

socialist
REVIEW

Monthly Magazine of the Socialist Workers Party

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'Extra-parliamentary activity'
Ken Livingstone



**Where do
we go from
here?**

'Claptrap'
Dennis Healey



INSIDE

**Rebuilding
in the
workplace**

Marxism83 July 8-13

'Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary practice.' wrote Lenin. The ideas of Marxism have never been more important for the labour movement. The world crisis rages on. From Warsaw to El Salvador workers face the power of world capitalism determined to hang on to its power and its profits by any means necessary. Here in Britain we see mounting unemployment, falling living standards and attacks on the social services. We also see the collapse of the Labour left and the impotence of the Labour right. And, most worrying of all, we see substantial support for the most reactionary of ideas—those of Margaret Thatcher. At the same time there are thousands of militants who want to fight the ruling class offensive but who are confused and demoralised by failures of the old solutions of the Labour Party. **Marxism 83** aims to provide the ideas which are vital if we are going to be able to organise the fightback. There will be a full week of meetings exploring every aspect of the modern world from a revolutionary point of view. *Everybody who wants to change the world should be there.*

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After the landslide

The Tory victory in the election is a setback for the working class. The collapse of the Labour vote is an indication of workers' lack of confidence in their ability to change things. The growth of the Alliance confirms how far the rot has gone. A setback, certainly, and a severe one, but hardly a transformation of the political world.

Only hardened parliamentary cretins believe the number of MPs is decisive. The failure of Labour to win even a majority of workers' votes is a different matter. But even that is a *symptom*. The real problems are deeper. Votes are important in that they are a pale and distorted reflection of the state of mind of the working class.

We argued before the election that the result would not represent a turning point in British politics. You only have to look at any workplace to see that this is true. Despite a massive Tory majority in terms of seats, it is most definitely not true that factories and offices throughout the country have suddenly been transformed into fascist barracks.

True, the management are now cockier. True, the militants are depressed and more

cautious than before. But that does not add up to a fundamental shift in the balance of class forces.

The Tories will try to use their massive majority to help shift that balance. *The Economist*, one of the more gung-ho representatives of capitalist opinion, is already calling for attacks on trade unions and driving down real wages. Peregrine Worsthorpe, of the *Sunday Telegraph*, is arguing that the re-introduction of capital punishment is one of the ways the Tories can sweeten the bitter pill of further mass unemployment.

There can be no doubt that Thatcher is listening to these voices and she will be thinking of ways she can force through a range of policies designed to make Britain a more profitable place to be a capitalist in. There are, however, important constraints

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Edited by Colin Sparks
Assisted by Stuart Ash, Dave Beecham, Norah Carlin, Sue Cockerill, Peter Court, Pete Goodwin, Noel Halifax, Gareth Jenkins, Christine Kenny, John Lindsay, Jim Scott, Marta Wohrie.
Production Ann Rogers
Business Clive Hopkins
Reviews John Lindsay

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on what she can do.

One of these constraints is the nature of power in capitalist societies. Just as it is true that the power of the civil service, the banks and the rest of the apparatus of capitalist power always prevent a Labour government making any real changes in the system, so they act on the Tories too.

Thatcher intends to rule in the interests of capital, but she and her supporters have a vision of capitalism which is firmly rooted in the vanished epoch of small business. Some of the most horrifying of their ideas—for example the abolition of the NHS—are exactly the product of that nostalgic ideology.

They do not fit the needs of the *decisive* sectors of big business. They need an educated healthy and reasonably well housed workforce in order to compete with capitalists exploiting the same quality of labour elsewhere. So the wilder schemes are unlikely to come to fruition. What will happen will be very nasty and will need to be resisted but it is a long way from the Armageddon of Tory dreams and Labour nightmares.

The other important constraint is the state of play between the major classes. The election results are a poor guide to that, but they do tell us something. The tally of seats is only of limited importance—passing a bill through the House of Commons is one thing, getting it implemented in the harsh world outside is quite another.

A major disaster

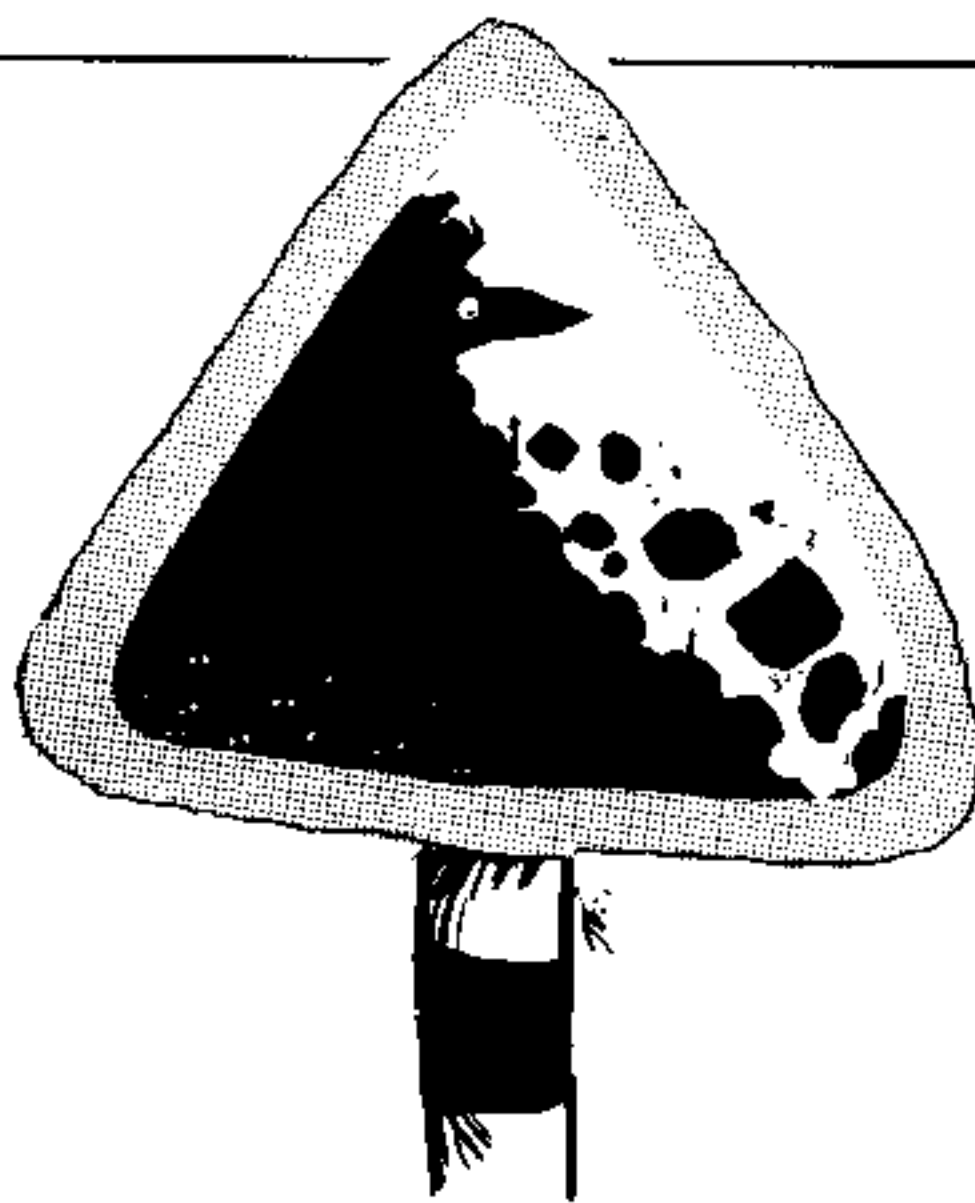
Despite that massive majority it is clear that the tales of enthusiastic working class support for Thatcherism which circulate on the left are false. The Tory vote fell by 1.6 percent even on their minority result of 1979. The fact that Thatcher won 61 percent of the seats on 44 percent of the votes representing 32 percent of the total electorate does not indicate massive support for change, but it does not indicate massive support for Toryism either.

The truth is that once the ballyhoo of the election has died down we face a prospect no different in any essential respect, from the one we have been struggling with over the last four years.

The outcome of Thatcher's second term of office depends, as did the first, on how much the working class is prepared to put up with and how far it can fight back.

Here the real worries start. The election was a major disaster for the Labour Party. It was their worst vote since 1918. Its average share of votes per seat was even worse—it was the lowest in the entire history of the party.

If we look at the detail of the vote, the picture is even more disturbing. Of trade unionists who went to the polls only 39 percent voted Labour. 32 percent voted Tory and a further 28 percent for the Alliance. A clear majority voted for parties which are publicly on record as wanting to attack the unions. In none of the occupational groups—a different thing from social class—did the Labour Party win a majority of votes. The closest they came was amongst semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers where they got 44 percent.



The excuse machine

The fact of defeat was so obvious that the excuse machine was working overtime even before the end of the campaign. It is worth looking at some of the more popular Labour Party explanations because they show just how all wings of the Labour Party are incapable of providing any real analysis of what went wrong.

Blaming it all on Michael Foot is one of the most popular, and most superficial, excuses. Foot played into the Tories' hands by coming across as a bumbling old gent fit only for a quiet evening with a good book. He has already paid the price for this by being bumped within three days of the election.

Foot's personal failings, however, will not do to explain the defeat. Clement Attlee, for example, was hardly a charismatic figure. He was described by Churchill as 'a modest little man with a great deal to be modest about'. Yet he led the Labour Party to a sweeping electoral victory in 1945 against that same Churchill, who most certainly was a charismatic figure and could bask in the glory of a far greater military victory than Thatcher can boast of.

Foot's vacillations and confusions were important because they accurately reflected the vacillations of the Labour Party. His position as leader was the result of a messy compromise between left and right and that compromise was behind every convoluted sentence he uttered. The weakness of the leader was the weakness of the Labour Party.

Healey is different. He and James Callaghan proved the revolutionary analysis of the Labour Party wrong in one important respect. We have always held the view that Labour says one thing in its manifesto and does something quite different once in office. Healey's outburst about nuclear weapons was a public statement that Labour's promises are worthless even before the election.

The weakness of Healey's position was exposed when he raised the issue of the sinking of the *General Belgrano*. This belated and half-hearted questioning of the details of the conduct of the Falklands war seems to have

cut no ice. How could it? The Labour Party, Healey and all, were enthusiastic supporters of the war. Neither on this nor any other issue could the Healey wing of the Labour Party mount any serious opposition to the Tories because they agree with them on fundamentals.

For the Labour left to blame it all on Healey will not do. His performance was a reflection of the fact that he was calling the shots in the campaign. His dominance was due to the victory of the right in the internal battle of the last four years. Blaming Healey only confirms how badly the left failed in their attempt to shift the Labour Party. They, after all, endorsed his position when they failed to run a candidate against him at the 1982 conference. To blame Healey is to blame everybody in the Labour Party.

Blaming the mass media is another favourite and superficial excuse. Of course the overwhelming bulk of the media were rabidly pro-Tory. What else can anyone expect from organisations owned and controlled by capitalists and staffed by their loyal servants? But the media have always been like that. They were just as bad in 1974 and the Labour Party won both the elections in that year.

The real question is why the media can get away with such lies and distortions and why they can influence people. For example, the media gave great prominence to Thatcher's claim that Labour's manifesto was 'the most extreme ever put before the British electorate'. Now this is patently untrue. The document did not even pretend to be arguing for socialism. It claimed merely to be a better way of saving British capitalism than the Tories' proposals.

Unable to fight

The Labour Party was unable to challenge that claim because the right half believed it and the left kidded themselves it was true. Nobody really believed in what the manifesto contained strongly enough to be able to argue it convincingly.

Even if they had, there was nothing they could have done about it. The Labour Party was forced to rely on the media because it lacks the sort of direct and active links with the mass of workers which would enable it to fight the media. Labour policies did not grow out of the struggles of workers, the Labour Party is not rooted in those struggles, and so the mass media could get away with almost any lie they wanted.

There is another unfortunate consequence of blaming it all on the media. Some on the left claim that if only Labour had had a socialist programme then it would have won. But the media presented the existing Labour programme as an extreme document and Labour was fairly heavily defeated. The evidence is that the mass of workers do not, at this stage, want anything to do with socialism.

A more detailed examination of the results proves this point conclusively. As we show later in this issue, none of the various leftists ran their election campaign on anything other than the orthodox national party line. This includes the four candidates supporting the Militant tendency. Two of them won,

two of them lost.

One of their candidates lost in Brighton Kemp Town, a difficult seat in any circumstances and can therefore be excused. The other loser was Pat Wall in Bradford North. His campaign was as unexceptionally orthodox as any other candidate—it contained no hint of his distinctive politics.

What distinguished Wall from the two Militant supporters who won was that he is much better known as a supporter of that line of thought. For one thing, he had the former Labour MP, Ben Ford, running against him and taking enough votes to defeat him. And he was also the man who made a national name for himself by arguing for left reform in a debate against the SWP. The logical conclusion is that Wall's efforts to hide his associations were unsuccessful at least in part and that there was no tidal wave of workers flocking to the banner of left wing policies.

Another argument used to excuse the defeat is that Labour held on to its traditional working class base in the north but failed to win over anyone else. There is a grain of truth in this argument. It is true that Labour did much better in the north than in the south.

The first thing to say about this argument is that it is one which leads to right wing conclusions. It was exactly the argument used by the Gaitskellites after the 1959 defeat. They argued that in order to win over the 'middle class' the Labour Party needed to move to the right, ditch Clause Four and any talk of socialism. What was needed was a moderate appeal to win over the centre. The argument will have the same conclusion this time round.

A more substantial objection is that the argument is false. Labour did badly in the south but the population there is not made

up exclusively of stock-brokers. There are important theoretical arguments as to who exactly is a worker, but it is clear that millions of people in the south come into that category.

It is not just a question of a split between white collar workers and manual workers. There are a very large number of white collar workers in the south but there are many traditional manual workers as well.

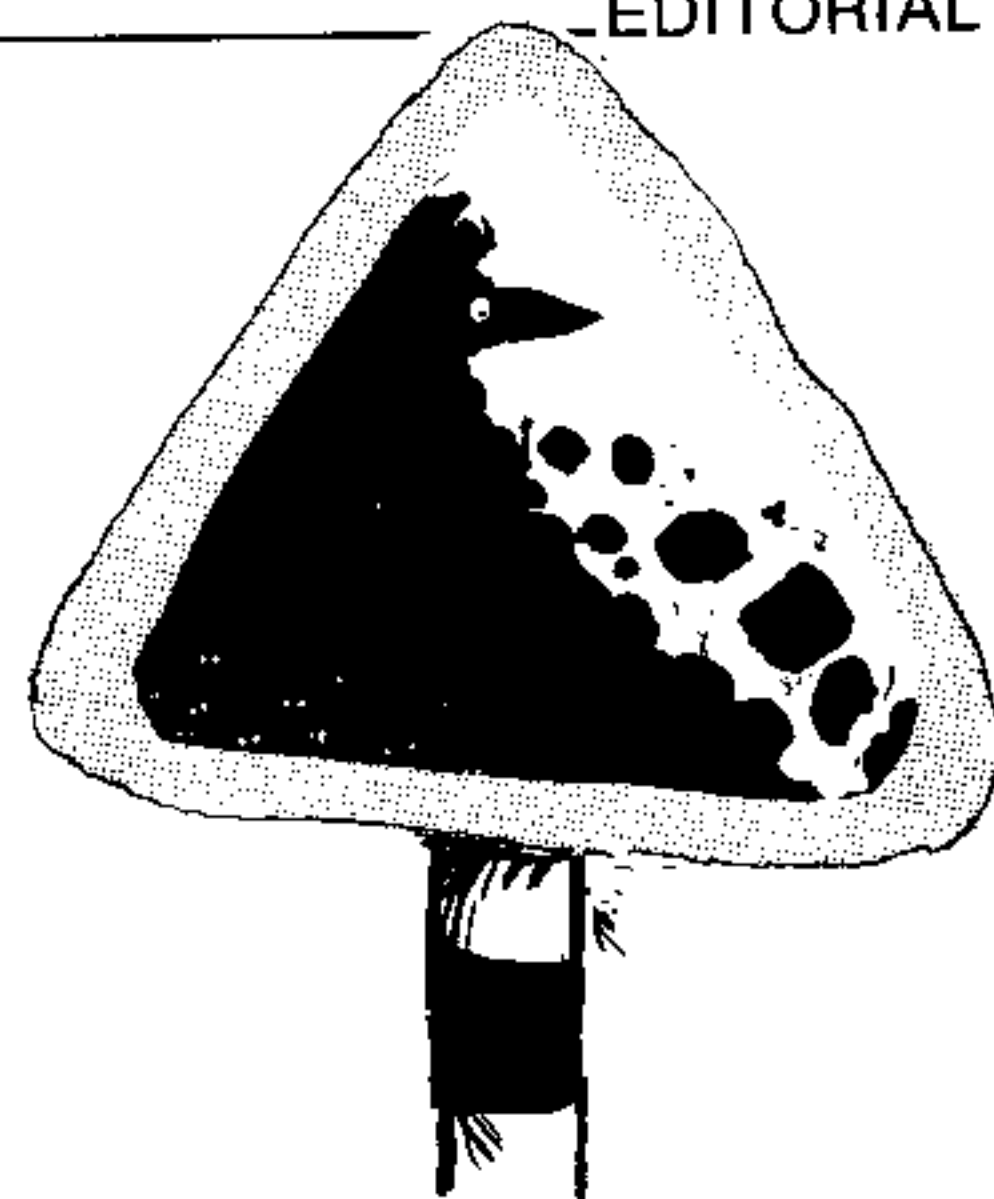
Manual workers

According to the most recent figures available (for September 1981), the South East of England has more than 1.63m workers in manufacturing industries. That is more than twice as many as the West Midlands (781,000), more than twice as many as the North West (805,000), and nearly four times the total for Scotland (483,000). It is, by a long way, the biggest centre of manual workers in Britain.

Labour did badly amongst these manual workers. While in the north and Scotland they won 42 percent of manual workers' votes, in the south the figure was only 26 percent. Even in the north and Scotland there is no evidence of automatic support for Labour amongst manual workers, but in the south things were very bad indeed.

If we look even closer, we have a similar picture. Labour lost Slough; Labour lost both Southampton seats; Labour lost Medway; Labour lost Swindon. All of these are areas with a large manual working class.

None of the excuses will do. The Labour Party lost this election, and lost it badly, because it was quite incapable of convincing the mass of workers that it provided any alternative to Thatcher. Left, right and centre have been tested on their chosen terrain of the ballot box and have failed.



A question of strategy

Lying behind the electoral collapse there is an important question of strategy. Votes are not the class struggle but they are a pale reflection of the level of class consciousness. For the last four years the whole of the Labour Party, but particularly the left, have been living in a dream world in which they only had to juggle the constitution a bit, pass a few resolutions, get the right candidates selected, and then the road to socialism would be open.

It was obvious to anyone who bothered to look beyond the ward meetings at the list of factories closed without resistance that the working class was not moving towards socialism. On the contrary it was and is on the retreat. The mood is one of demoralisation and weakness rather than confidence and strength. That reality has been reflected in the election.

Take, for example, the difference between north and south. That cannot be explained in terms of employment patterns. We have to go beyond the job statistics and look at patterns of class organisations. The working class in the south is large but it is relatively poorly organised and tends to get swamped by the political influence of other classes. The pattern of shifting votes to the SDP is as true in Sunderland North as it is in Dulwich but it has gone further in London.

Both the left and the right of the Labour Party see this drift being reversed simply by passing new resolutions or electing new leaders. And no doubt on both scores they will eventually manage to produce a superficially more attractive package than this time round.

But even in the narrowest of electoral terms the history of the Labour Party demonstrates that its strength is a consequence of workers' ability to fight. Its first burst of growth, in the 1920s was the reflection of the wave of militancy between 1910 and 1926. The victory of 1945 was a reflection of the wave of militancy which began in 1935 and continued through the second world war.

There is no sign that any wing of the



Picture JOHN STURROCK (Network)

Foot's vacillations and confusions were important because they accurately reflected the vacillations of the Labour Party



Ken Livingstone's great example of extra-parliamentary action was the GLC's 'Fares Fair' campaign

when Benn lost his seat and was ruled out as a candidate have now been put in an awkward spot by Heffer's decision to stand.

It is an indication of how far the left have been beaten that while Benn could run Healey very close two years ago, nobody now expects Heffer to get beyond the first ballot. That will allow everybody the opportunity to keep their conscience clean by voting for Heffer first time round and then trooping loyally into the second ballot behind Neil Kinnock.

When they do they will be doing rather more than eating a very large slice of humble pie. They will openly and publicly be giving their seal of approval to their own defeat.

Kinnock, after all, is not any old left candidate running as a substitute for the absent Tony Benn. It was Kinnock who led the centre-left MPs in refusing to back Tony Benn in the 1981 deputy leadership election. It was Kinnock, after all, who led the centre-left on the NEC into support for the witch hunt of Militant. More than any other parliamentary figure, Kinnock is the man who ditched the Bennites last time round.

Extra-parliamentary action

Apart from the leadership there is another problem facing the Labour Party. The next election is not until 1988—barring accidents. There is the question of what to do in the meantime.

All wings of the Labour Party are united in seeing the next election as the decisive event for which to prepare. Any difference of opinion are strictly subordinate to the shared aim of winning votes. But differences of opinion do exist.

Ken Livingstone and Arthur Scargill might seem exceptions. They are already on record as wanting 'extra-parliamentary action'. Healey has already stated his opinion on that idea: 'claptrap', he said.

A call for extra-parliamentary action sounds very impressive. Indeed, it sounds rather like the sort of thing which we have been urging on the increasingly deaf Labour left for the past couple of years. When looked at a bit more closely the idea is not so rosy.

In terms of the Labour Party, Healey has already made it quite clear that the right wing will have no truck with any such proposal. So the only way that the left could hope to turn the whole of the party's energies to action would be by a clean and decisive break with all on the right. If they do not do that then the right will sabotage any proposal and it will peter out in recriminations. The Labour left have no intention whatsoever of breaking with the right. What calls for extra-parliamentary action by the Labour Party are likely to achieve are numerous discussions about how nice it would be if some could be organised.

Even if the left were to get such action under way it would still be feeble. Ken Livingstone's great example of extra-parliamentary action is the GLC's 'Fares Fair' campaign. The bulk of Livingstone's efforts were directed into the undoubtedly extra-parliamentary but hardly radical forum of the high court. What campaign there was outside of this chamber carefully

Labour Party has learnt this elementary lesson from their rout. We are already seeing the opening rounds in a depressingly familiar battle a million miles removed from the class struggle.

For the right of the Labour Party the lesson is the same as ever: if we are ever going to get back into the corridors of power then we have to ditch all of this left-wing nonsense. Roy Hattersley said as much in his first statement in the campaign for leader.

The left are in a more difficult position. Already during the campaign they had surrendered control of the battle to the right. Now it looks as though they are moving even further in that direction.

One of the few pieces of good news on election night was the victory of Gerry Adams in West Belfast. When he was a councillor he was banned from visiting Britain. He had been invited by the GLC. Immediately after his election as MP the government backed down and lifted the order. The GLC was very far from enthusiastic about repeating their invitation. Ken Livingstone had not, at the time of writing, made any public statement about the invitation but Iltyd Harrington, GLC deputy leader immediately denied there would be an invitation.

He said:

'If he does come, it will not be as our official guest. We're facing a very determined government which wants to

abolish us. In this climate we must have all our friends around us—that is people in other parties as well. I think Mr Adams' presence here is not likely to create harmony at this particular moment... I don't believe we should be getting involved in the problems of Northern Ireland.'

Iltyd Harrington is not exactly one of the great stars of the left, but he was one of the signatories to the original invitation. A section at least of the left is clearly shifting right pretty fast.

The resignation of Foot creates even greater problems for the left. If Tony Benn had not lost his seat they would have faced an agonising choice over whether to run him for leader. They have been spared that because the constitution of the Labour Party is so parliamentary that it insists the leader must be an MP. Many must be breathing a sigh of relief. Even before the election was over they were starting to argue that what was needed in the current situation was a more electable figure... like, for example, Neil Kinnock.

At this stage in the game we cannot tell how the election will pan out. Kinnock seems to be making the running but a great deal still depends on what sort of dirty deals the union barons cook up in smoke filled rooms. A compromise with the right wing certainly cannot be ruled out.

Many who heaved that sigh of relief

avoided getting on the wrong side of union bureaucrats by not organising London Transport workers and directing its attention to consumers. Even then, Livingstone cut off the phones of the campaign when the going got tough and defiance of the law became an issue.

Scargill's version sounds more impressive because he talks in terms of organising strike action by workers. Unfortunately, whatever Scargill's rhetoric, his recent career shows an exaggerated respect for the formulae of the trade union bureaucracy.

Inside the NUM we have seen this lead to disaster three times since Scargill became president. Relying on the official machine has meant that Scargill has been unable to translate his speeches into effective action.

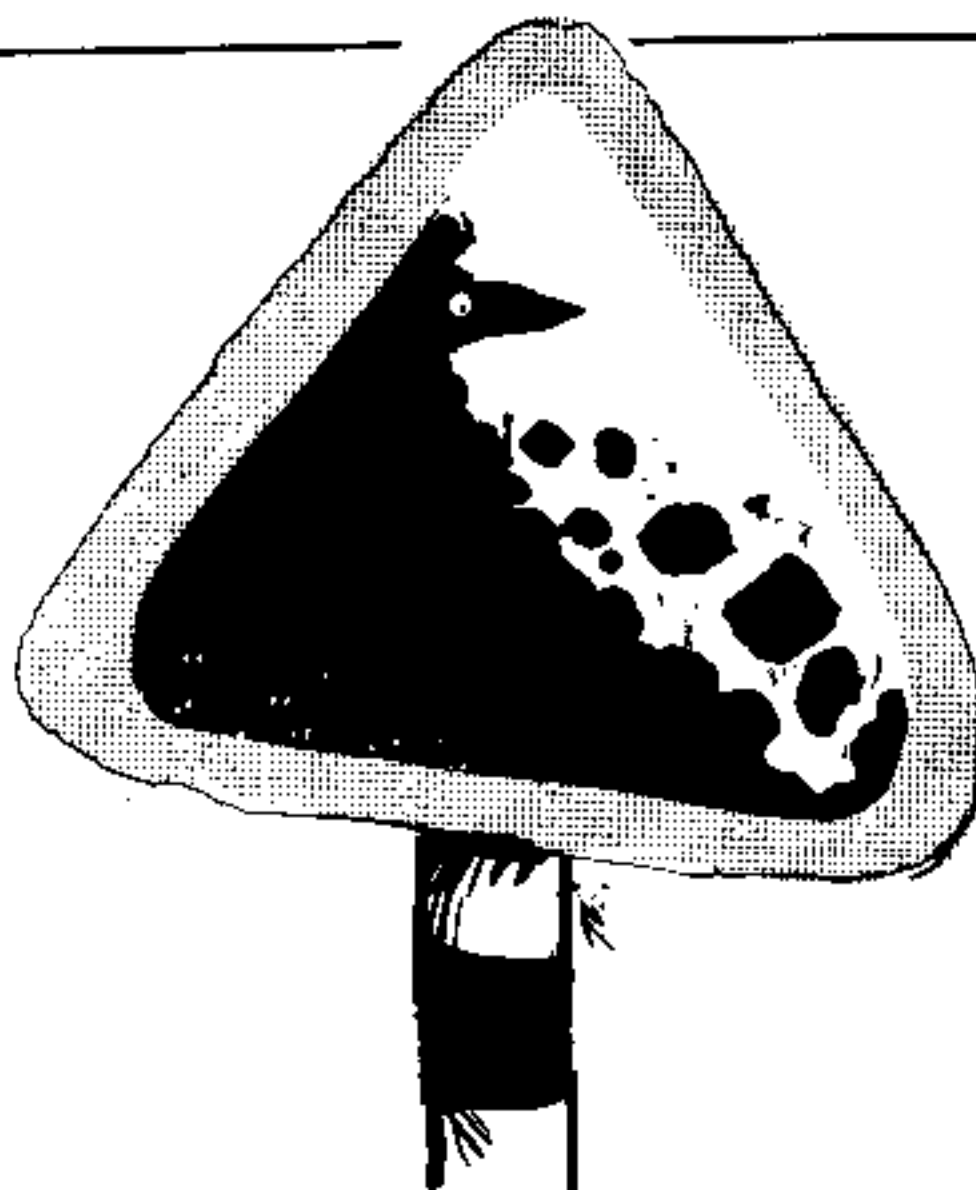
The reason for this is simple. Miners are no different from any other group of workers. However loyal they are to the union they do not respond to the wishes of the NEC like robots. To win the call for strike action needs more than a couple of speeches. It needs a network of militants at the local level who are prepared to make sure the arguments for action are won with the rank and file. Scargill has shown no enthusiasm or ability for building such a network.

On the wider stage the picture is even grimmer. The initial reaction of the TUC, as articulated by Len Murray, was that they were quite ready to talk to the new government—just as ready as they had been to talk to the last one. The only reservation he expressed was that he did not want to be 'treated with disdain'. So in terms of the trade union movement as a whole the fight for 'extra-parliamentary action' seems likely to degenerate into yet another wrangle inside the TUC. And all the indications are that the trade union leaders will move very much to the right. The last thing they will want to know about will be action against the Tories.

Even if that fight were to be won, we know what the TUC's idea of extra-parliamentary action is: it is the disastrous May 14 1980 Day of Action. Although some of the best organised groups of workers did come out on that day, overall the TUC proved that it could not deliver the goods for a political strike against the government. They were simply not up to the sort of work necessary to convince the mass of workers that they should defy the government. There is no evidence that should they try it again they will do any better.

Extra-parliamentary action is not going to be the panacea which rescues the Labour Party. We will certainly hear many speeches about it and we might see one or two demonstrations. There is no evidence that the entire weight of the Labour Party or the TUC is going to be thrown behind those concrete examples of extra-parliamentary activity which are embodied in every little strike that takes place.

Both the election campaign and its aftermath demonstrate very clearly that none of the currents in the Labour Party are anywhere near either understanding the present state of the working class movement or having any idea of how its problems might be overcome.



Is the Labour Party finished?

That does not mean that, as some bourgeois political commentators are gleefully arguing, the Labour Party is finished. There is no doubt that it will continue to be an important part of the political scene until it is replaced by a genuine socialist alternative. For one thing, the ruling class need it to head off any upsurge in workers' militancy.

Nor does the fact of its political bankruptcy which is so starkly revealed mean that thousands of militants are going to flood out of the Labour Party looking for a better way of achieving socialism. The predominant pressure on the left is to move to the right. Others will think it over for a few months. A very few will want to know about alternatives.

The alternative is not a glamorous one. It starts from a radically different assessment of the situation to that which the left of the Labour Party have held for the last few

years. It talks not about winning seats in parliament but about rebuilding shop stewards' organisations in every last workplace. To take it seriously means to break with the whole tradition of the Labour Party, right and left. That is not an easy task when your whole political training has been inside what presents itself as a mass party. The alternative is, after all, very far from being a mass party.

We have argued at length in this publication for an accurate estimate of the strengths and weaknesses of the workers' movement as it is on the shopfloor and we make no apology for devoting the core of this issue to the same topic.

The truth cannot be told too often. The truth is that workers are on the retreat. Shop-floor organisations are in a bad state. Claims of 'left victories' in the union bureaucracies are wholly illusory. The number of active socialists is tiny. It is very difficult to survive as a militant and a socialist in the present period. The task facing socialists is the hard and difficult one of rebuilding from the bottom up. There are no short cuts.

Because of the hostility of the environment the task of rebuilding can only really be undertaken by militants who have a rounded view of socialism. If it was possible to be a militant and have no politics in the boom years of the past it is no longer possible today. The task of rebuilding in the crisis is as much a question of ideas as it is of activity. Even to win action on quite elementary things often means you need to win arguments against the entire weight of the capitalist press. That level of political clarity is not achieved overnight and does not come about automatically. It can only be acquired through the work of a revolutionary party.

The rout of the Labour Party and the utter confusion of the left will not, unfortunately, mean that thousands are ready to hear the truth. It is up to us to argue the case and to show in practice that, in however small a way, it is possible to build a socialist party that can become an alternative to the dead end of the Labour Party.

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Right behind you, Denis

The 'hard left' in the Labour Party has spent the past few years telling us that it would fight the election on a socialist platform. Pete Goodwin shows that not a single left wing candidate was honest about their policies.

In a front page article in *Labour Herald* written soon after the election was announced Tony Benn issued the following rallying call to the Labour left:

'The campaign which Labour is fighting is very different from that with which we fought the 1979 election. Then the policy was dictated by the then prime minister. Now we have a policy which has been drafted by successive TUC congresses and Labour Party conferences.

'That is why we can genuinely say that the labour movement has created the policy on which Labour is now fighting...

'What we have to do is to take the policies of the Party out to the people, to their homes, and workplaces and into their shopping centres.

'This will be a doorstep, factory gates and office canteen campaign of a kind we have not mounted for many years.'

In the wake of the defeat there will be many on the supposed 'hard' Labour left who will claim that that is exactly what they were doing. It was others who blew the campaign off course—Jim Callaghan and Denis Healey with their back stabbing, Michael Foot with his doddering, and of course, the Tory press with their trivialisation of Labour's brave grass roots campaign.

The truth, however, is somewhat different. Take, for a start, that key-note article by Tony Benn we have just quoted. In it there is not one word of criticism of the leadership of the Labour Party, nor one word of reference to the struggles within the Labour Party over the past four years. The central argument of the Bennite years 1979-81, that conference policies were not worth the paper they were written on unless there was a parliamentary leadership prepared to implement them, was simply forgotten.

Tony Benn has been suffering from this self induced amnesia at least since the last Labour Party conference. But during the election campaign it has infected every nook and cranny of the Labour left. One searches in vain in any of the campaign literature of the Labour left for any reference to the witch hunt, the famous fudging of Michael Foot or the overwhelming dominance of the right wing in the shadow cabinet. Whether they be supporters of the Militant or the heroes of the newer entrists every one of them decided that the inner party battles they have conducted with such apparent ferocity were vote losers and therefore chose to ignore them.

Hardest left elements

Just how total this was is indicated by the 'model leaflets' produced by 'Socialists for a Labour Victory' and advertised in *Socialist Organiser* on May 19. Remember that the whole rationale for Socialists for a Labour Victory was that the Labour leadership would ignore the policies passed by party conference. Remember also that Socialists for a Labour Victory was the creation of supposed revolutionary entrists in the Labour Party and the apparently hardest elements of the new Labour left. But the 'model leaflets'

they produced simply assert (in large letters) 'LABOUR WILL...' expand social services or give 'extra help to one-parent families' or 'LABOUR STANDS FOR... unilateral nuclear disarmament... cutting unemployment'... and that is it. Presumably the voter is left to make up his or her mind whether Denis Healey or Roy Hattersley would actually do these things or whether it might actually need a bit of class struggle to achieve them. It says much for the 'new Labour left' that its 'revolutionary' wing should have seen their key intervention in the campaign as producing such anodyne statements. And it says even more that despite its studious moderation the much acclaimed Socialists for a Labour Victory sunk without trace during the actual election campaign.

Of course part of the reason for this was the direct organisational pressure of the Labour right wing. In particular the right wing union leaders, in the shape of Trade Unions for a Labour Victory, demonstrated from the start of the election campaign that they had a machine whose power the constituency based Labour left had generally failed to recognise. But it cannot be said that the Labour left did anything to combat the TULV influence on the campaign. In fact just the opposite—they positively encouraged it.

The TULV rally at the CPSA conference was chaired by leading Militant supporter Kevin Roddy who opened discussion by hoping that it would not focus on anything 'divisive' like the 'National Economic Assessment'—ie incomes policy! And it was the 'left' leadership of NUPE (again with the support of Militant) that manoeuvred so that its conference would not pass a vote hostile to the National Economic Assessment.

It should also be noted that every single left candidate has been an eager enthusiastic participant in the big Labour rallies at which the leadership of the party have been greeted with uncritical adulation. No one on the Labour left thought there was anything odd about Militant supporter Pat Wall boasting of how 'proud' he was to have spoken on the same platform as three Labour Party leaders—one of whom was Hugh Gaitskell!

But it is in the local campaigning, away from the glare of national publicity, that the reality of the Labour left's election is most sharply revealed.

It reaches its ultimate depths in Bermondsey. A vicious anti-gay campaign against Peter Tatchell was universally acknowledged to be one of the key factors in the by-election debacle there. So how did the left-wing Bermondsey Labour Party fight back at the general election? By attacking the smears and the bigotry, by arguing Labour's position on gay rights? Not a bit of it. It didn't mention them in its campaign literature. Instead it put round a leaflet entitled 'Introducing John Tilley' in which the new Labour candidate was prominently pictured with his wife and baby daughter!

But if Bermondsey was a particular low point, the behaviour of other prominent Labour lefts gives one little confidence that they would have acted differently had they faced the same situation. Everywhere the brave left talk of the past was simply junked when it came to addressing the voters.

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How Bermondsey Labour Party fights an anti-gay witch hunt

Take Val Veness, Labour candidate for Hornsey and Wood Green and deputy leader of Islington council. In an interview in *Socialist Worker* in January she was arguing that

'I truly believe that you need the mass of the working class behind you... I think the Chilean experience is one thing that you learn from... A Labour government has got to take on the people who obstruct it, arresting them if necessary—arm the workers if necessary—elect the judges. It's a question of democratising everything, and accountability.'

These words of wisdom were however not to be passed on to the electors of Hornsey and Wood Green. In her election address Val Veness says nothing about the state, the capitalist class, or extra parliamentary action, let alone arming the workers or electing the judges. Even Labour's commitment to abolishing the House of Lords does not merit a mention. Instead we have 'The Tories don't care', 'Labour's alternative' and 'Our positive plan'; points two and three being introduced with the inevitable 'Labour will', without the slightest hint that they might be obstructed by anyone.

Of course this did not stop the 'arm the workers' interview being raised by the loyal Social Democrats and splashed across the front page of the local paper. The Labour Party's response? Val Veness had been 'totally misquoted'.

The case of Val Veness is exceptional only in that her past left statements were so embarrassingly brought up during the election. But it is quite typical in its abandonment of extra-parliamentary action or criticisms of the state machine. There may be a few exceptions but we have not seen one Labour left election address that either mentioned the need for extra-parliamentary action or suggested that left policies would meet any obstruction. Scarcely any left Labour candidates for example even put forward any of the rather lame proposals for democratic reform advocated in Tony Benn's book *Arguments for Democracy*.

So whether prominent 'hard left' Labour candidates won or lost had very little to do with the radicalness of the policies they were putting forward in their constituency—because these policies were in fact indistinguishable from those being advoc-

ated by candidates in the centre and even on the right of the party.

Take for example the case of London's Labour 'hard lefts' up against SDP defectors. Audrey Wise's defeat at Woolwich can scarcely be put down to a left wing campaign for the simple reason that Audrey Wise did not wage one. Her election address is as uncontroversial as any other. 'Be Wise—Vote Wise'. 'This is Tory Britain. A land without hope or glory, especially for the young. A land where the unemployed, the sick, the low paid and the old suffer. The next Labour Government will change that.' Would Roy Hattersley have put it any different?

But equally Jeremy Corbyn's victory in Islington was not the result of a left campaign. 'Put people first'. 'Labour's policies make sense. Let's get people back to work and build a better future for us all.' These highlights from Corbyn's election address hardly indicate a serious attempt to build a conscious active left wing base.

The Militant campaign

What goes for the 'hard left' Labour candidates in general also goes, with a couple of particular peculiarities, for the Labour candidates who supported the Militant tendency. Militant focussed its whole intervention in the election on the four Militant candidates in what it considered winnable seats: Dave Nellist in Coventry, Terry Fields in Liverpool, Pat Wall in Bradford and Rod Fitch in Brighton. *Militant* was full of encouraging and largely apolitical stories from their constituencies, which would have led anyone who took them seriously to believe that each was going to win by a landslide. Militant supporters from all over the rest of the country were brought in to help with these four campaigns. *Militant* itself had singularly little else to say. For example you have to look through its pre-election issue with a microscope before you find any criticism of the Labour right wing, never mind Foot.

Now the four Militant candidates did have one distinctive policy. They all made great play of the fact that they would, as MPs, only take a skilled worker's wage. Very good, al-

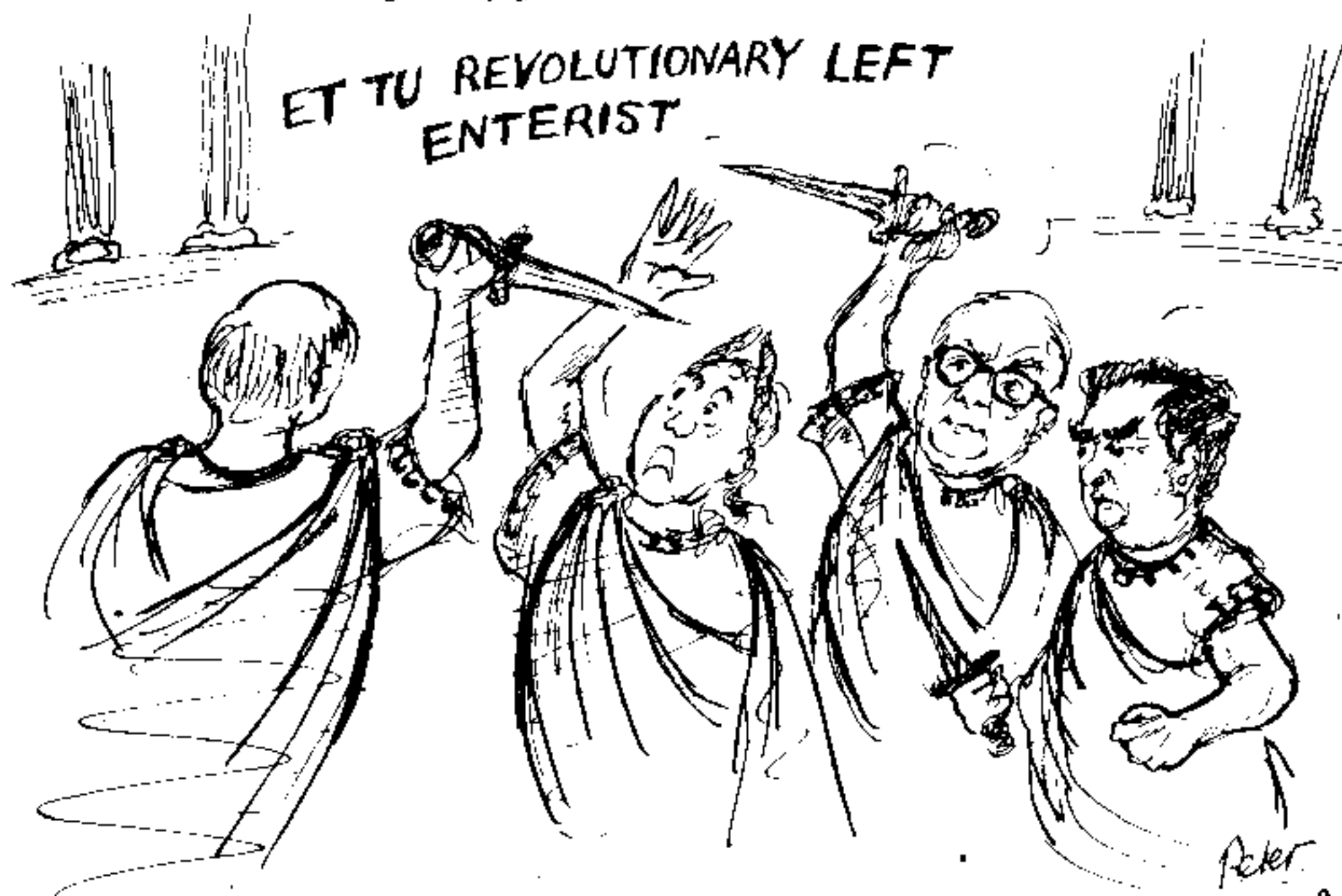
though as a socialist demand, rather than a nice piece of populism, it would have been more convincing had they put in their election addresses that they thought all state officials should be similarly remunerated (and perhaps elected as well). Of course none of them did. Nor did any of them make any reference in their election addresses to the fact that they were 'Marxists', supporters of *Militant*, opposed in any way to the Labour leadership or supporters of extra-parliamentary action.

In other words they all fudged in exactly the same way as the rest of the 'hard left' Labour candidates.

But they also had one special and distinctive evasion of their very own. Anyone who has had even a chance encounter with Militant knows that they stand for 'the nationalisation of the top 200 monopolies'. They do not merely stand for it, they never tire of introducing it as the key to every political argument... apart from when they happen to be standing for parliament! For every one of the four Militant candidates quite consciously avoided the magic phrase in their election addresses. Indeed Rod Fitch managed to restrict his talk of nationalisation to 're-nationalisation of those assets already sold off to private speculators.'

The others rested content with vague formulae about 'socialist planning' which could have come straight from Harold Wilson himself. Indeed in Pat Wall's case it almost literally did for he emphasised 'Socialists stand for a fundamental and irreversible shift in the balance of wealth and power in favour of working people and their families.' You've heard the phrase before? Yes, in the Labour Party's 1974 election manifesto!

Yes. Labour's 1983 election campaign was stabbed in the back by Callaghan and Healey, it was fudged to death by Michael Foot and it was trivialised by the Tory press. But any inquest has not just got to include the truth, but the *whole truth*. And to that list must be added another simple fact. Not one single 'hard left' Labour parliamentary candidate fought the 1983 election in the manner that they had talked about over the previous four years.



The main enemy is at home..

'May 1968 all over again' has been a repeated comment on the recent student demonstrations in France. The comparison is so grotesque that it can scarcely spring from ignorance, but rather reflects a deliberate concern to bury the memory of what May 68 was actually about. For there was a lot more to May 68 than a punch-up between students and riot police. In May 68 the students started from a recognition of their own oppression (in authoritarian, overcrowded universities) and moved to an identification with the oppression of others (French workers, Vietnamese freedom fighters).

In May 68 the student action gave confidence to others and sparked off the biggest general strike in human history. In May 68 self-activity was everywhere from student action committees to the trade union committees which effectively ran the city of Nantes.

There is precious little of any of this to be seen in the current series of student demonstrations, inspired by confused and often reactionary demands, and manipulated by a right-wing leadership, which, at the time of writing, seems to be finally fizzling out.

Middle Class revolt

Another comparison which has surfaced in some quarters is with Chile in the last months of Allende's rule. It is true that Allende was shaken by a series of middle-class revolts. Demonstrations by middle class housewives were followed by strikes of lorry owners. In mid-1973 there was the amazing spectacle of women in fur coats collecting money in the streets of Santiago's most prosperous suburbs in aid of striking copper miners. But the middle class revolt in Chile was only part of a softening-up process; the death blow was to be struck by the army, encouraged by Washington.

Now the present leaders of the French army probably do not feel any great personal affection for Mitterrand (or for any political leader to the left of Mussolini) but they have no particular motive for overthrowing him. After all, he has shown great dedication to maintaining the military budget even in times of financial hardship. And Ronald Reagan, who recognises Mitterrand as far more loyal to the western alliance than any other French leader since the fifties, has no motive to encourage 'destabilisation' in France. The French ruling class can live quite happily with Mitterrand—and when they feel they can no longer do so, Jacques Chirac will take over in a painless and peaceful manner.

The roots of this spring's disturbances are to be found at a far more mundane level, in the failure of Mitterrand's government to carry through even a minimal programme of reform.

The French higher education system is a ramshackle affair, based on privilege, tradition and incompetence. (As such it is like

Ian Birchall looks at the background to the recent student demonstrations in France against the Mitterrand government.

most other systems of higher education, but worse). It is highly wasteful of resources — it is not uncommon for teachers to work a four-hour week, while nearly half the total number of university students drop out after two years without any qualifications. The basic aim of the reforms now being promoted by the education minister, Savary, is to try to rationalise the system, to relate vocational training more closely to job opportunities, and to link higher education more closely to industrial and scientific research.



Paris, May 1983

At present French universities do not operate a selection policy; anyone with a *baccalauréat* (a rather tougher version of A levels) can enter university. Savary does not intend to change this (except to limit numbers training for medicine, dentistry and pharmacy). What will, however, happen is that after a fairly open and broad two-year course, students wishing to continue their studies into the 'second cycle' will be subjected to more rigorous selection. The law is disturbingly vague as to how and by whom this selection will be carried out.

Savary also aims to control more tightly the individual faculties, which at present have very considerable academic and administrative autonomy. The reform also aims to encompass the *grandes écoles* (great schools), highly competitive and elitist institutions which train top administrators and professionals. These prestigious bodies are to be more closely integrated with the university system.

All this is strictly capitalist in its logic, and

to a large extent represents another attempt at the same sort of reform that previous education ministers have been trying — with relatively little success — to introduce since 1968. It is certainly not the 'totalitarian yoke' that it has been described as by the very right wing daily *Le Figaro*, and on the face of it nothing worth throwing stones at a policeman about.

However, the reforms coincide with a period of recession and rising unemployment which cause deep anxiety among many sectors of students. At the end of the Second World War a university education was still a privilege, reserved for a small minority in society, and virtually guaranteed access to the upper echelons of professional life. The massive expansion of higher education (which in France was even more unplanned than that elsewhere) broke this down and undermined the privileged social status of students. Already in 1968 this was a major factor in the changing consciousness of students, especially those studying the natural or social sciences. But students training for the elite professions, especially medicine and law, were still relatively sheltered. They played little role in 1968, neither did students from the *grandes écoles*.

Privileges under threat

But now these groups too feel their privileges under threat. In the last twenty years the number of medical practitioners in France has increased threefold, and the market is becoming saturated. As a result many students feel they have to clutch on to what privileges they have. Many students are in favour of selection, as they believe this will strengthen their chances on the job market if they manage to scramble on to the band wagon in the first place. And those students heading for a professional career fear the first two years of open broad studies will be wasted.

These are legitimate if conservative anxieties. But fuel has been added to the flames by the intervention of the extreme right, eager to embarrass the government and to boost its own influence. Fascist groups have been able to operate openly in the student milieu, playing on the unpolitical attitudes of many of the students and the fact that the left, in all its shades, is seen as being somehow linked to the government. The relatively small pro-Giscard student organisation has managed to seize the leadership in many places, as have the even smaller fascist groupings. The largest of the fascist groupings, the PFN (Party of the New Forces) claims about 7,000 members and has some twenty local councillors.

All this has given rise to a wave of student action. There have been strikes in many faculties (and a very long strike by medical students working in hospitals) as well as the much-publicised clashes with the police. The street violence has led to some strange role

..in the Elysée Palace



reversals, with right wing deputies denouncing 'unacceptable' police brutality and backing student demonstrators. But the role of the police themselves has sometimes been open to questions. The police have no reason to fear Mitterrand (he has failed to institute even a minimal purge of a police force notoriously riddled with racists and open fascists), but they undoubtedly do not love him. The student demonstrations have in fact been relatively small (certainly in comparison to 1968) but the police may have been happy for them to get a bit out of hand, which would both embarrass the government and give them the opportunity get in some club-swinging.

Peasants and shopkeepers

The student demonstrations have also coincided with the appearance on the streets of other middle class groupings. The most vigorous of these have been the peasants. Peasants have been demanding higher EEC food prices, government aid and above all a stop to cheap food imports. In many places they have resorted to direct action, attacking lorries carrying imported food, especially at the frontiers, and also launching violent attacks on government buildings. Small traders have also been on the streets, notably a demonstration of fifteen thousand in Paris.

There is, of course, nothing new about this. There have been violent peasant demonstrations against every French government since the fourteenth century; traders and peasants gave Giscard a rougher ride than they have given Mitterrand—so far. Of course the fact that the government is allegedly left in complexion has given some old-time fascist scum the chance to rise to the

top in these movements too.

But two things need to be noted. Firstly, the media have given the various middle class demonstrations a relatively good write-up, compared with the vicious attacks that were launched earlier in the year against striking car workers, who were denounced in the most scurrilous racist terms. And secondly it is noteworthy that while the middle classes are less affected by the government's austerity measures than the workers, it is the former who have taken to the streets while the workers remain relatively quiescent. The reason for this, of course, lies in the fact that the main unions are still committed to bolstering up the 'left' government.

One of the greatest tragedies of recent events has been the failure of the left to offer any alternative lead. The left of all shades from the Socialist and Communist Parties to various Trotskyist currents had considerable influence in the student movement. But attempts by some on the left to mobilise student discontent around progressive slogans ('the university open to all') did not take off.

The reason for this must be sought in the attitude of even the revolutionary left to the Mitterrand government. For years before 1981 they offered the election of a left government as a panacea to be aimed for; and when Mitterrand came to power they gave the impression of doing little more than tailing him with rather more radical verbal demands. As a result the left appeared to be taking a more conciliatory position in the various disputes and were unable to capture the leadership.

On 18 May the *Ligue Communiste Revolutionnaire* (French section of the Fourth International) called a demon-

stration to show that the racists and extreme rightists did not have a monopoly of the streets. Some five thousand participated. This was greatly to the *Ligue's* credit — and to the discredit of virtually all the other left tendencies who refused to join with them. But it was only a small beginning.

Government concessions

As the postponed examinations eventually take place and the summer holidays intervene, the student protest will undoubtedly blow itself out, leaving little behind. The main impact will be on the government itself. For every manifestation of right-wing opposition strengthens the hands of the most conservative forces within the government. A handful of racists on the streets is not in itself a great threat. What is a threat is that this encourages the government itself to make concessions to racist demogogy. The most striking example was the disgusting racist campaign waged by the interior minister Gaston Defferre to clutch on to his seat as mayor of Marseilles last March.

Mitterrand's popularity is in decline. Polls show that he has the support of only 42 percent of the voters, as against 50 percent a year ago. The pressure is ever greater to appease the middle classes and to push the burden of the economic crisis on to the working class, trusting that the union leaders will continue to bail him out. There is growing pressure from sections of the Socialist Party for Mitterrand to introduce protectionism and an incomes policy. Mitterrand, as a loyal defender of the international capitalist order, will probably resist the former, but the latter — a direct attack on workers' wages — may yet prove more tempting.

Salvationary socialism

Robert Tressell's classic novel *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* has influenced generations of socialists. Owen Gallagher takes a critical look at the politics of this novel.

Approximately 70 years ago, a book was published that was to influence, shape and inspire succeeding generations of workers and socialists throughout the world. It became known as 'The Painters' Bible'.

Yet, three years prior to its publication, in 1911, the author was carried dead from a workhouse in Liverpool and lain alongside 12 others in an unmarked pauper's grave. That man was Robert Tressell, alias Robert Noonan. The book was *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*. Since its publication in 1914, it has sold tens of thousands of copies and so far has been translated into ten different languages. Yet we still know very little about the author's background and the influences working on him.

This famous working-class writer was the illegitimate child of an Irish magistrate, born in Dublin in 1870. At the age of 20 he broke with his family and worked his passage to South Africa, where he took up employment as a painter and decorator, which he continued until his death in 1911.

In Johannesburg he became involved in two Irish organisations, one of which was the 'Irish Brigade' which fought with the Boers against the British forces in 1899. Two years later Tressell left South Africa with his daughter, bound for England.

During his stay in South Africa, he mixed with the large immigrant population, including Irish Republicans and socialists of all shades. As well as contributing the odd article to newspapers he became an avid socialist reader. Financially, he was comfortably off, owning some land and employing a black servant, named Sixpence.

At thirty-one, already in the last decade of his life, he settled in the Edwardian Tory town of Hastings, primarily because of continuous ill health which in the end resulted in bronchial pneumonia. It was here he immortalised the last phase of his life in his classic socialist novel.

He arrived in England in the midst of an economic crisis. Whilst the newly rich paraded on the promenades of Hastings, thousands of workers lived in conditions of acute distress.

It was only when socialists began to organise independently of the Liberals at the turn of the century that Tressell began to see the need for a separate political organisation. In 1906 he assisted with a few others in forming a Social Democratic Federation branch in Hastings.

Tressell, through the use of *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, sought to inform

and persuade people to socialism by the use of reason. It was an attitude then prevalent amongst the 'left'. Coupled with this was the strong crusading spirit of socialists with the emphasis being on go forth and 'make socialists'.

The novel itself took about five years to complete. It was originally intended to be a series of pamphlets to counteract the influence of Tory ideas which were gaining a foothold amongst workers then. But fundamentally it was to expose the political parties and the system they managed. It was to be the case for socialism. As the writing developed, however, it formed the shape of a novel.



Shortly after completing the story in 1910, Tressell, the name being derived from the builder's trestle, left Hastings and tramped alone, bound for Liverpool. His intention was to earn his fare there and sail to Canada for the sake of his daughter's future and his rapidly deteriorating health. His years of living in poverty, however, finally caught up with him and he died in the place where he always feared he would end up, the workhouse.

The central theme of his work is the class war which is set in 'Mugsborough' (Hastings). Tressell shows through the lives of a small group of workers, their families and employers the complete rottenness of capitalism. He admirably conveys the life of the worker from the cradle to the grave.

His writings show quite clearly the influences of Owen, Morris, Blatchford and Marx. But ultimately his politics are those of the SDF, who as a party did not participate in the day-to-day economic and political struggles of the workers. In fact they frowned on and indeed discouraged the self activity of the masses. Small wonder then that workers looked upon socialist organisations, and still do today, with mistrust.

This self imposed isolation meant that Tressell was unable to see the means by which the workers could move towards socialism. Like many of the pre-first world war socialists, Tressell assumed that capitalism would spontaneously destroy itself, because of its inherent contradictions,

and socialism would somehow be ushered in. What role the working class had in all of this they were extremely vague and unsure about.

Undoubtedly, the most serious weakness of the book is Tressell's view on how we achieve socialism. Socialism is somehow for the benefit of the working class but it seems they have no role in bringing it about. This is to be done by others. The argument is still with us today. When the workers ask Owen how socialism is to be achieved his reply is, 'You must first of all fill the House of Commons with revolutionary socialists'. 'And on the day that you do that you will have solved the poverty problem.' However, the workers are not convinced. After one of Owen's lunchtime lectures the vote is put 'that socialism is the only remedy for unemployment and poverty'. Needless to say the majority of workers vote against it.

Tressell, like other socialists in his day, failed to grasp the meaning of Marxism. That socialism can only be brought about by the workers themselves. It cannot be handed down by acts of parliament, from the 'high priests', the 'enlightened ones'. Engels once neatly summed up this attitude of the SDF when he said that it saw itself as 'the only salvation-bringing church'.

As a result of his failure to convert the workers, Tressell, who was not alone by any means, resorts to arguing about the stupidity of the workers, their inability and 'unwillingness' to accept what the socialists keep telling them. He ignores previous workers' movements and strikes, their revolutionary past and potential and symbolises 'Mugsborough' as representative of the British working class. He goes on to blame the workers, not the socialists, for their impasse. And at times, in desperation, he has to argue, 'at least the children are worth fighting for.' He is clutching at straws.

Ironically, and probably unconsciously, Tressell finally puts his finger on the real problem, towards the end of the book, 'directly one enquired what means they proposed to employ in order to bring about the adoption of their plan (the socialists), they replied, that they hoped to do by reasoning with others!' But as Tressell points out earlier, 'it was clear as mud to the workers.' He was slowly beginning to realise that 'enlightening' the workers was not enough. Propaganda by itself was simply inadequate. A radical change of strategy and tactics was required in the socialist movement (much like today) and this felt and revealed itself in the coming decades.

Significant as the weaknesses of the book are, they are far outweighed by the book's strength. How many writers in the history of literature place the working class at the centre of the stage, take up the political arguments of the day and in simple, clear and direct language, strip capitalism bare to the bone, and offer us socialism as the alternative?

The secret of the continuing success of this book is that it is true, and that it offers us hope for the future. As Tressell writes in his Preface, 'I have invented nothing.' If he were alive today he would be confronted more or less with the same issues he chose to write about some 70 years ago. That is the book's major relevance.

Union Broad Lefts move right

Andy Strouthous and John Deason talked to *Socialist Review* about the new Broad Lefts in the unions.

The new Broad Lefts in the unions were born of the political mood which fostered Bennism in the Labour Party. The lack of work-place activity and the erosion of shop stewards' organisation meant that a layer of people found trade union positions had the same sort of attraction as the fight inside the Labour Party. They were both types of political work which can offer much to the activist independently of the mood of the rank and file.

The same sort of tactics are used in both unions and Labour Party. In both cases the emphasis has been on changing the leadership rather than on building at the base. And the policy issues around which fights have been conducted have often been similar too. The Alternative Economic Strategy has been a central concern in both places. In some white collar unions the main effort of the Broad Lefts went into pushing affiliation to the Labour Party.

Electioneering and bureaucratic manoeuvring are not new. They were also characteristic of the old Broad Left organisations built by the CP in the fifties and sixties. The CP strategy was to use their industrial support to build a relationship with the Labour left.

Although they were based on the strength of sectional shop stewards organisation this industrial muscle was never more than an adjunct to the parliamentary road to socialism.

Left officials elected

This strategy was successful in their terms, insofar as it got left officials elected, and Broad Left supporters into full time convenors positions. But the price paid for this was the neglect of the very shop stewards' organisation which was the basis for their influence in the first place.

We were always critical of this strategy because we saw the obvious danger of the collapse of shop stewards organisation at the level of the section. In fact the electoral successes themselves were an important feature in weakening shop stewards organisation.

At the top it meant that faced with a Labour government it was Jones and Scanlon who sold the social contract, not Frank Chappell. Their previous reputation for militancy made it much easier for them to get away with it.

This political drift coincided with the bureaucratisation of the shop stewards organisation. So the erosion at the base and the electoral strategy fed into each other and increased the rate of decline. They didn't recognise that their electoral strategy was

undermining the very base where their strength lay.

Take the example of British Leyland—Broad Left supporters became sucked into planning agreements, workers participation schemes and the like, at the same time they were becoming bureaucratised by accepting full time convenors positions. The potential for weakening shop floor organisation of these two factors can be seen in the fate of Derek Robinson.

When the crisis began to really bite, the Broad Left was in a weak position to respond, both organisationally and politically. The shop stewards organisation was weak, and politically they were hopelessly compromised by their support of a Labour government which was attacking workers as hard as it could.

The pressure from the Broad Left leadership for workers to tighten their belt and support the Labour government was reflected at workplace level. There was a certain level of agreement between management and full-time convenors about the need for profitability and making Britain competitive and the like.

The new Broad Lefts inherit all these political faults. But they have also grown up in a period of minimal rank and file activity. The politics is still in the strict reformist mould of change at the top, but this time there is no substantial rank and file base to counter-balance the back room manoeuvring and resolution mongering.

For the Broad Lefts the divisions inside the unions are between left and right. Winning election positions and passing resolutions at conferences become the key political activities.

For us the real division in the unions is between the bureaucracy and the rank and file. The key activity is building a base in the work-place. Electoral activity and conference resolutions are only important insofar as they are a



Kevin Roddy the outgoing president of the CPSA. Following the victory of the right, behind the scenes manoeuvres to set up a new Broad Left, but without Militant.

Picture: JOHN STURROCK (Network)

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genuine reflection of support amongst the rank and file.

The recent round of union conferences has seen these two different strategies very sharply opposed. The combined pressures of the decline of workers self-activity and the nearness of the election showed the Broad Left strategy in its clearest light. Unity behind Foot and Healey became their major political aim and holding onto whatever full-time positions they could their strongest organisational goal.

The idea of getting a Labour government elected was pushed very hard at the conferences by the Broad Left. They argued for substituting the election for a real struggle on a whole range of issues, and were desperate to paper over the differences in the Labour Party. At NUPE conference the only three speakers against the witch hunt of the Militant were all members of SWP.

The race to support Labour also led to several Broad Lefts supporting wage controls, in the form of the National Economic Assessment. The Broad Left bureaucracy in NUPE didn't oppose the National Economic Assessment on the spurious grounds that social contracts help the low paid. This sort of nonsense really sums up the politics—we can't lead fights to end low pay, so we'll put our faith in a Labour government with the same politics as the last, even though that utterly failed to end low pay.

The Labour Party is constantly seen as the way to achieve gains for the working class. At the USDAW conference the Broad Left argued that electing a Labour government was the way to prevent Sunday opening, to keep wages paid in cash and so on.

Of course the prospect of an election increased the tendency for the Broad Left machines to swing rightwards. As with the Labour Party this involved distancing the Broad Left from organisations such as the Militant.

Pressure to adapt

In the CPSA, where the right won back control of the executive at this year's conference, behind the scenes manoeuvres to set up a Broad Left without Militant are already under way. Instead of a proper analysis of why the union membership has shifted to the right, the Broad Left merely shift along with them to keep up.

If your priority is electoral politics, then the pressure to adapt to the demoralised mass of the union membership is fantastic. If your emphasis is on the rank and file then you will look to struggles, however small, and try to build on them.

At the CPSA conference, Kevin Roddy shared a platform with such well known defenders of socialism as Alastair Graham and David Basnett, under the auspices of 'Trade Unions for a Labour Victory'. Basnett opened the proceedings by telling everyone how wonderful the National Economic Assessment was. Roddy's response was to say that he preferred that the meeting didn't discuss the National Economic Assessment, but concentrated on 'those things which unite us against the Tories'.

Even when the Broad Left are up to their necks in rank and file action they are still

unable to break with electoral politics. Arthur Conheeny, the convenor of Greenings, is quite willing to say that the return of a Labour government is more important than the Greenings strike. And to attack those who think differently as 'ultra left'.

This sort of thing is a useful indicator of where the Broad Lefts would stand in an upturn. Rank and file action always has the potential to clash with the electoral ambitions of bureaucrats. Those committed to electoralism will almost always sacrifice the rank and file if they have to. The rubber stamping of policies is more important than building at the bottom.

So, they aren't particularly bothered if they win conference resolutions or union positions without any real support. When Ian France, an SWP member who had won a seat on the USDAW executive with Broad Left support resigned because he had won by a fluke all hell broke loose.

Need for a real base

Ian had stood with the intention of using the election as a platform to talk about politics. But the right vote was split four ways and this let Ian in. 27,000 should be the minimum vote needed to win an election in Ian's division. He received 11,000. Although he won in the Manchester division, 5,000 of his votes came from a national branch, which returns its votes to Manchester for purely historic reasons. So the fact that he won was an absolute accident, to remain on the executive would have been completely dishonest.

Ian argued that he hadn't got a base inside the Manchester division. That he'd only got a small base inside his own workplace. That actually he didn't represent anything. That building a union meant building from the base upwards, not by manoeuvring and taking positions at the top that you hadn't earned.

You need to look at the way the Broad Left functions in USDAW to understand why the attacks on Ian were so vicious. The truth is no-one really has a base, and Ian was showing the rest up by admitting it.

National Broad Left meetings are tiny. For example, the meeting that voted for Jeff Price as presidential candidate didn't have more than 25 people at it. The Jeff Price rally in Manchester had half a dozen at it. The main Broad Left rally which included Benn in London attracted a couple of hundred people, but only thirty or forty were USDAW members—most people came from outside of USDAW to hear Benn speak.

Broad Left meetings in Manchester which are held once a month are attended by 5 people. Three are SWP members, one is a member of Socialist Organiser, one is a full time official. The whole thing is a joke and the SWP members are pulling out.

The meeting at which Ian explained his reasons for resigning really showed how votes had become all important to the Broad Left. All people were interested in was sorting out which motions to vote for. As soon as Ian got up to discuss politics half the people in the room walked out. The ones who stayed just couldn't understand why Ian was throwing away the chance to manoeuvre which an executive position would have given him.



Strikers on picket duty over redundancies at Greenings

So great is their union machine lunacy that to hide things from your own membership is not beyond certain sections of the Broad Left either.

In the IRSF two members of the executive have resigned over the issue of secrecy in the union. Des Bailey, an SWP member and vice president of the union was censured for publicising 'confidential' documents to the membership. The difference in strategy for building in the unions could not be more clearly seen. On the one hand we have negotiations behind the back of the membership, therefore without the agreement or support of the membership. On the other we have the idea that the way to win gains for the membership is to stir up as much rank and file activity as possible.

The full-time trap

In the present period full time positions only serve to trap revolutionaries who get caught up in the trade union bureaucracy. There is no doubt that the class as a whole is demoralised at present, this demoralisation leads to a rightward political shift, full time union officials have no choice but to adapt to this in order to keep in touch with their membership.

For rank and file activists the world looks rather different. They have the opportunity, and are in the position to begin to rebuild in the individual workplaces. This involves, more than anything, being able to use and develop the small struggles going on at the

moment.

Often this will be at a very basic level, such as collecting money for a strike. But the importance of getting workers to give money on a trade union issue cannot be overestimated. The introduction of the 'check off' system for collecting union dues (a move supported by the trade union bureaucracies as it

'Arthur Conheeny, the convenor of Greenings is quite willing to say that the return of a Labour government is more important than the Greenings strike.'

guaranteed their income) was an important feature in weakening the power of shop stewards. Collection sheets, used in the right way, can begin to re-introduce the tradition of the best workplace activists regularly getting around their workmates and talking about politics.

Because of the present industrial climate this will necessarily be on a small scale. During the dockers dispute £1,000 was collected, £800 of this was on SWP collection sheets, the biggest single collection was only £30. We can see that the SWP is more or less alone in pushing for a rebuilding of rank and file confidence, and that it is on a small scale.

But the alternative is incorporation into the union bureaucracy—the recent history of the

CPSA shows where this can lead.

During the disputes in Birmingham and Oxford, where DHSS staff went on strike for more staff to compensate for their ever increasing workload, the union did absolutely nothing. Both varieties of the new left, the Militant and the Bennites, were for once united in that they did absolutely nothing. They were frozen like a rabbit in car headlights, without any strategy for moving forward.

Building by fighting

The only base they had was electoral, built on disillusionment with the right, rather than a positive commitment to fighting. And they did not understand how to build rank and file confidence. Some argued for 'keeping your powder dry' for the pay campaign. Others for sectional or selective action. But none understood that you don't build by waiting, but by fighting, and if people are fighting then you push for all out support.

Of course, when it came to the pay campaign, people had already suffered defeat. The resulting demoralisation showed itself in the ballot on pay, when a fight was overwhelmingly rejected.

The recent strike at Hackney dole office shows that in certain areas, at certain times there will be a minority who are ready to fight. It also shows that sometimes that minority can win. But they can only win if the work is put in on the ground over a long period of time. □

Prologue to an upturn

The recent crop of strikes, at Halewood, Tilbury, Timex and Cowley have shown a small shift in the industrial climate. What has led to these strikes, and how should socialists relate to them? We reprint a speech by **Tony Cliff** to the National Committee of the SWP which answers these questions.

A group of strikes—Cowley, Halewood, Timex, Tilbury—came together in many ways different from those before. When we saw workers going on a four week strike over the sacking of Paul Kelly for allegedly bending a bracket costing 86p, with the loss of 19,000 cars worth £100 million, we knew there was something different happening. The same was true of a four and a half week strike over washing up time of six minutes.

We have to explain the common features of these strikes. They were not the upturn itself—more the prologue to the upturn. Two kinds of strike were involved, not always separate. The first relates to an upturn in the economy of the enterprise or plant; the second has to do with workers becoming immune to the level of unemployment.

Let us start with the first. We have to remember that even in the terrible downturn of the 1930's there was growth in particular industries. The aircraft industry expanded massively—the number of aircraft workers rose from 17,600 in 1930 to 29,100 in 1935, to 60,000 in 1936 and 120,000 in 1938, though the total number of engineers remained constant. The consequence was a bitter explosion of strikes in the aircraft industry.

When we turn to the present, we can see a similar pattern of growth producing conflict. At Cowley in November 1982, Alan Thornett was sacked after 20 years as a shop steward. It was clearly a frame-up of a very good steward. Yet there was a vote of ten to one against supporting him. But in April this

year a strike over six minutes' washing-up time lasted six weeks. What happened in between?

The extra employment of some 1,400 workers followed investment of £250 million, and without the success of the new Maestro, there would not have been a rebirth of confidence among the workers. The same applies to Halewood. With hire purchase restrictions lifted on cars, a significant expansion in demand took place. The Escort, produced in Halewood, is among the top sellers in the country. The explosion over Paul Kelly's sacking was workers saying 'we want our share'.

With the strike at Tilbury we saw something similar. Containerisation cut the labour force by an enormous amount. In 1947 there were 80,000 registered dockers in the country. In 1972, 42,000. At present, only 15,000. The Catherine, Surrey and India docks all closed. The Royal Docks smelt of death over many years. The few hundred who went from the Royals to Tilbury were astonished by the magnificent machinery, by the port being full of ships. Here was something to bite into, a feeling that despite the general downturn things were on the up.

Less well known are a series of strikes following investment made a few months before. At GEC Hitachi, South Wales, 1200 mainly women workers had accepted a wage freeze in April 1982. In October 1982 with the introduction of new models workers were ready to put the boot in and went on

strike. At Halewood and Ackroyd, Leeds, new investment and new machinery meant 300 workers on strike for six weeks. At Bonar Long, in Dundee, 400 workers came out for two weeks after £2½ million investment. A massive order book at Yarrow shipyards lay behind a week-long strike against the blacklisting of a shop steward. At GKN Telford, the labour force declined from 4,000 to 1,800. There was short time working, strikes were non-existent. Then with overtime working, the immediate reaction was that it was time to fight.

In the new Selby coalfield in South Yorkshire there have been overtime bans and continuous delays in production at the £1,000 million development and miners have refused to accept the performance standards suggested by the NCB.

Again, at Firth Derihon Sheffield 80 workers were out for over eight weeks—and won. Management already had four volunteers for redundancy—all they wanted was another five.

The recent South Yorkshire strike of steel craftsmen was a combination of the two types of strike. On the one hand, it was a profitable part of the industry, with the possibility of privatisation. On the other, there were only some 80 to 90 compulsory redundancies involved—thousands of jobs had already gone.

What we can conclude from all this is that a small economic upturn in specific enter-



prises can give a massive boost to the level of struggle.

The second kind of strike was the strike of desperation. Miners beating up a national coal board official is a reflection of just such a feeling. It didn't happen in 1972 because then miners had a feeling of confidence in their own strength. Now, some significant groups of workers are beginning to say 'enough is enough'.

One expression of this feeling could be seen with Timex. Since January management had wanted 1,900 redundancies. They had 1,703 volunteers—the other 197 redundancies were to be compulsory. But the workers said 'enough is enough'.

The same goes for Albion, Glasgow; over the last couple of years a thousand jobs have gone. The strike was over 146 jobs. Albion was one of the few Leyland vehicle plants not to become involved in the five week strike which began in January 1982, a strike against the sacking of 4,000 workers of the Leyland vehicles workforce.

Nobody should think that the question of voluntary redundancies disappears. The Port of London Authority wanted 300 redundancies—they had 900 volunteers. At Halewood, management wanted 1,400—the last reports indicated 1,700 volunteers.

But in all these strikes, we have seen groups of workers who have grown immune to the threat of unemployment, exploding in complete bitterness.

Slumps and booms— capitalism's pulse

Why were these strikes important? Because they pre-figure what might happen under an economic upturn. And that will happen because slumps and booms are the heartbeat of capitalism, even of ageing capitalism, when the heartbeat is less regular. Over the next year unemployment will continue to rise, but less speedily. In specific industries, employment will increase.

What we now have to understand is how these strikes were fought. For example, in Cowley, who led the strike? What is interesting is that the rank and file fought—while the union officials controlled. The shop stewards played only a very small role. David Buckle, the T&G official, was the crucial person, not Bobby Fryer, the convenor.

This would not have been the case ten years ago. Even the press noticed that this was not a traditional strike, led by shop steward 'troublemakers'. Why the domination by the union officials? The truth is that the deterioration of the power of the shop stewards has been underestimated, even by us. The reason is the bureaucratisation of the negotiating top table.

According to Professor Clegg, in 1978 there were 10,000 full time shop stewards (more than the total number of union officials). There were also a massive number of senior stewards with a lot of facility time. So, while only 11.7 percent of manufacturing industry had full time convenors, another 74



percent had senior stewards not necessarily with full facility time of 100 percent, but with one or two days off per week.

In 1978 at Cowley, there were two full time convenors (one T&G, the other AUEW), seven fulltime deputy convenors (T&G), five fulltime deputy convenors (AUEW). That's 14 out of a workforce of some 4,000. In addition there were 80 senior stewards, not fulltime. Quite rightly one expert in industrial relations could write 'fulltime stewards have to a large extent come into being through management initiative.'

Since then, their role in the factory has declined. Once these fulltimers had done their job in response to the Edwardes plan, and weakened shop organisation, management was able to turn on them and push the majority back to work. Out of the 14 mentioned earlier, there are now only two fulltimers. Being out of touch with their members, they had no power to resist the management offensive.

The same lack of contact could be seen at Tilbury. The only SWP member on the negotiating top table of 15 was consistently in a minority of one. Yet when it came to putting compromises to the mass meetings, they were constantly rejected by huge majorities. Why were these shop stewards out of touch? Simply because they no longer represented a section. By being responsible to everybody, they were responsible to nobody.

Another factor weakening the power of the shop steward has been the growth of the check-off system of paying union dues. Back in 1970 this was only widespread in the electrical power industry and the railways. Now 73 percent of trade unionists in manufacturing industry pay through check-off. In the old days the first duty of the steward was to collect the dues. If that is not done, there is

practically no relationship between a steward and his members.

The impact of this weakening of shop organisation has been twofold. First, we tend to think of shop stewards as organisers of struggle. But if we check carefully we can see that they also act as firemen, putting out disputes. A frequent boast from stewards is that they have solved more strikes than led them. It was this aspect that made one industrial relations expert say:

'Full time stewards to a large extent came into being through management initiative... For the most part the steward is viewed by others, and views himself, as an accepted, reasonable, and even moderating influence, more of a lubricant than an irritant.'

The shop steward's role has weakened

Even when capitalism was expanding (in the 1950s and early 1960s) the shop stewards had this double role. Now, with the economic crisis, this double role is greatly weakened. They are often neither strong enough to lead strikes nor able to act as firemen. Management insults them. So strikes break out completely spontaneously, without being led.

So if the impact of weakened shop organisation is to bypass the shop stewards, the second point is that it strengthens the role of the trade union leadership.

The unions have not been decimated by the crisis. There is no analogy with the 1920s and 1930s on this point. For example, in 1920, 45 percent of workers were in unions, by 1932 only 23 percent. There was a collapse in membership from eight million to four million. Given that unemployment at its

height did not rise much above three million, many must have become non-unionised without being unemployed.

Compare that with today. Unemployment has risen to four million. In 1979, 55 percent of workers were unionised; in late 1981, 52 percent. So the proportion remains much the same, with only a slight decline. It is nothing like the 30s.

So the union organisation still exists. It is the shop organisation which is so weak. That means that workers have to huddle with the union bureaucrats. In the absence of a strong shop floor organisation, workers' spon-

'Whether from inside or outside the workplace, for us it is the workplace which is central in the struggle for socialism. The creation of a network of militant stewards is central for building in industry. It is also central to overcoming the isolation of individual stewards who, if they are left isolated are forced to subordinate themselves to the full-time official'

taneous struggle will get leadership from people like David Buckle or Moss Evans.

What we have to understand is the role of the trade union bureaucracy under such conditions. In an upturn, workers wonder what more they can get. So the emphasis is on the specific and the sectional. For example, when London engineering stewards met in the 1960s they would compare factories to see which got more. The trade union bureaucracy would provide a national wage level which independent shop floor organisation would then try and improve on.

Under conditions of retreat, exactly the opposite is the case. The national wage agreement is the minimum. People are frightened that wages will sink beneath the floor.

As one expert on industrial relations puts it:

'The more decentralised the bargaining system, the faster wages are likely to move in whatever direction they are moving anyway.'

Hence in the 1950s and 60s workers paid much less heed to national wage agreements than they had done in the 20s and 30s and in the depression of recent years.

What management would love at present is plant negotiations without reference to national agreements. As far as they are concerned the wages' picture is much messier than it was three to four years ago, and this is where they would like a breakthrough. In response, therefore, workers are forced to

look to the trade union bureaucracy as protection against the cold.

Finally, on the nature of the bureaucracy, we have to recognise that they are not a monolith. The trade union bureaucracy is under the pressure of workers on the one hand, and under the pressure of employers and the state on the other.

So it vacillates. But different layers do so differently. When you move from Moss Evans to David Buckle (both in the T&G), you find that Moss Evans vacillates much less than David Buckle. Why? Because Moss Evans is not insulted on a regular basis as



David Buckle is by the Cowley management and is under less direct pressure from workers.

That means there are splits within the bureaucracy. Of course, we have no delusions that sections of the bureaucracy can lead us to the revolution. But the splits do open the door to intervention.

We must build the steward's organisation

The key to intervention is rebuilding shop organisation. Now it is true that the change to measured day work shifted the balance from shop stewards to the national level (that applies in the mines, the docks and the car industry). And it is also true that if you don't negotiate by the piece it is much more difficult for stewards to bite into anything.

But it would be a terrible mistake to assume that you can't have workers' control, or extension of control, or mutuality, under any other system. (Mutuality, to put it simply, is where management has no right to decide any change without a workers' representative agreeing to the change). You can have it under measured day work.

We shouldn't idealise piece work. Marx, for example, attacked it as a vicious, horrible form of exploitation. Workers eventually learnt how to bend the piece rate system; there's no reason why they shouldn't learn to bend the measured day work system.

The best instance is the Flint strike of 1937, when 150,000 workers took on

General Motors. Their demand was abolition of piece work and union participation in regulating the pace of the conveyor belt.

Two examples in my book *The Employers' Offensive* (1970) show how it is possible to control the speed of the belt.

The first comes from the foundry at Dagenham, where one belt went much slower than another because a good steward was in charge. The second comes from a glass factory. Because the management insisted on fixing the speed of the belt, the quality control worker simply inspected so

few glasses that the rest were smashed as sub-standard. In the end, management were compelled to slow the speed of the belt. Again, it was a question of good shop steward organisation. Workers who have learnt over a long period of time how to bend piece rates, do find and will continue to find, ways to control measured day work.

But the change from piece rates to measured day work hit stewards' organisation very hard. If you look at the docks and engineering, for example, you can see that stewards' organisation gained its strength from the fights around the piece rate and around bonuses. Once measured day work was introduced things changed.

You can see the effects in many places, but to take just one, ten years ago the quarterly AUEW shop stewards' meetings in Beaver Hall attracted between 200 and 300 stewards. Now the attendance is around 25.

But the piece rate is gone in many industries and we have to look at the situation as it is now, with measured day work.

The last point to note about measured day work is that when the explosion comes it will be on a much bigger scale. Take the mines. After 1966 there was no more piece rate working and the number of strikes collapsed. But then there was the upsurge of 1972 and 1974. Compare, too, the strike pattern in Leyland and Ford. Until the introduction of measured day work at Leyland, there were always lots of little disputes. Ford, on the other hand, has had measured day work

since the 30s, with few strikes, but these strikes have always been on a massive scale.

Finally, how do we go about building the shop stewards' organisation? The first point to note is that by definition every new beginning of workers' struggle starts from new areas. Take the history of the British labour movement. In 1880 the big expansion in the trade unions came with the dockers, people who had no tradition of organising. In 1930, the new impetus came from another section, the aeroplane industry.

The second point to note is that it is usually new people who lead these struggles. This is clear from the three major American strikes of 1934: the Toledo auto component workers, the Minneapolis truck drivers, and the San Francisco longshoremen.

For evidence of the newness of these people, take the case of the teamsters' leader, Farrell Dobbs himself. In 1932, he admitted he voted Republican. At Toledo, the leader A J Mustie, was a paid peddler of religion, a minister!

Again, if we take Minneapolis, we can see how things started from virtually nothing. Originally there were 70 teamsters in the union, and a tiny group, 30 to 40, of Trotsky's followers. But in a matter of weeks, together they had organised 7,000 into the union, which then grew into a strike involving between 40,000 and 50,000 in the whole city.

We can also see something else. It was a matter of small groups intervening from the outside. The editor of the teamsters' daily strike paper, *The Agitator* was Max Shachtman. He never drove a lorry in his life.

The same phenomenon could be seen in Britain, though on a smaller scale, and less dramatically because the unions were already well-established and had greater weight.

According to Richard Croucher, author of *Engineers at War*, the most important strike in the 30s was that of the engineering apprentices of 1937. Starting in Scotland, it spread to Manchester, Birmingham, Coventry and eventually London. In Glasgow and the west of Scotland, 150,000 adult workers came out on strike to support the apprentices.

As far as new rank and file initiatives were concerned, again we have to note youth to the fore. *The Propellor* (which soon became *The New Propellor*) came out of the Hawker aircraft dispute of 1935 and turned into the organ of the aircraft shop stewards' national council. It was edited by a young man of 25.

At Siemens electrical engineering plant, the biggest in the south east, the creation of an effective shop stewards' organisation was due largely to the imaginative efforts of another young CPer in his mid-twenties. The rank and file leaders writes Charles Welford:

'In the late twenties or early thirties had already accumulated a great deal of experience within the labour movement.'

What Croucher says of the apprentices' strike has a general application:

'It shows that experience in industrial matters is often less important than enthusiasm and determination.'

But the key is still politics. The CP led

many of these strikes but because of their popular frontism they led the strikes to nothing. Nor is technical expertise any substitute. Shachtman, the editor of the Teamsters' strike paper, probably knew little about the teamsters' rate of pay. You can have the cleverest negotiators in the world, but that counts for nothing if you cannot mobilise people. Similarly, the editor of the London busmen's rank and file paper *The Platform* for two decades was George Renshaw, who never worked on the buses.

This emphasis on politics is very important for us in the here and now. For the majority of us a strike comes as an external event. This is true for the series of strikes we have recently witnessed (Cowley, Tilbury, Timex, etc) even where we have a couple of members working inside.



'In the absence of a strong shop floor organisation, workers' struggle will get leadership from people like David Buckle (above) or Moss Evans'

What politics means can best be illustrated by the Tilbury dispute. The fact that the SWP raised incomparably more money than either the Labour Party or the Communist Party was important, less for whether it would stop the strike being lost than whether it would help locate the ones or twos in each workplace prepared to identify with the dockers. And that is an extremely political issue. It was easy to support the hospital workers because everybody loves hospital workers. But dockers are seen as lazy and overpaid.

The other important political aspect has to do with leadership in the workplace. And here we meet the law of uneven development. If the level of class consciousness were even we would need no insurrection. The Russian revolution did not take place all in one go. It started with a few thousand in Petrograd, with the majority of the workers in the city watching them favourably. Success there then gave confidence to the rising a few days later in Moscow. Nevertheless, the loss of life was much greater. And so the process continued throughout the whole country.

When we apply this law to the workplace we can see the same thing. In locating the ones and twos by collecting money for strikes, we are locating the ones and twos who are prepared to fight and who are prepared to identify with our politics. It is out of such small scale activities that a leadership is built for the struggles of the future. And the issues around which the struggle takes off can be quite small to begin with, health and safety, overtime distribution, manning and deployment, and the like.

We do not create that relationship by simply presenting ourselves as the optimists expecting the upturn. We did not collect money for the dockers on that basis. What we are out to show at present is that the *method* of collecting money is exactly the same method of leading a strike or an insurrection.

We have to isolate the scabs and the cowards and pull the vacillating elements behind the militants and fighters. But to do that you have to start with the minority, and build support among wider and wider layers. The method is the same whether it's a strike or an insurrection. You can only start with the few that are prepared to fight.

That is the method we have to understand about building a leadership. The point is that workers will never be without a leadership. That can be a union bureaucracy leadership, a reformist leadership, or a revolutionary leadership. Everybody has political ideas in their heads, and in the absence of revolutionary ideas, they will be reformist ones.

We have to transform the SWP into a party of leaders. Lenin stated that the revolutionary party has no rank and file, only leaders. What is meant by that is that we don't simply understand the perspective but carry it out. In talking about relating to the minority prepared to fight, no one can afford to be passive. Every member must be actively involved.

Whether from inside or outside the workplace, for us it is the *workplace* which is central in the struggle for socialism. The creation of a network of militant stewards is central for building in industry. It is also central to overcoming the isolation of individual shop stewards, who, if they are left isolated are forced to subordinate themselves to the fulltime official.

In the cold world of the downturn the industrial militant cannot survive, cannot keep his or her spirit unless they are inspired by socialist ideas and are part of a community of militants. Pure industrial militancy will lead to either total resignation and apathy, or total co-option into the trade union bureaucracy.

We are faced with the twin dangers of passivity and co-option into the trade union bureaucracy. This means that it is no longer sufficient to find a small issue and build from there. The only way militants can avoid the pitfalls is if they take a much wider political view. Overcoming the isolation of individual militants will not happen automatically—it will only happen if they understand the politics of the situation.

Marx, Engels and the vote

We have just seen bourgeois democracy in action. Some people claim that Marx had illusions in what could be achieved through parliaments. **Duncan Hallas sets the record straight.**

'Universal suffrage is thus the gauge of the maturity of the working class. It cannot and never will be anything more in the modern state; but that is enough.'

The key idea of this well known 1884 statement by Engels, which may have been written with the German Social Democratic Party in mind, is that parliamentary elections, in and of themselves, are never of decisive importance in the class struggle.

There is a myth, put about by some

academic Marxologists, that as young men Marx and Engels were revolutionaries but, with advancing age and ripening experience, they came to see the virtues of electoral politics.

Actually the political evaluation, although always in the revolutionary camp, was rather in the opposite direction. In 1852 Marx wrote, concerning the Chartists

'But universal suffrage is the equivalent of political power for the working class of England, where the proletariat forms the large majority of the population, where, in a long though underground civil war, it has gained a clear consciousness of its position as a class and where even the rural districts know no longer any peasants, but only landlords, industrial capitalists (farmers) and hired labourers. The carrying of universal suffrage in England would, therefore be a far more

socialistic measure than anything which has been honoured with that name on the continent. Its inevitable result, here is the *political supremacy of the working class.*' (emphasis in original)

The plain meaning of Marx's words is that, in a 'constitutional' state—what is now erroneously called a democracy, a working class majority in the legislature, backed by a majority of the population, can bring about a real transfer of power, *without* the destruction of the existing state machine.

That view is compatible with the statement of the *Communist Manifesto*, written four and a half years earlier,

'that the first step in the revolution by the working class, is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class, to win the battle of democracy.'

There can be no reasonable doubt that this was indeed Marx's position at the time. Twenty years later, in a speech at Amsterdam, he said:

'We know that heed must be paid to the institutions, customs and traditions of the various countries, and we do not deny that there are countries, such as America and England and if I was familiar with its institutions, I might include Holland, where the workers may attain their goal by peaceful means. That being the case, we must recognise that in most continental countries the lever of revolution will have to be force; a resort to force will be necessary one day in order to set up the rule of labour.'

'Peaceful means' meant electoral means to Marx.

The experience of the Paris Commune of 1871 changed the attitude of Marx and Engels quite fundamentally. Marx had already, in 1852, concluded 'the next attempt of the French revolution will be no longer, as before, to transfer the bureaucratic-military machine from one hand to another but to *smash* it, and this is the preliminary condition for every real people's revolution on the Continent.'

Now this was generalised. Not only is the bureaucratic-military machine an obstacle, it is inherently unusable by the working class.

'One thing especially was proved by the Commune, viz, that the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes.'

says the new 1872 preface which Marx and Engels wrote for the *Communist Manifesto*.

The famous picture of the Commune-state painted by Marx in *The Civil War in France*, the suppression of the standing army, the armed people, all officials paid the average worker's wage, all important ones elected and subject to recall at any time, represents the considered view of Marx and Engels, in their later years, of the *essential* instrument for the transition to socialism. All subsequent genuine Marxism is anti-statist.

It is only necessary to cite Engels' 1891 introduction to *The Civil War in France*, written for the twentieth anniversary of the Commune.

'In reality, however, the state is nothing but a machine for the oppression of one

BOOKMARX CLUB

Spring Quarter

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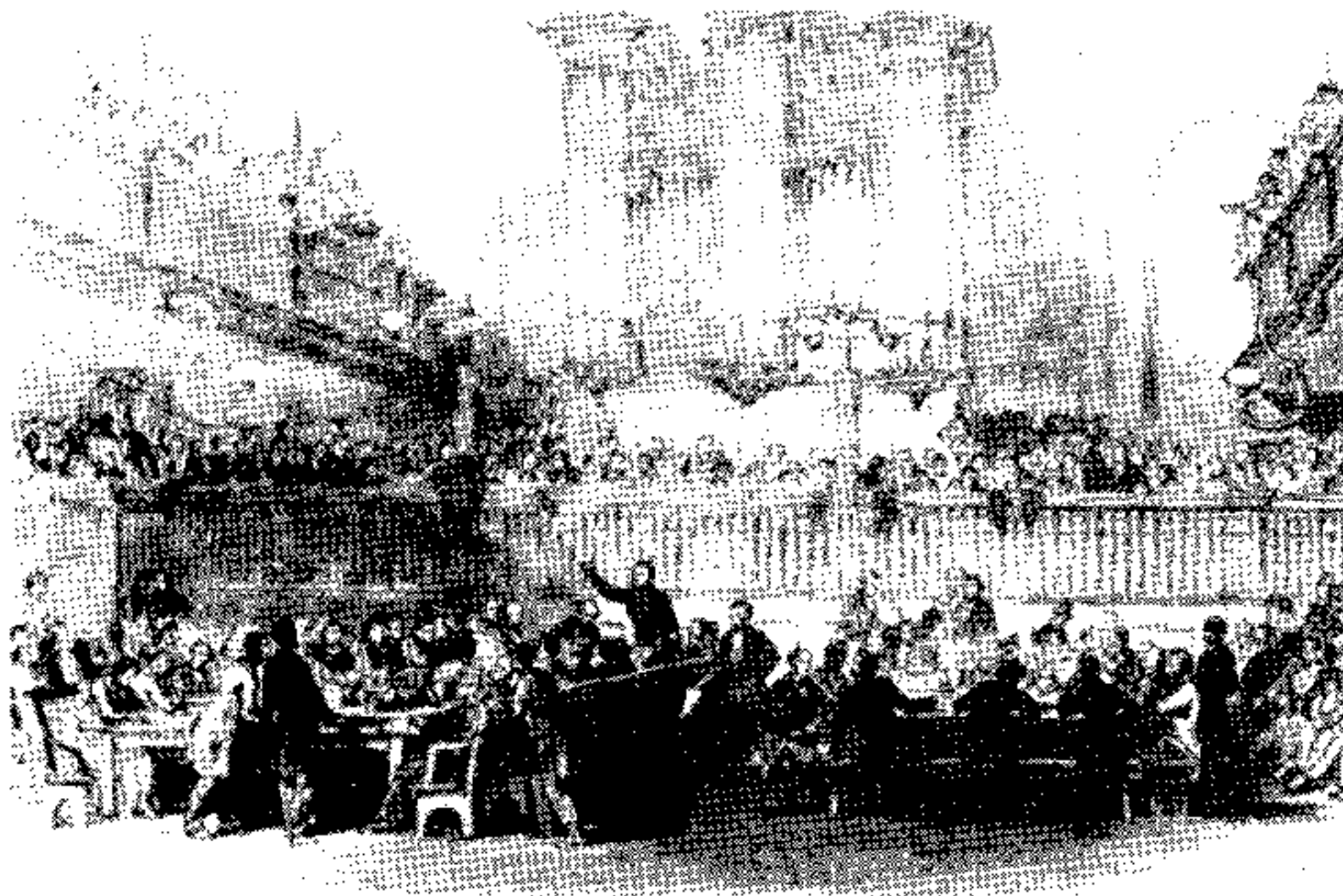
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The Chartist Convention, London 1848

class by another, and indeed in the democratic republic no less than in the monarchy; and at best an evil inherited by the proletariat after its victorious struggle for class supremacy, whose worst sides the victorious proletariat, just like the Commune, cannot avoid having to lop off at once as much as possible until such time as a generation raised in new, free social conditions is able to throw the entire lumber of the state on the scrap heap... Look at the Paris Commune. That was the Dictatorship of the Proletariat.'

In this context, Engels' remark that universal suffrage *within the framework of the bourgeois state* 'cannot and never will be' more than a 'gauge of the maturity of the working class' becomes perfectly clear.

Thus, the European socialist parties of the next generation, insofar as they accepted the Marxist tradition—as they mostly did, at least nominally—inherited a dual attitude to electoral contests. On the one hand, they contested elections within the framework of bourgeois legality so far as they were allowed to. On the other hand they were, in theory, committed to the socialist revolution.

The rise of reformism

By 1912 the German Social-Democratic Party was a legal mass organisation which, that year, won 34 percent of the total poll in the *Reichstag* elections and returned 110 deputies. Its Austro-Hungarian counterpart had 82 deputies. The French party elected 102 in the spring of 1914. The Italian party returned 78 in 1913.

Theoretically, and to some extent even in practice, these deputies were committed to intransigent opposition, not merely to the government but to official society. Grouped in the Second International, the European socialist parties had rejected participation in bourgeois government and also collaboration with 'progressive' bourgeois parties.

Of course, to a great degree, this apparent virtue was the result of lack of serious temptation. By and large, bourgeois governments did not want socialist participation in office prior to 1914.

When the great crisis came in August 1914 most of the socialist parties in the main belligerent countries collapsed into support for 'their own' governments and 'their own' states; states that were considerably more militarised and bureaucratised than the French state of the seventies which Marx had called 'a monstrous parasitic growth.' In short, they abandoned the struggle for socialism.

It would be a mistake, however, to attribute this simply to electoralism. Certainly, the parliamentarians and municipal councillors became, as a group, a conservatising influence, as they were to a degree 'assimilated' into the milieu of official bourgeois politics. But it is easy to overestimate this effect by seeing it in the light of later events.

More fundamental factors were at work. For Lenin, the explanation was the development of a labour aristocracy:

'the comparatively cultured and peaceful life of a stratum of privileged working men "bourgeoisified" them, gave them crumbs from the table of their national capitalists.'

Again, it is easy to exaggerate this factor. As a matter of fact, the anti-war movements of 1916-18 in many cases drew substantial support from skilled and highly paid workers, most notably in Germany.

Something else was happening in the decades before 1914. The growth of relatively stable *mass* working class organisations gave rise to a labour bureaucracy. A host of functionaries in the unions, the parties, the co-operatives—a much broader layer than the parliamentary deputies. The *core* of this layer, the trade union officialdom, is by the very nature of its function committed to negotiation and compromise within the framework of capitalism and to preserving the often very considerable assets of its organisations—by 1914 the German SPD and its associated unions owned property worth the then very considerable sum of 90 million marks. The pressure of the bureaucracy, dominant in the big parties, was and is, for legality at all costs.

Thus Kautsky, the theoretician of the

SPD, proclaimed that it was 'a revolutionary party but not a *revolution-making* party'. The thesis was that the party confined itself to legal political work, and the revolution would happen anyway as a result of 'great historic forces'. But what was the nature of this legal activity? Not supporting workers in struggle in the work places—that is for the unions. Therefore elections become *central*, not as a 'gauge of the maturity of the working class', but as a prime end.

Not surprisingly, by 1918, Kautsky had come to the position that: 'By the dictatorship of the proletariat we can mean nothing other than the rule of the proletariat on the basis of democracy,' i.e. on the basis of the existing military-bureaucratic state. Only the fact that his intellectual capital had been invested in 'Marxism' prevented him from disavowing the whole concept outright. His successors, of course, did precisely that. Electoral activity then came to mean seeking to win a parliamentary majority to administer capitalism, of course more 'humanely', 'efficiently' or whatever.

'Democracy' became the flag under which the social-democrats fought against workers' power, against socialism. It still is. Yet we are *for* democracy. The working class cannot possibly rule on any other basis. How is the contradiction resolved?

Our Tradition

The Communist International

The First Congress of the Communist International declared:

'Democracy assumed different forms and was applied in different degrees in the ancient republics of Greece, the medieval cities and the advanced capitalist countries. It would be sheer nonsense to think that the most profound revolution in history, the first case in the history of the world of power being transferred from the exploiting minority to the exploited majority, could take place within the time-worn framework of the old, bourgeois parliamentary democracy, without drastic changes, without the creation of new forms of democracy, new institutions that embody the new conditions for applying democracy.'

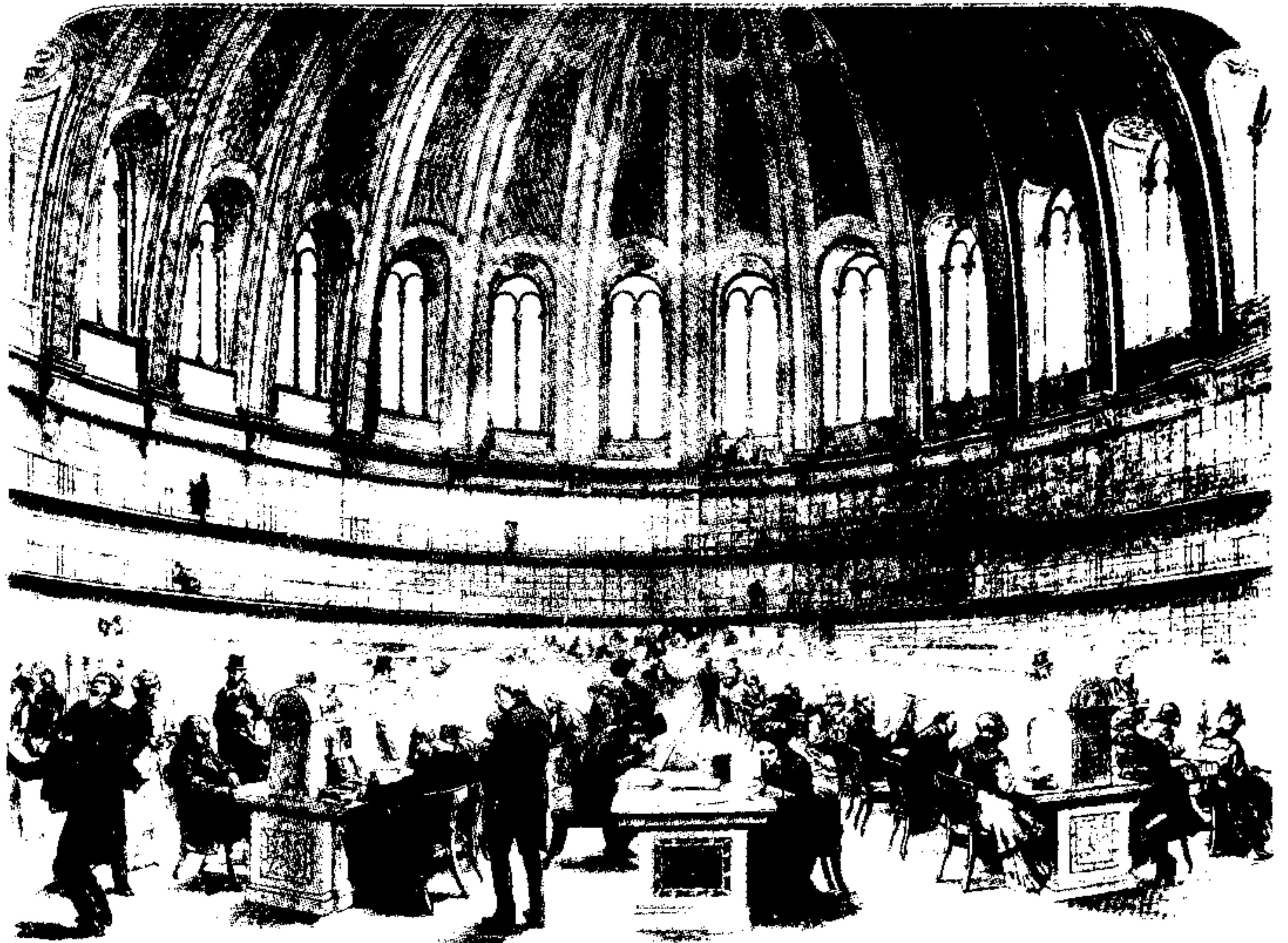
That is our position. The 'new forms' can only be organs of direct working class rule.

We are for the defence of bourgeois democracy—more precisely the defence of democratic rights against attacks from the right.

We are, in principle, in favour of electoral activity but only as a subordinate form of activity, only as an auxiliary to direct working class action, never as an end in itself.

We are for workers' power on the basis of the direct rule of working class organisations, whatever specific form this may take. This involves far, far *more* elections but on a new basis.

'The abolition of state power is the goal of all socialists, including and above all Marx' declared the resolution cited above. 'Unless this goal is reached, true democracy, that is equality and freedom is not attainable.' And the road to the abolition of state power is the road of revolution and the commune-state, not the road of reformist electoralism.



The reading room of the British museum, where Marx worked on 'Capital'

The bleak years of the 1850s

For two to three years the SWP was over-optimistic and misjudged the political climate. It is slightly reassuring to learn that we share this error with Marx in his understanding of the failures of the 1848 revolutions. Noel Halifax shows it is only after he studied the 1848 revolution that Marx fully developed his analysis of society.

With hindsight 1848 can be seen as a turning point in European history, the beginning of a protracted lull in class struggle, not fully broken till 1871 with the Paris Commune. The frantic times of the early 19th century gave way to a period of capitalist expansion and comparative calm. But to the revolutionaries of 1848 this was far from being obvious. To them, including Marx, the failure of 1848 was a minor setback to be followed by a more thorough and profound social upheaval. The Communist League (now centred in London) issued an address in

August 1850 to its groups in Germany written by Marx himself and optimistic in the extreme, with the call for a separate workers' party, for 'permanent revolution' and the soon-to-be-experienced second revolution.

As Norah Carlin pointed out last month, Marx's *Address to the Communist League* contains all the ideas that we now associate with Lenin and Trotsky, the need for an independent workers' party and world-wide permanent revolution. But it was the fate of Marx to spend a major part of his working life in a period of downturn in the class struggle. The ideas in the *Address* and his later writings on the Paris Commune had to wait till after his death to be developed, for they did not correspond to the middle of the 19th century, a period of capitalist expansion and absence of cataclysmic crisis and revolutions.

Marx arrived in London in August 1849, part of a flood of political refugees and exiled revolutionaries from Europe. The Communist League's central committee was now based in London where it plotted and awaited further developments on the Continent. The *Address* is one of the League's products and reactions to events in Germany.

Marx and Engels settled down to appraise the situation and look anew at the prospects for revolution. In particular Marx started his economic studies at the British Museum.

From late 1850 to 1851 Marx came to realise that major revolutionary upheavals in the immediate future were unlikely. His studies of economics led him to the conclusion that there would not be an economic crisis for some years to come, and without an economic crisis a revolution was unlikely. It also made Marx realise the importance of England, then the centre of capitalism, to any potential world revolution.

As he wrote in *The Class Struggle in France*:

'With the exception of only a few chapters every more important part of the annals of the revolution from 1848 to 1849 carries the heading: Defeat of the revolution! ... While ... the crisis first produces revolutions on the Continent, the foundation for these is, nevertheless always laid in England. Violent outbreaks must naturally occur rather in the extremities of the bourgeois body than in its heart, since the possibility of adjustment is greater here than there ... With general prosperity, in which the

productive forces of bourgeois society develop as luxuriantly as is at all possible within bourgeois relationships there can be no talk of a real revolution ... A new revolution is only in consequence of a new crisis, but it is just as certain as is the coming of the crisis itself.'

His studies of France in *The Class Struggle in France* and his brilliant *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* saw Marx's realisation that reaction was well-entrenched. The 18th Brumaire describes the class nature of the then new regime of Louis Napoleon and analyses the state, but it is also a description of the consolidation of reaction.

Marx also came to fully realise the limits of peasant consciousness and how, as a class they are incapable of leading the struggle for socialism. For it was the peasantry which was the class basis of Louis Napoleon's and reaction's rule.

Role of workers

The very mode of production separates the peasant from each other, and from the rest of society and other classes, so that they form a class. Yet:

'The identity of their interests begets no community, no national bond, and no political organisation among them, they do not form a class. They are consequently incapable of enforcing their class interests in their own name ... They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented. Their representative must at the same time appear as their master as an authority over them, as an unlimited government power that protects them against other classes and sends rain and sunshine from above. The political influence of the small-holding peasant, therefore, finds its final expression in the executive power subordinating society to itself. That is in a hierarchical dictatorship such as that of Louis Napoleon.'

Having come to fully realise the revolutionary role of workers and the downturn Marx had the task of convincing the Communist League of the new perspectives, of the need for education and slow progress towards winning over workers to the cause of revolutionary socialism. Within the League's central committee this view was far from being accepted. In particular Willich and Schapper opposed it, and the resulting argument and faction fight was to cost Marx many months of rows and irritation.

At the very best of times it is difficult to convince revolutionaries who have experienced mass struggle of the realities of a new epoch, as the history of the children of '68 shows only too well. So Marx was very much fighting against the stream in his call for slow work and the unlikelihood of another 1848. The exiles in London were now cut off from the struggle abroad. They were also scornful of the local radicals who had 'failed to have their own 1848' and distanced themselves from the political scene in England. So the argument became increasingly bitter.

Against Marx, Willich and Schapper appealed to the romantic dreams of the

exiled revolutionaries, with grandiose calls to revolution and to arms. Instead of gradual work to win over the masses they proposed a coup to trigger off the revolution and so continue the work of 1848. In fact their plans and plots were in the mould of Blanqui, to by-pass the masses when they seemed so conservative. As Marx argued in September 1850:

'Our party can only gain power when the situation allows it to put its own measures into practice. Blanqui is the best instance of what happens when you come to power prematurely.'

That is, when you come to power without the support and backing of the working class.

Marx stressed the need to win over the workers towards a social revolution, a prospect that appeared long, slow and unexciting. Willich and Schapper wanted a coup to trigger the revolution off, apparently quick and more 'revolutionary'. It was a short-cut to getting socialism, implicitly elitist and reflecting the exiles' own isolation from mass struggle. By September 1850 the split had become so great that they left the Communist League which as a result became an empty and defunct body. By 1852 the League was dead and Marx with relief left the rows and pointless bickering of the exiles' circles to study and to involve himself with the class struggle in England.

As Engels wrote to Marx of the political climate of the exile's clubs in February 1851:

'One can see more and more that exile is an institution in which everyone must necessarily become a fool, a donkey and a scurvy knave, unless he withdraws from it completely and contents himself with being an independent writer who doesn't bother his head in the least even about the so-called revolutionary party.'

So by 1852 both Marx and Engels found themselves cut off from the world of political clubs and direct involvement with the class struggle; and were correctly pessimistic about any short-term prospects for change. This was not a situation that either relished and indeed this plus the poverty that Marx lived through was the darkest and most depressing period of his life. Marx's reaction was twofold. One, to continue and expand his research into the working of capital (a subject to be dealt with later in this series). Second slowly and gradually to expand the contacts that Engels in particular had made

with the remnants of the Chartist movement (itself now defunct and in decline) and with the English trade unions.

Both Marx and Engels wrote for Chartist newspapers commenting on events and issues of the times; the oppression in Ireland, India, the arguments in parliament etc. One the *Red Republican* had published an English translation of the *Communist Manifesto* and continued to be an outlet for Marx. He and Engels also wrote for the then liberal *New York Tribune* and in England for the *Free Press*.

Marx looked for signs of a commercial crisis which he hoped would start off a period of political unrest and social upheaval. In 1857 a commercial crisis began of which Marx had great hopes, as he wrote to Engels in November 1857: 'Although I am in serious financial difficulties myself I have not felt so happy since 1849 as I do today in the face of this eruption.'

Not on the sidelines

The crisis of 1857 was followed by political unrest and the civil war in America which had deep and profound effects on the working class in England organising to stop the British government entering the war on the side of the South. And indeed the quiet days of the 50s had hidden the gradual growth of British trade unions freed from the anti-union Combination Acts in 1825. By the end of the 50s the new unions were moving out of purely economic struggles to fight for improvements in the general lot of workers and struggling towards the ideas of workers' power.

In 1862 a 'fraternal celebration' took place between representatives of English and French workers at the Great Exhibition. In 1860 a great meeting of workers was held against Palmerston's covert support of the South. In 1863 a mass meeting was held in support of the Polish uprising against Russian oppression. In all this Marx and Engels commented and advised, and not just from the side-lines. In 1864 the First Workers' International was founded with Marx at its head and the new English unions as members. The hard slog of the 50s had at last borne fruit, and the worst of the downturn was over. As the class struggle intensified Marx and Engels could again devote themselves to activity but this time at the head of an International.

'Socialism is a new society of freedom-or it is nothing.'



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Workers' resistance in Russia

The dramatic growth of Solidarity in Poland and the continued resistance to military rule has highlighted the potential of the Eastern European working class as a political force capable of challenging the system there. But in the Soviet Union itself it often seems that the working class remains cowed and passive and that the massive weight of repression is still sufficient to atomise it.

But the evidence is growing that the Russian working class does engage in conflict with the authorities and that in recent years there has also been a tendency for these conflicts to proliferate. The extent and scale of this should not be exaggerated. It is still small stuff compared to Poland but neither should the conflict be minimised. It is growing and there is no doubt that the leaders in the Kremlin recognise it as a serious headache which reduces their room for manoeuvre. It should also give heart to western socialists and encourage us to take up the question of Russian society more vigorously and redouble our efforts to raise the issue of defending Russian workers when they do move, within the western labour movement.

High labour turnover

The gut alienation of Russian workers has long been known but because of the way in which repression isolates people as individuals this alienation has usually found expression in individualised forms. The most widespread of these is simply quitting your job. The basic attitude of Russian workers is summed up in the Russian saying 'nazhmut — uidi' — 'if they put the pressure on — I quit'. The result is that Russian industry has one of the highest labour turnover rates in the world as each year hundreds of thousands of workers change their jobs to try to escape their circumstances.

But changing your job offers only a short-term solution since the exploitation and alienation experienced in the next one is likely to be just the same. For many workers a more permanent solution is found in drink. Vodka is what one dissident called 'The No 1 commodity'. The Russian population has one of the highest alcohol consumption rates in the world and the press constantly harps on both about the level of drunkenness in society at large and widespread drunkenness at work.

The press complains too about the extent of absenteeism and 'pilfering' but gives no figures of its extent. But the volume of complaint alone makes it clear that this too is a widespread reaction, a way of getting back at the world that controls and exploits you.

But the response of workers also takes forms which while not necessarily openly confronting the authorities subvert them through forms of action depending on mutual co-operation. The most widespread of these is the way in which workers individually and collectively try to fiddle their

Workers in Russia suffer low wages and speed-ups just like workers in the West. Mike Haynes shows how, given the chance, they use exactly the same methods of class warfare against their exploiters.

work norms on a massive scale.

Wages in the Soviet Union depend heavily on bonuses which are got when various set norms or production figures are exceeded. The official policy is based upon a constant productivity drive where norms are pushed up. Everywhere the posters scream down to workers variations on the theme 'Today's record — Tomorrow's norm!' As one worker graphically put it, 'What's happening is that they're squeezing more blood and sweat out of the worker — and they're paying him less.'

The obvious response of the workers is to try to hold down these norms by disguising the real potential of the productive process and putting pressure on their immediate bosses to accept this. The evidence from Soviet economists is that this happens on a significant scale. And, since it is the workers who must operate the process of production, the powers of the management to do anything about it are limited. The press even occasionally reports incidents where informers who have broken the unofficial code and 'grassed' about 'weak labour discipline' and 'inflated production figures' have been beaten up and even killed by their work-mates.

But this does not stop the pressure from above from being put on and the norms being arbitrarily changed upwards to overcome these forms of resistance. When this happens one response that is known to occur on a significant scale is the go-slow. Another is the so-called 'Italian strike' where the workers turn up at the factory but do no work at all.

A typical 'Italian strike' has been described in some detail by an emigre. It took place at a reinforced concrete factory in Moscow. Here new norms were suddenly introduced which slashed wages. The workers demanded that the old norms be restored and when they got no response for two days:

'The workers sat about in the shop doing nothing. The conveyor-belts moved emptily along. The shop foreman begged his men to get to work, threatening them with legal action, but they demanded to see the factory director. The director, terrified by the strike, was afraid to enter the shop. At one point, one of the strikers telephoned the local party committee and announced the strike. The local party secretary came straight to the factory with a promise to lower the norms and the conflict was over.'

However, it is when conflict breaks out

openly outside of the factory and threatens to spread that it becomes more serious for the regime. From the early 1930s to the early 1950s there are almost no examples known of strikes, demonstrations and riots by workers. The weight of repression and the pace of social change created such a high degree of atomisation that the only channels of resistance available were the ones we have already described. But since 1956 there has been increasing evidence of more open protests by workers, sometimes on a large scale.

Our information about this protest is limited since strikes are never reported in the Russian press though occasionally stories about outbreaks of 'hooliganism' or criticisms of 'insufficient party educational work' clearly relate to workers' protests. Most of the evidence has come from dissidents, emigres and western correspondents. On occasion, however, the regime's spokesmen will 'unofficially' admit that conflict is widespread. This happened, for instance, in 1979 when the British Communist Party's paper *Comment* reported on the visit of a delegation of journalists to the Soviet Union. Formally they had got nothing but the propaganda line but informally it had been suggested that reality was rather different. As a result, as one expert has put it,

'There is little doubt that information on only a small number of strikes that occur reaches the west.'

There is obviously an element of chance in just what information gets out — particularly as workers have less access to the normal networks of dissident contact. But despite the problems of interpretation that necessarily arise from these difficulties it does seem possible to come to some broad conclusions on the basis of a survey of the reported incidents. In particular what we see is a pattern of emerging conflict punctuated by sharp outbursts of more intense protest.

Whole towns rioting

In the last 25 years well over 100 incidents have been reported in the west. These range from relatively minor strikes lasting no more than a few hours to major riots involving whole towns which were only put down with considerable bloodshed after several days.

The first significant break in the pattern of apparent working class passivity came in the Khrushchev era. The death of Stalin had led to a gradual relaxation of some of the worst features of repression as well as a slow increase in the appallingly low standard of living. But most of the benefits were felt not by the working class but by the middle classes. The result was a number of major bursts of protest. At the same time policies of Russification also began to have an impact, linking working class issues with national issues in some of the constituent republics of the Soviet Union.

In the years between 1956 and 1964 some 30 strikes and riots are known to have taken



place. Many of the riots were the bloodiest that have occurred in recent Russian history. Of these it is the events in Novocherkassk in 1962 that are the best known. These seem to have imprinted themselves on the folk memory of Russian workers. In the mid seventies a Russian worker, who was later to emigrate, but was then working over 1,000 miles away from Novocherkassk, was told by his workmates that there was no point in protesting — 'if the whole town protests — they'll simply mow us down with machine guns as they did in Novocherkassk in 1962'.

What happened was that nationwide increases in food prices combined with local increases in work norms to cause a social explosion in the town. Striking workers demonstrated with their families and students and schoolchildren, but were met with troops and gunfire as a result of which it seems likely that a hundred or more may have died. But the events in Novocherkassk were only a part of far more general protests stimulated by the increase in food prices and they had been preceded by violent protests elsewhere.

Attacking police stations

In 1956 Tbilisi was in the hands of demonstrators for several hours. In the same year mass demonstrations took place in cities in Lithuania. In 1959 thousands of construction workers rioted in Temir Tau in Kazakhstan. Then in 1960 demonstrations against food shortages were reported in Kamerovo in Siberia. In 1961 a riot had led to the police station in Murom in Vladimir being attacked. Nor did unrest die down immediately after the repression in Novocherkassk. Strikes continued well into 1963 in a number of other cities.

It was only after the fall of Khrushchev in 1964 that there seems to have been a decline in activity. An important part of the reason for this was the attempt by the new leadership under Brezhnev to improve the image of the regime amongst the working class and to a lesser extent increase standards of living for ordinary workers.

But even in this period of apparent lull several major protests did occur connected particularly to the national question. In 1965 disturbances were reported in Erevan — the Armenian capital. In 1967 in Chimkent, an industrial city in Kazakhstan, major riots were reported. In the same year riots also occurred in Priuluk in the Ukraine and a serious strike took place in Kharkov. The next year, on Lenin's birthday, Crimean Tartars demonstrated in Chirchik in Uzbekistan and bread riots took place in Khorol near Vladivostok in the far east.

After 1969 reports of strikes once again became more frequent. Over 20 incidents were reported between 1969 and 1973. These included possible sympathy strikes with Polish workers in 1970-71, major nationalist riots in Kaunas in Lithuania in 1972 and major strikes and disorders in Dneprodzerzhinsk in the Ukraine in the same year.

The mid 1970s again saw a lull in reported incidents but towards the end of the 1970s the tempo of reports of strikes has increased

and particularly since 1980 there has been a crop of reports about a rash of strikes taking place in different parts of Russia — 17 in 1980-81 alone.

It is tempting to interpret this pattern in terms of three or four waves of protests — 1956 (perhaps), 1959-1963, 1969-1973 and 1979 to date. But whilst it may be true to see the events in 1959-63 and 69-73 in terms of waves the reports we have of more recent conflicts suggest that they reflect a new stage where an increased degree of open conflict will be a constant and endemic feature of the system.

One reflection of this is the way in which riots seem to have given way to strikes except in those instances where workers' demands link into national issues as they have done in recent years in Estonia and Lithuania. Most of these more recent strikes have been localised with limited demands and they should not be thought to constitute a mass movement in any sense. But the regime does not seem able to stop them occurring. Not only have they spread but in a number of instances strikes have recurred in the same or nearby towns suggesting that the demonstration effect of the actions of the authorities in repressing conflict is not long-lasting.

Pattern of strikes

It has been suggested that most open conflicts take place away from the Moscow/Leningrad region both because conditions are worse outside this area and because the authorities cannot allow conflict to be seen to take place in the geo-political heartland of Russia. But our survey of the reported protests suggests that the notion that strikes and riots take place on the 'periphery' needs some qualification. It is true that the larger number of strikes have taken place outside of the Moscow/Leningrad region but industry is also widely dispersed outside that region. To the extent that strikes and riots have followed this pattern they cannot be regarded as taking place on the 'periphery'. Some genuinely peripheral conflicts have taken place. The 1959 riots in Temir Tau for example were by workers involved in building a new industrial complex away from traditional centres. Similarly the regime was hardly likely to be rocked by the bread riots in the far east at Kherol. But the constant recurrence of conflict in the

Ukraine is another matter. In British terms this is more like a strike in South Wales than in Cornwall.

Moreover it is not true that no strikes take place in the Moscow/Leningrad region. In fact a small number have been recorded in Moscow and Leningrad themselves since 1956. These have been intermittent and small but they are indicative that even here the authorities cannot prevent open protest by workers taking place. If we then go further and map our reports of conflict it also appears that not only has it spread from a base in the Ukraine and the Caucasus in the early 1960s but in spreading it seems to have advanced nearer to the Moscow/Leningrad region.

'...the regime does not seem to be able to stop them occurring. Not only have they spread but strikes have recurred in the same or nearby towns'

Dramatically in 1979 bus drivers in Togliatti, the new centre of the Russian motor industry, walked out. They did so again in 1980 and this led to walk outs too by the car workers in the car plant producing the Russian version of the Fiat 124. At the same time workers in the Gorky car and truck plant also walked out, suggesting both links through time and between places.

Four immediate causes of conflict recur in the information we have. Concern over food supplies is a crucial issue that constantly seems to provoke more or less open protests around slogans of 'No food - no work!' Arbitrary increases in work norms also cause flashpoints of conflict. Housing issues seem to have been important in strikes — particularly those involving new construction sites. Police brutality too occurs on a surprising number of occasions. This is important because it suggests that workers are prepared to confront the authorities on occasion even if the consequences are potentially dangerous for them. One strike, for example, took place in Leningrad in January 1979 over the death of a worker who had been arrested by the local militia and subsequently died after being beaten up.

His workmates seem to have struck for one and a half days until the chief of the Leningrad militia came and promised that the militia members involved would be brought to justice. The strike then ended but the workers made a further pointed protest by ignoring management appeals and going in three coachloads to the funeral.

But it makes little sense to judge the basic grievances of workers in terms of the immediate causes of conflict. Just as in the west, strikes over wages, bonuses or even washing up time open up bigger issues and crystallise questions of alienation, exploitation and control. That these issues are never far below the surface in Russian conflicts is indicated by the 'flash-fire' character of many of the disputes. Once they get outside the factory and onto the streets they can suddenly be transformed into demonstrations which can mobilise thousands as they did in Novochoerkassk and other riots and strikes since.

The response of the authorities to these flash-fire conflicts is basically that of 'fire brigade actions' to damp down the possibility of the fire spreading. So long as things have not yet got out of hand the immediate policy is one of concessions followed by attempts to remove the 'troublemakers' or officially the 'hooligans' who instigated the conflict. We should have no illusions that they can be successful at this. In the relatively innocuous 'Italian strike' we referred to earlier we know from our source that those who had participated 'voluntarily' left their jobs sooner or later — no doubt with their labour books, which every Russian worker must carry, indicating their lack of 'labour discipline'.

Stays in mental hospitals

When the conflict is more open it is often not just a case of dismissal but of removal from the area, imprisonment and even stays in lunatic asylums — who but a lunatic would protest in the workers' paradise? It is this last act of repression that is perhaps most feared by workers and since their plight is usually unknown they have no possibility of getting out but to wait until they are 'cured'. But even so this has still not been sufficient to stop workers coming back for more.

The reason for this is that the 'fire brigade' actions of the state depend upon a surplus of goods being available to buy off discontent. But that surplus is steadily diminishing and the pressure for more productivity increasing. Thus any concessions can only be temporary and they cannot be general ones to the whole working class. Andropov recently went to great lengths in his speech on the anniversary of Marx's death to stress that every wage increase must be earned by workers.

It was this inability to make concessions that brought down the regime in Poland. When fires broke out on a massive scale the fire brigade was not up to the job. Russia is not in that state yet by any means. The fires are still small and there is still capacity left to deal with them, but it is diminishing.

Just how much is apparent from the problems encountered in the current five year



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plan. With monotonous regularity commentators on Russia say every year that the current performance and plan is the worst ever. But this is exactly what has happened. Today Russia is growing — even according to the inflated official figures — no faster than the main western countries. (Britain, as always, is a poor standard of comparison, its performance being one of the worst in the advanced world.)

The current five year plan's targets have not been met in the past two years. Agriculture continues to be a problem and the official report notes that 'the population's growing demand for some foodstuffs and consumer goods was not satisfied in full'. But industry is in as great difficulties. It grew last year at its lowest rate for 35 years. Although the foreign economic performance of the economy increased it will not be helped by the falling price of oil this year as some 70 percent of Russia's hard currency earnings comes from oil and oil-based derivatives.

A sure sign of the growing scale of the difficulties is the decline in the volume of information given in the plan results themselves. But even the figures that are given are peppered with shortfalls in the plan and a significant number of industries where output actually declined. One telling statistic

is that real per capita incomes only increased by 0.1 percent!

Since no-one who has studied the figures believes that they do not exaggerate this is about as close as the government is likely to come to admitting that real incomes fell. But confirmation can be found from the statistics that it did. National income officially increased by some 12,000 million roubles (2.6 percent). But personal deposits in savings banks increased by 8,500 million roubles according to the plan report.

The relationship of the two figures may not be obvious until we add a third piece of information. In modern industrial economies the split in national income is that roughly 30 percent goes to capital and 70 percent goes to labour. 70 percent of 12,000 million is 8,000 million. In other words virtually the whole of the increase in income that went to the population ended up in savings banks. This was not because Russian consumers were so flush that they had nothing to buy but because there was nothing available that they wanted to buy — something that Andropov has admitted in his recent speeches.

The possibilities then of buying off discontent are narrowing for the population of 270 million plus. This can be seen in other ways too. One of them is Andropov's current

campaign for more 'labour discipline'. Since he cannot offer the guarantee of higher standards of living he has to stress the national interest more and more and he has to demonstrate his good faith by causing heads to roll wherever laxity is found. At a visit to a Moscow machine tool plant earlier this year he was concerned to stress, as he was reported in *Pravda*, that:

'The question of strengthening discipline applies not only to workers, engineers and technicians. It applies to everyone, beginning with ministers.'

But though heads have recently rolled in Moscow it seems unlikely that Andropov will be able to reverse the growing trend of cynicism and pessimism in Russia. Out of this attitude we are likely to see more strikes rather than less and perhaps a less halting growth of the workers' movement than before.

Note:

The survey of strikes and riots mentioned in the text is currently in progress. Data sheets listing the known incidents are being prepared and when ready will be available to anyone who is interested — c/o Mike Haynes, The Polytechnic, Wolverhampton. It is hoped that a fuller discussion will appear in a future issue of *International Socialism*.



Engineering factory in Togliatti

The despair of the reformist

Alex Callinicos reviews a new book edited by Martin Jacques and Stuart Hall about Thatcher's appeal and ways it can be fought.

The Politics of Thatcherism

Lawrence and Wishart in association with *Marxism Today* £4.95

For the past four years the exciting place for socialists to be has been inside the Labour Party. This was especially so, of course, in 1979-81, when it seemed for a moment that the Labour left, with Tony Benn at their head, were taking the party citadels by storm. All that seems a very long time ago now.

During that period there were two forces on the left that were rather isolated from the Bennite movement in its headlong rush to defeat. This was partly because they were the only organisations of any significance still outside the Labour Party—the Communist Party and the Socialist Workers Party.

It was also because both had rather pessimistic analyses of the short-term prospects for the left. This set them apart from such figures as Tariq Ali, who was prepared to forget his years as a revolutionary in his eagerness to get in on the Labour act.

One of the few successes

In our own case, the pessimism—realism might be a better word—flowed from our analysis of the downturn in the class struggle which set in around 1975, the conjoint crisis of leadership, organisation, and ideology which has prevented the British labour movement from dealing with Thatcher as it did with Heath.

With the Communist Party it has been rather different. In the first place, the analysis is associated less with the party as a whole, and more with the right-wing intellectual faction around the journal *Marxism Today*. The hostility with which this group is regarded in some CP quarters came into the open when an article containing some mild criticisms of shop stewards was bitterly and publicly attacked last year by the party's industrial organiser, Mick Costello.

Marxism Today survived the row. One can see why—it is one of the few successes the CP has left. Since the present editor, Martin Jacques, took over from the late James Klugmann in the late 1970s, he has succeeded in turning a rather boring quasi-internal bulletin into a magazine sufficiently popular for WH Smith to be willing to distribute it. At the same time, *Marxism Today* has earned the praises of a number of Fleet Street heavyweights—Peter Jenkins of the *Guardian*, Hugo Young of the *Sunday Times*, Malcolm Rutherford of the *Financial Times*.

Turning to this collection of articles from *Marxism Today* one can see why. The magazine has concentrated its attention on the crisis which the British political system has experienced since 1979—the travails undergone by Labour, the rise (and fall?) of the SDP/Liberal Alliance, and the Thatcher juggernaut. This last phenomenon provides the theme of the present collection, as its title and the familiar, demonic features on the cover indicate.

The articles are of variable quality. This is especially true of those concerned with Tory economic policy. A variety of authors—Bob Rowthorn, Andrew Gamble, Michael Bleaney, Ian Gough, Tony Lane—all expound monetarism, and assess its effects, giving rise to a great deal of repetition and contradiction. This, combined with rather uneven attempts to update the articles, and a great deal of printers' errors, conveys the impression of a collection slapped together in haste to cash in on election fever.

In order to contain proletarian opposition, the Tories rely, not on the Special Patrol Group or the British Movement, let alone on the Young Conservatives, but on such old worthies as Terry Duffy, Moss Evans and the like

There is, however, nothing slapdash about the keynote article, Stuart Hall's celebrated *The Great Moving Right Show*. Written with great panache, and first published in the dying days of the Callaghan government, the article puts forward a thesis summed up by a recent anecdote of Malcolm Rutherford's:

'It was Mr Roy Jenkins, the leader and founder of the Social Democratic Party, who first introduced the phrase 'breaking the mould' into British politics. Mrs Thatcher said at the time, though more privately than publicly, that it was she who was the real mould-breaker.' (*Financial Times*, 14 May 1983)

Hall makes precisely the same claim. Expressing the point in terms taken from Gramsci, he argues that Thatcherism is a response to the 'organic crisis' of British capitalism, an attempt 'to cure...within certain limits' its 'incurable structural contradictions' by creating a new balance of forces. It seeks to do so by exploiting the contradictions of social democracy.

Labour governments have used the state apparatus as a means of disciplining the working class. This has enabled Thatcher and the radical Tory right to link the traditional anti-statism of laissez-faire economics with an anti-bureaucratic populism. Thrown in also have been some traditional themes of mainstream Toryism, a stress on the family and the nation as the larger units within which individuals find their meaning.

Thus, 'Thatcherite populism is a particularly rich mix. It combines the resonant themes of organic Toryism—nation, family, duty, authority, standards, traditionalism—with the aggressive themes of a revived neo-liberalism, self-interest, competitive individualism, anti-statism.' The effect, Hall argues, is a political and ideological repertoire which permits Thatcher to outflank Labour and appeal directly to many of its working class supporters.

Read now, four and a half years after it first appeared, the analysis seems in many ways highly prescient. As a thousand electoral studies have shown, a sharp swing away from Labour among skilled workers was crucial to the Tory victory in 1979. In office, one of the most remarkable features of Thatcher's premiership has been the way in which, especially in 1979-81, when the Tory wets dominated the cabinet, she has presented herself as in opposition to her own government, championing the little man (or woman) against the collectivist state.

God sent opportunity

The Falklands, of course, gave Thatcher a god sent opportunity to play the great themes of *Nation and Empire*. The Family, the subject of a book by Downing Street adviser Ferdinand Mount, is likely to be much harped on in the second term.

The difficulty with Hall's analysis lies, however, in establishing its precise implications. *The Great Moving Right Show* is, in part, a polemic against an automatic Marxism that sees economic crisis as leading inevitably to political radicalisation. Hall insists that 'ideological factors have effects on and for the social formation as whole—including effects on the economic crisis itself and how it is likely to be resolved, politically.' As it stands, this statement is perfectly true, and wouldn't exactly have stunned Trotsky, for example, with its novelty. But unless what Hall calls 'the neglected political and ideological dimensions' of the crisis are related to their anchorage in production relations and class struggle, the danger is that Thatcherism will be seen as an autonomous phenomenon operating independently of class forces.

We can make the point more sharply by going back to Gramsci's discussion of organic crises in the *Prison Notebooks* on which Hall draws in his analysis of Thatcherism. Gramsci distinguishes between 'organic movements (relatively permanent)', which arise from the relations of production, and 'movements which may be termed 'conjunctural'' (and which may appear as occasional, immediate, almost accidental). The conjunctural forms the terrain of ideological and political struggles on which capital and labour struggle, each seeking to impose their own solutions to the underlying organic crisis.



Photomontage: Ian Steel

Never was so much owed by so few to so many

Gramsci warns:

'A common error in historico-political (ie Marxist) analysis consists in an inability to find the correct relation between what is organic and what is conjunctural. This leads to present causes as immediately operative which in fact only operate indirectly, or asserting that immediate causes are the only effective ones. In the first case there is an excess of 'economism', or doctrinaire pedantry; in the second, an excess of 'ideologism'. In the first case there is an overestimation of mechanical causes, in the second an exaggeration of the voluntarist and individual element.'

What Hall does in rejecting the 'economism' of vulgar Marxism is to collapse into 'ideologism', detaching Thatcherism from its roots in class relations. This can be seen in two ways. First, there is the question of to what extent the present Tory

government represents a radical break from its Labour and Conservative predecessors. Hall describes Thatcherism as

'a move towards "authoritarian populism"—an exceptional form of the capitalist state which, unlike classical fascism, has retained most (though not all) of the formal representative institutions in place, and which at the same time has been able to construct around itself an active popular consent.'

Now the expression 'exceptional state' was coined by the Greek political theorist Nicos Poulantzas as a general description of those forms of capitalist state such as fascism and military dictatorship. They can emerge in conditions where bourgeois representative democracy is no longer adequate as a form of capitalist class rule. Hall denies that 'authoritarian populism' is identical to classical fascism, but he tacitly admits it to the same political family.

Has Thatcher broken with bourgeois democracy, albeit while preserving the facade of parliamentary government? To answer the question we have to examine the Tories' relationship to the working class. For the social meaning of bourgeois democracy is precisely the containment of the organised proletariat within the framework of capitalism.

It is the political form of class collaboration between big capital and organised labour. As a form of class rule it depends critically on the role of the trade union bureaucracy in cementing the working class to the capitalist state. A shift to an 'exceptional state' would imply a reliance instead on a far higher degree of coercion, whether by means of the repressive state apparatus (military dictatorship) or a mass paramilitary movement (fascism).

Once the issue is posed in these terms, it is clear that Thatcherism does not represent a

qualitative break with the past. In order to contain proletarian opposition, the Tories rely, not on the Special Patrol Group or the British Movement, let alone the Young Conservatives, but on such old worthies as Terry Duffy, Moss Evans and the like. Thatcherism is an extreme right wing variant of bourgeois democracy as it has been practised in Britain for much of this century.

Hall is led into his failure to grasp this by concentrating too closely on 'conjunctural factors'. Thatcher has broken with the high profile class collaboration typical of the post-war years which reached its culmination in the Social Contract years 1974-9. But that pattern is not necessarily the normal or typical form of bourgeois democracy. This form of class rule is quite compatible with a much more subaltern role for the trade union bureaucracy—for example, Britain after the general strike, the United States for much of the post-war period, and the French Fifth Republic until 1981.

Hall is undoubtedly right that social democracy in its predominant post-war form—a dreary mix of Fabianism, Keynesianism and welfarism—is in acute crisis. His mistake lies in inferring from this ideologico-political phenomenon to a fundamental change in the form of class rule.

Away from class politics

Hall's 'ideologism' is equally evident when it comes to the question of how to respond to Thatcherism. His and Jacques' introduction to the collection talks of 'the construction of a new political force, the building of a new network of alliances.' Now, in traditional Marxist vocabulary, the term 'alliance' suggests some sort of arrangement between different classes—for example, that between workers and peasants during the October revolution. Is that what Hall and Jacques are thinking of? If so, which class is the proletariat to ally itself to?

Here again nothing is terribly clear. Hall is on record as dismissing 'idiotic prophecies that class is about to disappear', and noting that 'the class is in process of a deep reconstruction'. (*New Socialist*, May/June 1983). True enough, but on my estimate the 'recomposed' working class constitutes about 75 percent of the economically active population in Britain. Who exactly are they supposed to ally with?

The old petty bourgeoisie isn't much more than 3 percent of the workforce—not much of a catch. Or perhaps the new middle class of upper white collar workers (about 20 percent)? We simply aren't told. Compare this with Gramsci's careful class analysis of potential allies of the proletariat in 'On the Southern Question' and the 'Lyons Theses'. The suspicion is that all this talk of alliances involves a shift away from class politics altogether. One article from *Marxism Today* which argues explicitly for such an approach, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (January 1981), is not included in the present collection.

Laclau and Mouffe assert that classical Marxist talk of global class contradictions is old hat, and that the social structure of modern capitalism is so fragmented that all

socialists can do is construct alliances with highly heterogeneous groups—feminists, black nationalists, ecologists etc. Is this the sort of 'network of alliances' Hall and Jacques advocate? Do they also reject class analysis? As Sir John Junor of the *Sunday Express* would put it, I think we should be told.

The effect of this 'ideologism' is to detach socialist politics from the class struggle. Eric Hobsbawm, discussing the Falklands, argues that when nationalism and 'militant class consciousness...go together in harness, they multiply not only the force of the working class but its capacity to place itself at the head of a broad coalition for social change.' He cites the example of the Second World War: 'our "Churchillian" memories are not just of patriotic glory—but of victory against reaction both abroad and at home: of Labour triumph and the defeat of Churchill.'

I'm inclined to reply, tell that to the Greeks. The Allied victory led to the denial of the hopes for social liberation aroused throughout the Continent by the Resistance, and the imposition of reactionary régimes, where necessary by force (for example on Athens, treated by Churchill as a 'conquered city'). And the same is, of course, true of what happened 'at home' after 1945: even Tony Benn these days acknowledges that the Attlee government made Britain safe for capitalism.

It's surprising that as distinguished a historian as Hobsbawm can forget what a number of the more political younger writers (David Hare and Ian MacEwan, for example) have so eloquently described—the lie at the heart of the 'people's war', the manipulation of popular radicalism to preserve British imperialism.

Hobsbawm can, of course, claim justification from the latest in Marxist theory. Ernesto Laclau, in a book cited approvingly by Hall in *The Great Moving Right Show*, argues that ideological elements such as nationalism and democracy are politically neutral. They can be used for both progressive and reactionary purposes. The trouble with the left he suggests, is that they haven't been willing enough to take on the right on their own ground. This sentiment is shared by Robert Gray in this volume. He argues that 'the left must begin to think more concretely and creatively about national identity and national interests'.

'Ideologism' of this sort leaves tactical political options very open, although the general direction is clear—to the right, away from class politics. Take the case of proportional representation, advocated by the Communist Party. Irrespective of the abstract question of which electoral system is more democratic, it is clear that, as Peter Hain pointed out (in a debate with Dave Cook, *Marxism Today*, February 1983), the effect of PR would be to condemn the Labour Party to permanent opposition status, further weakening the link between the organised working class and the bourgeois political arena.

The *Marxism Today* team are prepared to face this prospect with equanimity, because they have placed their hopes not, as the official CP programme suggests, in the election of a 'Labour government of a new

type', but in a wider 'political realignment' involving, according to Bob Rowthorn, elements of the SDP/Liberal Alliance and even left wing Tories.

Ironically, Hall's analysis of Thatcherism as an 'exceptional form of capitalist state' lends support to such a strategy. For, in practice if not in theoretical formulation, this analysis has the same implications as the cruder view of Thatcherism as 'creeping fascism' now being touted around on the Labour left. To combat this threat to democracy, the argument runs, we need, as Hall and Jacques write, 'the broadest possible set of alliances against Thatcherism, involving, in the initial instance, possibly quite modest objectives.'

The vision of a popular front embracing Gordon MacLennan and Mick McGahey, Bea Campbell and Dale Spender, Rudi Narayan and Darcus Howe, David Owen and David Steel, Ted Heath and Francis Pym, swims up before the eyes for a brief, mad moment.

I say 'ironically' because the collection reprints Hall's splendid, biting attack on the SDP, 'The "Little Caesars" of Social Democracy', in which he argues that 'Social Democracy is gunning for the same space' as Thatcher, that it is another version of her anti-working class populism. If this analysis is correct, what possibly can the labour movement have to gain from an alliance with the SDP, let alone from Ted Heath, the man who put the Pentonville Five in jail and presided over the Bloody Sunday massacre in Derry?

Balance of class forces

I conclude that Hall, Jacques and Co are guilty of precisely the error against which Gramsci warned, 'an exaggeration of the voluntarist and individual element'. A useful analysis, within its limits, of the politico-ideological significance of the Tory right is likely, in present circumstances, to contribute to the vastly overinflated image of Thatcher as hero/demon created by the media.

It is easy to forget how much accident and good fortune have contributed to her present ascendancy. Simon Jenkins, political editor of *The Economist*, in a review of her premiership, argued that, without the Falklands war, 'it is probable that pressure from within and outside the government would by late summer (1982) have driven Mrs Thatcher into a major reflationary package or into resignation' (21 May 1983). Even with the Falklands, had Argentine armourers been a little more efficient in fusing their bombs, the present 'conjuncture' might now look rather different, with a Foot, Pym, or even Jenkins government.

Once we cut Thatcher down to size, then we see the constraints that operate on her even in victory. These constraints arise from the balance of class forces in Britain, and the condition of world capitalism. Factors which have favoured her in the past four years may work against her in the future.

Tony Lane in his article on *The Tories and the Trade Unions*, written specially for this collection, cites a management consultant who writes:



Hail the conquering heroes?
Above: Welcoming the survivors
from HMS Sheffield at RAF Brize
Norton. Below: Welcoming the
person whose political career they
helped save



'If the balance of power has shifted in management's favour, it is because the economic climate has changed...Pendulums swing both ways. When the economy picks up, the unions will come fighting back to recover what they see as ground lost at the last pay settlement—and how many managements, long starved of orders, will want to lose precious new business because of a strike?

It is developments of this nature which will, sooner or later, undermine Thatcherism. More than ever Marxists need to grasp what Gramsci called the 'dialectical nexus' between organic and conjunctural, economic and ideologico-political movements. *The Politics of Thatcherism*, by its one-sided preoccupation with ideological factors, and its effective dissolution of class into the broader categories of popular alliances, prevents us from doing so.

Its publication is likely merely to feed the despair of those who only a few years ago saw Tony Benn as the bearer of the Holy Grail, and now regard Margaret Thatcher as commandant of the concentration camps whose gates they now see opening before them.

Artists international

Currently on tour is an exhibition entitled, 'The story of the Artists International Association 1933-1953'. The bulk of the work on display deals specifically with contemporary working class life and workers' political struggles and should be of interest to socialists and trade unionists.

Founded in 1933 the AIA aimed to establish 'the international unity of artists against imperialist war on the Soviet Union, fascism and colonial oppression'. Its membership soon grew and it attracted the support of artists such as Picasso and L S Lowry. It was one of the more successful of the CP's popular fronts of the 30s. The Association published pamphlets attacking the government's policy of non-intervention in Spain and its attitude towards Fascism. It acted as a populariser of the arts, with exhibitions such as 'Art for the People' in 1936.

The AIA's post-war activities were marked by controversy. The cold war and a growing awareness of the reality of Stalinist Russia led to a marked lessening of the Association's political role. A split followed, between those in support

of Soviet-style state control of the arts and those in favour of individual freedom.

The exhibition follows the development of the AIA's history from the 30s, with the Depression and the rise of fascism, through the war and up to the early 50's, bringing together material as varied as paintings, leaflets and sculptures.

It was undoubtedly during the 30's that the AIA's role as a vehicle for socialistic ideas was most vividly and skillfully expressed. This is reflected in works such as *Miner in Chains* by Gilbert Daykin, or *Hands off Abyssinia* by James Boswell. The exhibition also displays paintings of miners' demonstrations in South Wales and the selling of *The Daily Worker* outside factories.

With the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War the AIA began producing posters and visual displays supporting the cause of the Republic.

Refusing to see the artist as an 'objective' observer above society the Association's attitude towards its subjects was both sympathetic and supportive. Whether it is a painting of a workers' demonstration or the marvellous sculpture



James Boswell *Hands off Abyssinia* 1935

by Peter Peri depicting a street speaker addressing a crowd, the works exude passion and strength as well as reflecting the often harsh conditions of working class life.

Though influenced by Stalin's 'socialist realism' much of the work is still vivid and a historical document of the time.

With the Second World War the AIA became less vociferous against the government and it began to use its propagandist skills in favour of the war effort. Despite this the Association's artists tended to depict the depressing life of the ordinary soldier rather than the heroics of the officers.

The immediate post-war period, before the start of the AIA's ideological splits, saw renewed attention being paid to working class subjects. *The Arrest of the Dockers* by Derek Chittock and *Raising of Lazarus* by Kathleen Allen are two such examples. Some of the work produced in this period was commissioned by the Amalgamated Engineering Union.

With the arrival of the 50's realism became, for the Association, simply a style as opposed to an 'attitude towards life and the dominant historical realities of the period'. Realistic paintings of Venice became as common as realistic portraits of working class housewives. The exhibition ends with the dropping of AIA's political clause and the formal end of its agitational activities.

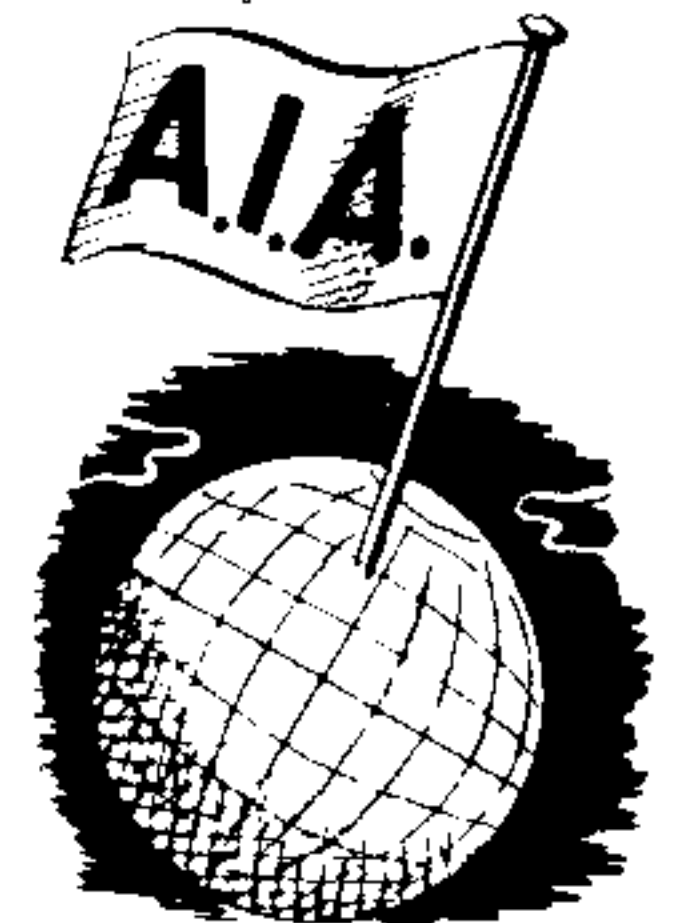
The development of the AIA from a radical and almost revolutionary body to a moderate organisation which influenced the setting up of the Arts Council is admirably charted by this exhibition. This development ran parallel to the changing attitude of the British intelligentsia, which, in the face of

the fascist threat, adopted 'communism' and viewed the Soviet Union as the only defence for democracy; and then in the late 40s drifted to the right under the impact of the cold war and the knowledge of the realities of Stalinism, till little remained of its once socialist fervour.

Still, during its most exciting and stimulating period, it acted rather than just observed. The AIA had a healthy artistic attitude towards the working class. It treated workers not merely as passive subjects but as a powerful historical force. This attitude shines through the material, whether it be Tisa Hess's sculpture *Toil* or the pamphlet *On Revolutionary Art*.

For anyone interested in the social and political history of the 30's and 40's, as well as the art of that period, this exhibition is recommended.

Patrick Sawyer



•The exhibition is on tour and admission is free. It will appear in Bradford from 16 July till 3 September and Nottingham from 15 October to 20 November, and other towns after that.

LETTER

Music and politics

I was very confused by Ian Birchall's letter replying to the article *The Sounds of Struggle*. So I'd like to clarify a few misconceptions people have about music.

The first point I would like to take up is the absurd idea that bands sell out by signing to a major record label. That by signing to a major label bands will automatically lose touch with their roots and any political awareness they had. As far as myself and a lot of people are concerned this is utter rubbish.

Take for example *The Jam*, whose political awareness grew and grew, finally culminating in the song *Trans-global Express* that actually advocated workers striking against the system internationally. For someone like Paul Weller, who wrote the song this is an incredible jump in political awareness. When Paul Weller stops Chris Moore at a tube station and asks him what the theory of Permanent Revolution is you know his political awareness is growing!

By selling out people mean that if a band is in a position to benefit financially it automatically affects their political consciousness. But money does not necessarily distort consciousness, it all depends on how you earn it.

Bands actually earn their money working for a section of the ruling

class (the record company) so they are not in a position to become part of that ruling class. However much they earn it is not in the interests of the ruling class to let them. Ultimately a band is always a producer and not an exploiter, so that bands interest does not differ that much from the interests of other sections of the working class.

Another argument that comes up is that bands have no strength as a force which can go on strike. This is true. But a large band is in an incredibly strong position to agitate because of the mass audience it can attract. Fair enough, agitation is not enough, and any members of the SWP who are in a band realise that the real struggle is on the shop floor.

But being in a band that exists only to put our politics to a mass audience, I know that music is a good way to do this. Anyone who agrees with what we are saying is not left in the political wilderness because there is an organisation they can join, and a paper they can read.

So, in my opinion bands can do something. But they are in a much stronger position if they are members of an organisation and not politically isolated like so many bands in the past.

Martin (Redskins)

Readable style, flabby politics

Hard Times: The World Economy in Turmoil

Bob Sutcliffe

The Cuts Machine

David Hall

(Both published by Pluto Press £2.50 each)

These two books are the latest in Pluto's *Arguments for Socialism* series. They are short, and well-written, which is a definite virtue in these days of verbose academic tomes. The editor of the series, John Harrison deserves some credit for his commitment to reach a wide audience with 'popular and provocative' books. It's a pity that his editorial skills are not matched by his political acumen.

To be fair, neither of these books is quite as awful as *Take over the City* by Richard Minns, one of the first in the series. Both contain information and argument which many *Socialist Review* readers will find useful. Both distance themselves from the crass reformism of the Alternative Economic Strategy. But *The Cuts Machine* evades most of the crucial issues facing militants in the public sector. Even Sutcliffe's demolition job on the AES dissolves into a soggy appeal for a 'broad democratic alliance' at the end.

Harrison and Pluto would no doubt defend themselves with talk, as in the blurb which accompanies each book, of the need for a 'radical rethinking of major political questions', to open up 'debates on strategy for the left'. But any serious debate should surely be confronting the critical issues instead of avoiding them. Where are the books on the failures of the left in the Labour Party, or the impotence of CND, or the fate of the shop stewards' movements, and rank and file organisations of the early 1970's?

Instead we have a couple of readable books whose politics are flabby, and in which the arguments are flaged.

Bob Sutcliffe's book on the world economy is a pale thin affair by comparison with Nigel Harris's *Of Bread and Guns*. But it does contain a lucid panoramic survey of the developments of the crisis over the last decade. Anyone looking for a brief summary of what's been happening, as distinct from the sort of pathbreaking analysis which Nigel Harris provides, will find nothing better on the market. Chapter 5, where Sutcliffe examines the logic behind the right-wing economics of Thatcher and Reagan, and the difficulties both have run into, is particularly good.

Unfortunately Sutcliffe's explanation of events is much weaker. The author made his name back in 1972 with a book written with Andrew Glyn on *British Capitalism, Workers and the Profit Squeeze*. There he produced the

influential but mistaken and dangerous line, that pressure from militant trade unions forcing up wages was responsible for the marked decline of the rate of profit in British capital.

Since then Sutcliffe has become much more cautious. He now argues that even if wages had not risen there would still have been a crisis — from there being too little demand for the goods that capital produces. In other words either wages are too high and there's a crisis in the 'production of surplus value' — or they're too low and there's a crisis from an inability to 'realise surplus value'.

Such arguments have the merit of stressing that capitalism gets trapped in a contradictory situation in a crisis — and that most of the solutions offered resolve one side of the contradiction at the expense of the other (thus cuts in wages improve profits from one side but by lowering consumer demand worsen profitability from the other). But the obvious problem is how capitalism ever manages to grow under such a constraint? Why doesn't it stay trapped in a permanent crisis?

Sutcliffe fails to take seriously Marx's own arguments about the tendency for the accumulation of capital, the piling up of dead labour as means of production (plant and equipment, buildings and infrastructure), to both generate a boom and cut into the rate of profit capitalists can obtain from that investment. He therefore gets tangled up in discussing why the system actually moved from the long boom of the fifties and sixties into the prolonged stagflation of the seventies and eighties. Nevertheless despite this, and a soggy ending, the author's surveys of a number of aspects of the crisis — cuts in state spending, the failure of Keynesianism, the debt crisis and so forth — are often penetrating, and always clear.

The Cuts Machine is a strange sort of book. It starts off very well, stressing the impact of the crisis in 1974, and the fact that it was the last Labour Government which set the 'cuts machine' running. Thus:

'The key features of the systematic attacks on public services had all emerged by the end of 1975. Profitability was given pride of place over social needs. Taxation policy was used to shift the burden away from capital and onto workers and consumers. Government policies were adjusted in deference to the 'confidence' of the financial markets... The cuts machine had been set in motion — under a Labour Government and with TUC acquiescence.' (Page 4)

Hall goes on to provide one of the best analyses I have read of the

'technical' side of the public spending and cuts debates. He stresses quite rightly that the very way in which the national accounts are constructed systematically distorts the contribution made by public services. He shows that the whole debate has been constructed around the false premise that education and health etc, simply cost money without producing anything.

His discussion of the way in which the City is able to exercise control over the mechanics of government borrowing is also excellent. Although here he fails to clarify why both Labour and Tory governments since 1975 have put so much emphasis on reducing the budget deficit. Those active in public sector unions will find his discussion of all those horrid jargon phrases such as 'cash limits' and 'rate support grants' useful.

But when it comes to the question of fighting the cuts what we get are worthy sentiments and platitudes. Hall's background as research officer for the SCPS suggests the problem: biting criticism of the TUC and industrial unions for being willing to tolerate cuts, but not a murmur about the failures of the 'left wing leaders' of the public sector unions themselves. An attack on the AES for giving only secondary priority to the public services, and failing to rate 'social need'

above 'private profit.' But still a belief that 'democratic alternatives' with all sorts of nice ideas such as the 'wasting away of the Treasury' can be introduced through legislation.

'The response of capitalists is, of course, the problem with such a programme.' So says Hall just before spelling out all the reforms he thinks should be demanded 'of a future Labour government'. And what about the record of Labour controlled local authorities? He notes in passing that the judges stopped the G.I.C's cheap fares policy, but there's nothing at all about the increases in the rates, or decentralisation.

At times like the present these are precisely the issues which must not be dodged. Clarity over exactly how we resist the cuts is a necessity if the rank and file struggles to which Hall appeals are to succeed. Talk of broad alliances, of demands on Labour governments, sounds so realistic and easy. In reality the employer's offensive and the cuts machine are going to keep rolling on — and can only be effectively fought by those on the ground, in the workplace not in the council chamber, not in amorphous unrepresentative cuts committees, not by the union bureaucrats, and least of all in Parliament.

These two books, for all their merits, do not provide the arguments we need. Sadly they are, to pinch Tony Cliff's word of the moment, indicative of the swamp in which so much of the left is floundering.

Pete Green

تونى كليف : سرمایه داری دولتی در شوروی

سرمایه داری دولتی چیست ؟

چگونه بوجود آمد ؟

چرا دولت شوروی يك دولت کارگری نیست ؟

آیا بحران اقتصادی در شوروی وجود دارد ؟

آیا قانون ارزش در شوروی عملکرد دارد ؟

آیا مبارزه طبقاتی ، سرمایه داری دولتی را تهدید میکند ؟

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Axe-man's own story

Back from the Brink
Michael Edwardes
Collins, £9.95

Poor Michael Edwardes, deprived of thousands of tax payers' money as head of BL, has had to quickly rush off his memoirs and serialise them in the *Mail* so that he can stave off starvation and the dole queue. His latest 'Back from the Brink'—*Daily Mail* 23 February 1983—is a gloating account of his final smashing of Longbridge's Stewards' Committees and in particular Derek Robinson.

In January 1979 Margaret Thatcher met Edwardes at the Stafford Hotel and afterwards wished him well in his efforts to restore BL's prosperity. Ironically her rise to power in May caused a strengthening of the pound and a financial crisis at BL which brought it to its knees. So much for Thatcher's grip on the economy. To stave off crisis Edwardes had to beg the Tories for more money. They demanded an increase in profitability. Edwardes pulled out the hatchet and on 10 September he launched his Recovery Plan. This would mean 25,000 redundancies plus the closure of the Triumph car assembly at Canley and the MG works at Abingdon plus low pay awards and a comprehensive overhaul of working practices.

On 21 September the TGWU rejected the plan. By 1 October a management team met the corporation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions Executive, CSEU, at Brighton who represent all the unions at BL. Edwardes knew of the vulnerability of the workers because he had the confidence to tell the CSEU that he was going to ballot the 150,000 workers about his Recovery Plan with or without the unions' cooperation. The CSEU team, despite TGWU opposition, capitulated and agreed to cooperate in the ballot. In fact the Unions totally surrendered and supported the plan which was 'more than any of us had dared to hope'.

Edwardes had guessed right and

with no organised union opposition 106,000 out of 150,000 voted for the Recovery Plan. Now came a series of events which led to the ritual sacrifice of Derek Robinson and the final humiliation of the Stewards' organisation at Longbridge.

About two months after Edwardes had launched his Recovery Plan. Now came a series of events which led to the ritual

About two months after Edwardes had launched his Recovery Plan most of the unions had approved it and the workers had voted wholesale in favour of it. But it was only now that Robinson and three other stewards launched a fight back with the leaflet—*The Edwardes Plan and Your Job*. It called for disruptions and sit ins. The management selected Robinson for special treatment as he had obviously been getting up their noses for some time. On 19 November they sacked him.

Edwardes describes a 'partial walk out' at Longbridge with Robinson's own brother crossing picket lines. A week later Duffy grovelled for a meeting. Edwardes had already decided upon an immediate return to work policy and 'if this broke the strike we would re-employ most of those on strike.' He was hoping for more than just Red Robbo's scalp.

Edwardes lined up his team against Duffy, Sir John Boyd, Gerry Russell, Gavin Laird, Ken Cure, John Weakly and Jack Wyman.

He trusted the men on the other side of the table just as he was sure that they trusted him. Oh yes, you bet. He hit them with all he had, he must have been busting with confidence by now and ecstatic over the power he was wielding. He told them that those on strike 'have in effect dismissed themselves. We will never engage them again.' The AUEW team capitulated. They agreed to set up an inquiry under Gerry Russell, not about the Recovery Plan but about the conduct of one of their own members, Derek Robinson. I wonder how



many times Michael has told this jolly wheeze over port and stilton. The AUEW told all their members to return to work. Edwardes was still worried about getting Longbridge back to work. But Terry was at hand. 'One call to Moss,' he said. 'I'll tell him our decision. The Transport and General could not possibly carry out a strike over one of our members if we don't support it and anyway what matters is that we are setting up the committee of inquiry to investigate the circumstances leading to dismissal.'

The inquiry reported that Robinson had indeed been a bad boy but the management should play fair and reinstate him as he had been unfairly dismissed. A 'strike' was deferred until the members could be balloted. After such massive Union backing Robinson was surprisingly not reinstated by some 14,000 to 600 votes! Duffy had done Edwardes' dirty work.

But how had Derek Robinson allowed himself to get so out of touch with workers at Longbridge? Why did it take so long to organise a fight back? Could it be that shop floor organisation had collapsed at BL and it only existed in the minds of Robinson and some other stewards?

Union officials and some militants must learn what Michael Edwardes has learnt which is that power lies in the power of the rank and file workers. Once Edwardes had secured it any confrontation was doomed to humiliating defeat. The class struggle is dynamic and reflects the ever changing conditions of capitalism. It is essential that we are always in tune with workers' willingness to act if we are

to lead the struggle and not face crushing defeats at the hands of the ruling class.

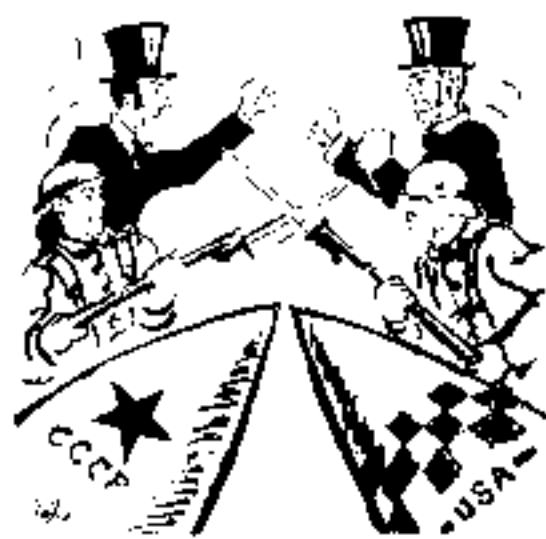
It must have been hard for Robinson to believe in the support Edwardes had amongst the workers, but he is a modern breed of capitalist very much aware of the class struggle and how to squeeze profits out of the system. 'We had won, not the war, but a very important battle.' But he has yet to discover that he or his class can never win outright even though they are riding high on victories. Capitalists like Michael Edwardes will always need to squeeze surplus value and profits from workers. Organised labour might lose battles but it always has the potential of freeing itself from its relationship with capital.

The war is still being waged at Longbridge and workers are showing a willingness to fight back despite massive redundancies over recent years. In October of last year the management tried to dress up a two year pay offer to look like two annual increases. The majority of workers rejected the pay offer which is part of the BL board's move to privatisation. They want workers tied to long term wage and redundancy deals with only productivity agreements to discuss because it will help their image for private investment.

To prove that the workers are really alive and kicking they voted overwhelmingly at the same meeting to support the health workers dispute. Shopfloor organisation is still weak at Longbridge but the war is still on, Michael.

Nick Catlin

International Socialism 19



- The New Cold War: Pete Binns
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Bukharin: Selected Writings on the state and the transition to socialism

Edited by Richard B Day
Spokesman
£20.00

Bukharin was one of the most important theorists in the history of Marxism, as well as being one of the Bolshevik leaders of 1917.

He developed a theory of imperialism to explain the First World War before Lenin did, and was also in advance of Lenin in rescuing the genuine Marxist theory of the state from the distortions it had undergone in the years after the deaths of Marx and Engels.

In some ways his writings on imperialism are today more relevant even than Lenin's. They are not encumbered by the confusing notion of finance capital which Lenin took over from the English liberal economist Hobson — a notion which can easily be misinterpreted to mean that industrial capital is a victim of finance capital's imperialist drive (a view quite alien to Lenin himself).

Bukharin's theory is centred on the way industrial capital becomes more and more integrated with the state, even though the forces of production increasingly operate at an international level. He sees this contradiction as underlying the drive towards war: each capital turns to the state to help it combat other capitals internationally, and military competition complements or even supplants market competition.

His theory of imperialism is therefore also a theory of state capitalism.

Bukharin's theory does not contradict Lenin's as properly understood (Lenin wrote a very favourable introduction to Bukharin's *Imperialism and the World Economy* and his marginal notes to the *Economics of the Transformation Period* are by no means wholly critical). But it does go further in pointing to factors which are vital for an understanding of world conflict today.

The first part of this book is made up of extracts from Bukharin's writings on these questions — *Towards a Theory of the Imperialist State* and *The Economics of the Transformation Period* — which are examples of Marxist theory at its best.

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of the writings in the second part of the book. They come from the period 1922-28, when all the weaknesses in Bukharin's approach to practice and theory came to the fore.

Already in the earlier years Lenin had had to criticise one fault in Bukharin's approach — he tended to forget that the very real tendencies he pointed to in the system operated in concrete circumstances alongside other, counter-tendencies. This led him to a political practice which veered from

Increasing blindness

one extreme to another.

In the years before 1920 Bukharin was on the extreme left of the Bolshevik Party — opposing national liberation struggles since they could only 'play into the hands of other imperialisms', rejecting the peace of Brest-Litovsk and urging 'revolutionary war' regardless of the cost, glorifying in the 'war communism' imposed on the revolution by the harsh requirements of survival.

In 1921 the Bolsheviks were fore-

international pitfalls facing any attempt to maintain 'socialism' in an isolated, overwhelmingly agricultural Russia.

It also led him to fail to understand what motivated Stalin and the bureaucratic elements in the party.

For five years he continued with undaunted optimism to attack anyone who saw these dangers.

In the process he revised many of the tenets held by all wings of Bolshevism in 1917. It was, for instance, he who first systematically



ed to abandon war communism because of the threat of peasant rebellion and the weakness of their worker-base as revealed by the Kronstadt uprising.

A 'new economic policy' based upon a free market for the peasants and petty traders replaced the previous total state control.

For Lenin and Trotsky this was a 'retreat' under pressure of circumstances. But Bukharin's inclination to see things in terms of abstract tendencies led him to come to a different conclusion.

The NEP, he argued, could enable Russia to move inexorably forward to socialism 'at a snail's pace'.

It was on this basis that he developed the 'theory' of 'socialism in one country' — a theory Stalin was only too eager to take up.

The new 'theory' blinded Bukharin to the real domestic and

propagandised the idea that socialism would be brought about by a 'bloc' of different classes, rather than by the working class leading all oppressed and exploited groups. What some ignorant Euro-communists see as the great 'innovation' in Gramsci's later writings is only in fact part of the general orthodoxy of the Comintern during the period in which Bukharin dominated its proceedings — an analysis brilliantly refuted in Trotsky's *The Third International after Lenin*.

Overall, Bukharin's writings of this period lack the vigour and perception of those left oppositionists who he polemicalised against. They can only be of interest today to those with a specialist interest in the period — and to those who repeat Bukharin's mistake by believing there is a reformist road to

'socialism with a human face' in one or other country of Eastern Europe.

The ossification of the revolutions seems to have produced an ossification in Bukharin's head, so that he was incapable of applying the notion of state capitalism he had developed a decade before to what was going on around him in Russia. Instead, he went so far as to suggest 'socialism' could advance if nationalised Russian industry could produce at lower costs (presumably including wage costs) than its private competitors. His blindness led him to encourage the clamp-down on workers that Stalin was to take to its logical conclusion.

What this meant was suddenly revealed in 1928-29 when an agricultural crisis showed the complete inadequacy of what Bukharin had been preaching for five years. Stagnated industry competing militantly on an international scale was proved to be incompatible with a relatively prosperous peasantry. Stalin reacted by seizing the land from the peasants through a bloody campaign of 'collectivisation' and by hammering workers' living standards right down. The gains which both workers and peasants had made in 1917 were finally destroyed.

The last section of the book, called *The years of Disorientation and Defeat* contains two pieces Bukharin wrote as this was happening.

In them Bukharin tries to criticise Stalinism without explicit mention either of Stalinism or of the bureaucracy which supported him. He does this first by condemning 'Trotskyism' for what are clearly the policies of Stalin (a trick Gramsci also resorted to in bits of the *Prison Notebooks*) — something which could not do anything to stop Stalin's advance, but which could make it still more difficult for workers to understand what was happening.

Then in 'the theory of organised economic disorder' he reviews a book about developments in Western capitalism, hinting that similar trends are present in Russia. It is here you get odd references to his old ideas about state capitalism. But they are never spelt out.

Trotsky never developed a theory of state capitalism as the young Bukharin had. But because he fought Stalinism and did not hide behind clever, Aesopian formulations, his writings on it are infinitely more interesting than Bukharin's, for all their theoretical faults.

The young Bukharin remains necessary reading for every serious Marxist today. But it is probably a better bet to read them in the separately published *Imperialism and the World Economy* (available in this quarter's Bookmarks list) or in one of the two English editions of *The Economics of the Transformation (or Transition) Period* rather than in this collection with material of much less interest.

Chris Harman

Poverty amid wealth

When we talk about socialism we are talking about a society in which everyone will have the basic necessities of life. Everyone will have enough to eat, a decent home, decent health care and so on. We are talking about a massive difference from the society in which we live today. As the crisis has intensified people even in the most advanced states have been robbed of a decent standard of living.

So, the question goes, where would you get the money to create a world of plenty?

Although equalising wealth in Britain would substantially increase the income of working class people, it would still not be sufficient to abolish poverty once and for all.

It would not, for instance release enough wealth to deal with the mass starvation and terrible living conditions which exist in the third world. It would not overcome the problems of the waste of human resources, of people working all their lives to produce useless shoddy goods.

The personal wealth held by the ruling class, although huge, is not sufficient to abolish poverty in the world as a whole.

But if we look at the way this society produces goods, we can see that it is forced to squander resources and to produce inefficiently. Because companies are constantly competing with each other for profits they are locked into a race which demands that they waste raw materials and workers on unproductive exercises such as advertising.

Factories which produce goods which are useful, are organised in a way which makes sure that there are not enough for everyone. There are millions of people in the world who would like a car, for example, but instead of producing cars to last so everyone who wanted one could have one, cars are produced for maximum profit. So all cars are built to fall to bits after a few years in order that car companies can make more money by introducing new models. The machinery used has to be constantly updated, and the old thrown away before it is worn out.

Outside of manufacturing industry huge amounts of money and energy are siphoned off into insurance companies and the stock exchange, where it does not produce anything which people need, it just makes more money for those who already have it.

The constant drive for ever higher profits means that it is purely hit and miss whether capital is invested to produce anything useful, or directed into totally useless forms of profit seeking. So in the early '70s we saw a massive property boom. Office blocks went up all over the country. No-one needed office blocks, and most of them remained empty.

It is in crisis that the anarchy and inefficiency of capitalism can be most clearly seen. Factories are left to rot, office blocks stand empty, and people are thrown onto the dole. As soon as profits fall capitalists are no longer interested in investing. However desirable or useful the products their factories produce may be, if there is not enough cash to rake off at the end the capitalists refuse to invest.

Huge amounts are spent on arms, which is the most wasteful squandering of resources of all. Armaments are either never used, and just become obsolete and have to be replaced, or they are used to kill people. In neither case does the money spent on them do ordinary people any good at all.

In 1980 500 billion dollars was spent on arms production throughout the world. That is almost one million dollars per minute. In order to maintain its own sphere of influence, every nation state wastes huge amounts of resources.

Waste, both in terms of inefficient production and making things which are totally useless is absolutely inevitable under capitalism. Maximising profits in manufacturing industry means making shoddy goods which will become obsolescent. Maintaining control over your chunk of the world means spending massive amounts on arms.

The resources to build socialism are already there. Its just a matter of releasing this wealth from the inefficiencies of capitalism.

In a socialist society the driving force behind production would be human need. It would be possible to organise production. Instead of a completely undirected scramble for profits we could plan production around what people wanted.

As well as improving everyone's standard of life outside of the workplace, it would also improve life at work. Instead of slaving all day to produce rubbish, whose only function is to make profits for the boss, workers could turn their creative skills to making things for the good of the whole society.

The largest slice of any nation's research budget goes into armaments. Sometimes it has spin offs into areas such as health care and people's lives may be marginally improved. Imagine how quickly we could develop this sort of research if it was a priority for society.

Capitalism is an anarchic crazy system, which is out of anyone's control, and only serves the interests of the tiny minority who own the means of production. It is in the interests of the vast bulk of society to overthrow this system, so we can start using the resources we have for the things we need.

Ann Rogers

