS, £1.00) and an interesting low-down on food, Hannah Wright, *Swallow it Whole* (New Statesman Report, £1.50).

New from SWP authors: Alex Callinicos *Is there future for Marxism* (Macmillan, £4.95) a substantial attack on much of academic 'Marxism', but too heavy for those not acquainted with the area of discussion, to be reviewed in the next edition of *International Socialism*; also don't miss Ian Gibson's excellent book on the politics of health, *Class, Health and Profit* (published by the author, £4.50); plus John Molyneux's much awaited *Trotsky's Theory of Revolution* will soon be out, published by Harvester.

The torrent of books from the Labour left and their acolytes continues, with Francis Cripps et al, *Manifesto* (Pan, £1.95) and Ken Coates (ed) *How to win? Democratic Planning and the Abolition of Unemployment* (Spokesman, £3.50). Of a similar vein though potentially more interesting is A Gamble, *Britain in Decline* (Papermac, £4.95) which will be reviewed along with several titles mentioned in this column in later issues of *Socialist Review*.

THEATRE

More anger, less corn

CAST brought *Sedition '81* to the stage. Its short sharp, shock sketches together with the stand up comedian style of Roland Muldoon, kept your interest and brought some laughs. 'After the revolution, tune into Radio Rosa Luxembourg.' *Hotel Sunshine* was 'guaranteed to provide a highly entertaining, if subversive evening,' so said the publicity leaflet. A creditable follow up then? Something to look forward to?

The opening scene: a down trodden housewife, Helen, tells us, 'I love the kids', but she's also going mad, there's nothing to do and no one to see. She introduces us to her dream home provided courtesy of T.I.T. El Paso, the home of the future – everything you could wish for . . . 40ft underground.

The rest of the CAST are: Arthur – one time manager, advocate of progressive policy decisions and now a new socialist; Dave – Helen's husband, frustrated rank and file leader, complete with 'working class' northern accent and a habit of jumping on chairs when he's got anything to say; Marcia – aspiring executive and company slave, looking like a young Sally Oppenheimer on a good day; and Genie – the friendly neighbourhood company computer.

We are invited into their Orwellian future home, where the silicon chip rules OK. They play out a comedy that sometimes sinks to the level of a Brian Rix Farce, but occasionally rises to indicate the sinister power of the company that controls their isolated lives. For, they are the only people living underground in what was designed to be a large complex. Unfortunately the company is personified by the computer, Genie, and much mileage is got out of it sounding American and having a stupid name. Repeating it out loud isn't that funny.

As the play develops the characters are made both too familiar, by appearing too homely, almost as if they were the unwitting victims of *Candid Camera* or *Game For A Laugh*, and too distanced in as far as the comedy never really leads us to question any preconceived ideas we might have concerning their actions. Although CAST had obviously made an attempt, in making *Hotel Sunshine* Helen's story, (she's the only one who can recognise the lunacy of their situation), to give the tale some challenging meaning – the strength of this was sadly dissipated by a muddled presentation and some crummy lines and corny jokes.

Only in part 2 was any attempt to make the audience sit up and listen really successful. There was one particular moment that stood out from the rest. Here a large map was brought out to serve as proof that if the Flat Earth Society was right, then deterrence could work, and that the problems of nuclear weapons are due to the world being spherical! The reason this was funny was that it made you laugh at something that directly related to the outside world. It showed that all talk of deterrence, of unilateralism, and multi-lateralism comes out of the lunacy of a world that produces the means to die more than 100% efficiently for all, but denies the means of life to millions.

But that piece could have stood on its own as a simple and effective sketch. In CAST's last offering *Sedition '81* there was much more of this, it didn't hold together brilliantly, but the theme of sedition came through better than that of *Hotel Sunshine*. The sentiment, Jobs not Bombs, we have the resources, shouted at the end, was not carried forcefully through the play.

When there are the means available to startle and thrill, when what is effective on the streets are powerful images and symbols, succinct and stylish, badges, posters, leaflets, records, TV and video, why use jaded farce in the theatre? Why not use the means available to accuse, even shout a few names? The cast seemed to have forgotten them — Reagan, Nott, Weinberger, Cruise, Trident, Thatcher. The production needed to be a bit more angry and a bit more hostile

Paul Harper

Naive hopes drowned in blood

If you've seen the poster for the film *Gallipoli* you're inclination is probably to avoid what is presented as yet another boring war adventure film. You could miss a very good film. **Jane Ure Smith** explains why.

The Australian film industry has turned out some extremely impressive films in recent years. Films like *My Brilliant Career* and *Sunday Too Far Away*. *Gallipoli* is no exeption.

It is perhaps surprising that no-one has attempted to make a film about the Gallipoli massacre before now. After all it would have been quite easy to make a conventional war film of the incident chockfull of heroics with a tear-jerker ending.

But the director manages to avoid all the clichés. What emerges is an anti-war film with all the power of the original *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Along the way it is also very funny.

The film does not linger on the actual Gallipoli landing. That is dealt with extrememly effectively and economically as the climax to the film. The rest is taken up with recreating the atmosphere and ideological pressures which forced a generation of young men in Australia to rush off at the first available moment to fight in a war half-way across the globe.

The absurdity of the situation is most apparent in a scene when the two main charaters, having decided to enlist, get stranded in desert en route to Perth. They come across an old man with a camel, who is totally out of touch with the world situation. They tell him there is a war going on, explaining it is a war against Germany. The old man is confused:

'Then why are you going to fight the Turks?'

'Because they're allies of the Germans'

'But what's it got to do with us?'

'Well if we don't stop them there they might come here'

The camera pulls back to reveal desert as far as the eye can see.

The many pressures which drive young men off to fight in wars are amply illustrated: the male camaderie, the fears of appearing cowardly particularly in the eyes of women. 'How could anyone not fight?' demands an incredulous, middle class matron, 'with the Germans crucifying kittens on church doors?'

Australia's isolation in relation to the rest of the world added to the ideological pressures which turned young men into cannon fodder everywhere. For many Australians the First World War opened up the possibility of seeing a new and exiting world thousands of miles away. For most of them it was a chance they would not otherwise have had. A chance to escape from cultural isolation. The film brilliantly recreates the naive hopes and dreams of a generation. Hopes and dreams which were drowned in blood on the shores of Gallipoli.

Cashing in on the Nazi act

Mephisto
Director: Istvan Szabo

Mephisto tells the story of a young German actor as he gradually sheds his sympathies with the left in pre-war Hamburg and becomes a state actor for the Nazis.

On one hand it is about an individual that compromises his beliefs and ideals as he gets caught up in the current of events that move too quickly and powerfully to swim against. But more importantly, the film's message is that an actor is not on the fringe of political reality but has an active part to play in the real world. Every gesture, every soliloquy, dialogue, costume and prop carries a meaning that is relevant to social and political events.

The actor is ambitious. Small parts and workers' theatre in the factories of North Germany become shabby. He wants success, appreciation and applause—so what if it's the Nazis that offer it? He cries; 'I'm only an actor! It has nothing to do with me'.

As he gets more and more caught up in the Nazi propaganda machine and the freedom of his friends and family is threatened, it becomes more difficult for him to bury his head in the sand. He cannot ignore that his wife and black mistress are in exile. He cannot pretend that impositions are not made on his freedom. But what can he do, he is only an actor?

The film is set in the period when Bertolt Brecht was writing about the relationship between threatre and politics, and it borrows several arguments from Brecht's writings.

Brecht argued that every aspect of a theatrical performance has an important part to play in getting across the message of the story. Hence, lantern-slide sub-titles, projections, and Kurt Weill's music were all part of a new approach that emphasised the 'direct, didactic' aspect of the text.

For Brecht the role of the actor was clear. He is there to project a political message, he is very much a part of social reality, in fact, he is a tool for social change.

Mephisto hammers home this point again and again for two and a half hours. Unfortunately it says very little else.

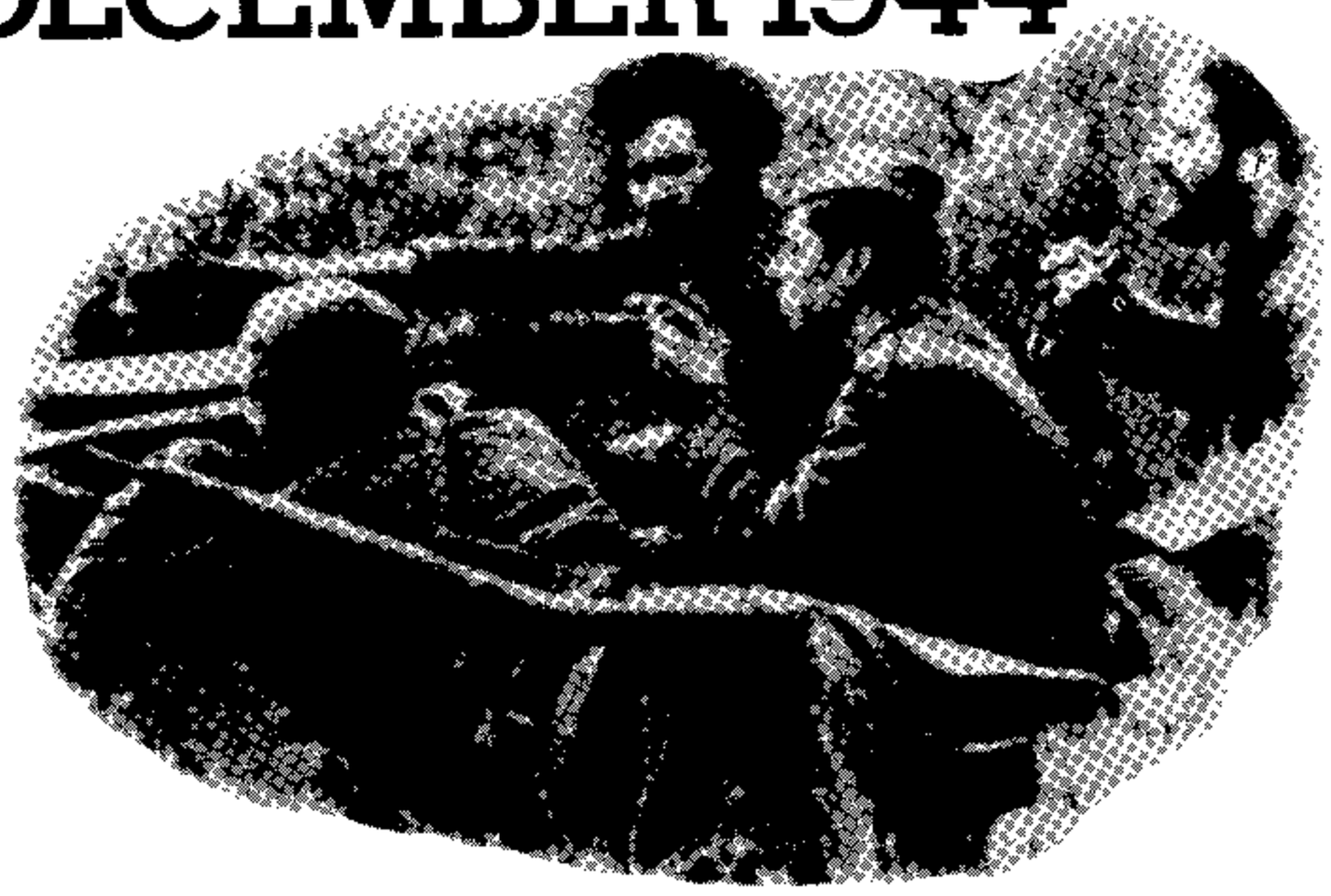
Stylish and elegant direction are lost on a plot that has very little substance and, while the camera work is devastating, the best shots have absolutely no relevance to the story.

The tragedy of German cinema is that is nearly always riddled with post-war guilt because the bourgeoisie didn't do anything to prevent the rise of fascism in Germany. Like *The Tin Drum* and *The Marriage of Maria Braun*, *Mephisto* is one long apology. The actor symbolises the bourgeoisie of Berlin that was too caught up in its own decadence to notice what was happening in Germany. The lifestyle of this intellectual elite is reconstructed to show all the gluttony and debauchment of a Roman orgy.

Mephisto is a beautifully made film, but I wish that it was more than just a way that modern Germany can purge itself of its history. After all Brecht argued that theatre (and cinema) should show the way forward, not apologise for the past.

Marta Wohrle

DECEMBER 1944



On 6 December 1944 British aircraft began bombing the working class districts of Athens. Heavy guns mounted on the Parthenon assisted the bombardment, and tanks moved through the streets firing at pockets of resistance. The military operation was not to dislodge the German occupiers—they had evacuated seven weeks before—but to defend a British imposed government against the resistance movement, ELAS, that had driven out the Germans, The Battle of Athens had started.

ELAS had been formed early in 1942, very much on the initiative of the Communist Party. It became the only real centre of national resistance. The pre-war dictatorship had collapsed, and the Royal Government exiled in London, was compromised because of its association with the dictatorship. The bourgeois leaders remaining in Greece either collaborated with the Nazis or kept their heads down.

Militarily, ELAS was one of the most successful resistance movements in Europe. By the time of 'liberation', ELAS controlled virtually the whole of Greece outside the main cities. Their local councils were the effective administration, and the German puppet government based in Athens was impotent.

In the cities too, the resistance was in effective control. A German plan for mass conscription of forced labour was defeated after demonstrations, occupations of public buildings and a general strike lasting a month.

The resistance faced the future after 'liberation' with an estimated membership of two million out of a total population of only seven million. ELAS was in a position to take power.

The British government under Churchill recognised this, and it was the reason for their attack. The 'war against fascism' was not allowed to get in the way of the primary aim—defending capitalism.

From the start of the war, Churchill had tried to minimise the influence of ELAS. British gold and arms were poured into Greece to support any armed resistance group opposed to ELAS, while ELAS were starved of supplies. One group, EDES, was only formed when its leader, Zervas, suspected of being a German agent, was given by the British two alternatives: be publicly denounced or go to the mountains and form an armed band.

★★★

The strategy failed and the British made their preparations to eliminate ELAS after 'liberation'. In 1943, an Allied officer, Don Stott, conducted negotiations for a 'separate peace' with the German authorities in Athens. The Germans were to withdraw and the British to land without harassment to avoid a period of 'chaos'.

There was no opposition to this strategy from Stalin. Churchill and Stalin had already agreed that Greece was in the British 'sphere of influence', just as Eastern Europe was going to be under Russian control. Churchill wrote in November 1944:

> 'Having paid the price we have to Russia for freedom of action in Greece, we should not hesitate to use British troops to support the Royal Hellenic Government...I hope the troops will not hesitate to shoot when necessary.'

The day before the British attack he sent an order to General Scobie, commander of allied forces in Greece:

> 'Do not hesitate to act as if you were in a conquered city where a local rebellion is in progress.'

When the British-installed prime minister,Papandreou, offered to resign to reduce the possibility of civil war, the British ambassador was instructed 'should he resign, he should be locked up till he comes to his senses'.

From the strength of the British attack one might assume that ELAS and the resistance were trying to take power. But they were not.

Under CP influence, the political aims of the movement were limited and talk about socialism was to be put off until after the establishment of a 'democratic republic'. The Western allies were to be supported because they were the allies of the Soviet Union. The Communists recognised Britain's 'predominate role' in Greece. They put this into practice before 'liberation' by placing ELAS under the formal command of General Scobie and by participating in the Royal Government.

The crunch only came when ELAS was instructed to disarm, leaving its supporters defenceless against the armed bands of the Royalists and the fascist Grivas.

A mass demonstration against the instruction on 3 December was machine-gunned by government forces in the streets of Athens. Twenty eight were killed. It was the signal for a general strike which paralysed the city. ELAS occupied the key public buildings. The scene was set for the battle.

But still the Communist leadership hoped for a compromise. The initial instructions were not to fire on the 'allied' British soldiers. ELAS units outside the Athens area were instructed not to join the fighting.

The British government had no such scruples. Thousands of troops were withdrawn from fighting the Germans in Italy to reinforce the Athens garrison. With superior forces they managed to push back the ELAS defenders.

The final blow came when Moscow announced at the height of the fighting, they were appointing an ambassador to the Royal Government.

ELAS were not defeated - they surrendered. Scobie admitted that he didn't have the forces to control any area outside Athens and that the majority of ELAS forces had not participated in the fighting.

Stalin had ensured a defeat for the working class movement in Greece which was not to be reversed for decades.

The British role was best summed up by a young—and still left wing—Denis Healey in a speech attacking Labour Party members of the British coalition government early in 1945:

> 'The upper classes in every country look to the British Army and the British people to protect them against the just wrath of the people who have been fighting underground against them for the past four years. There is very great danger that we shall find ourselves running with the Red Flag in front of the armoured car of Tory imperialism and counter-revolution.'

Pete Gillard