

socialist

REVIEW

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**Lebanon:
Reagan
gets his
fingers
burnt**



An expensive diversion

Since the Falklands war nearly two years ago, the Tories have incurred enormous expense with their 'Fortress Falklands' policy. **Duncan Blackie** looks at the dilemma facing the Tories between patriotism and the purse strings.

It is nearly two years since the fiasco of the Falklands war. In that time Thatcher has been able to turn the ridiculous venture into one of the main planks of Tory ideology—and sustain it.

The war of Thatcher's face has been able to maintain a level of chauvinism for far longer than anyone originally expected. However, some of the contradictions of the exercise are now beginning to emerge. The 'Fortress Falklands' policy rests on two main pillars of support.

Firstly, that there can be no question of discussions over sovereignty of the islands. And secondly, that the government is prepared to spare no expense in the defence of them.

It is doubtful as to how long the media can keep the Falklands in the news. Even the most loyal of punters will get fed up with birth, marriage and death reports from a rock in the South Atlantic.

At some point Thatcher will have to weigh up the publicity value against the enormous outlay of maintaining the present policy.

The cost of the war itself is probably known to most people — working out at over a million pounds per head of population. But the expense of merely maintaining the British presence is also staggering.

There are still 4,000 troops on the islands, supplied at a massive cost from 8,000 miles away. A new airport is being built for an estimated £240m. A number of other unexpected bills have been deposited at the government's door lately.

The return flight that Heseltine made from the Falklands at the end of January cost £90,000. More amusingly, as the result of numerous inept bureaucratic slip-ups, 54 pre-fab houses have been installed at a cost of £133,000 each. (The kits cost £18,000 each from their Swedish manufacturers).

Somehow, back in 1982, the contract for the luxury homes went to a small, loss-making firm, James Brewster. One of the directors was Sir Michael Hadow, a former foreign office official and ambassador to Argentina.

At one fell swoop half of the government's 'post-war rehabilitation fund' has been used up. The planned rents will be £80 to £160 per month. (The average Falklands wage is about half that in Britain).

Dead sheep

Heseltine decided that the locals should show a bit of initiative, in the true tradition of British enterprise. They should 'generate money for themselves' by making local produce available to the troops, to diversify the present diet of imported food.

The first such attempt was a failure, soldiers were presented with 18 carcasses, of mutton of course, and all but four of them were found to contravene EEC standards. Until the Tories decided to extend the EEC into the South Atlantic two years ago no-one was really bothered, but now they could have even more problems on their hands.

Thatcher's back door, her possible way out of all this nonsense, without being seen to lose face, came in December last year.

Paul Alfonsin was elected president of Argentina. Thatcher sent him a message of support on 10 December hoping to show that the Government had no quarrel with the new administration, only with the old generals.

She needn't have wasted her time. The Argentine government had decided to direct its non-intervention rhetoric in another direction. It said that they would no longer

assist the US in crushing left-wing movements in Central America.

They maintain a position of offering a formal end to hostilities in return for: 1 The removal of the 150-mile exclusion zone, 2 demilitarisation of the islands and, 3 negotiations over future sovereignty.

The role of the Labour leadership in all of this has been abysmal. Healey has kept up his 'bruiser' image by making political capital out of the luxury homes' farce. However, he hasn't questioned the basis of British rule in the Falklands for one minute but just claims that he could manage it more efficiently.

Kinnock stooped even lower. He said there was no need to hurry to solve the Falklands' problem and went on to praise the Tories on its 'mature and temperate response' to the Argentinian suggestion. Kinnock even said that the issue of sovereignty over the Falklands was now a 'dated virility symbol', appropriate to the Generals, but not to a sober statesman like Alfonsin. He neglected to say whether it remains a virility symbol to Britain.

It seems that the government is now looking for a middle way between economic expediency and public prestige. It turns out that in the two months since Alfonsin was elected to power secret negotiations have been taking place between Britain and Argentina.

Howe has put forward some specific ideas, mainly aimed at the resumption of trade with Argentina. The cost of the garrison is bad enough for him, without having to close off foreign markets to British capital. These include the lifting of import/export licences and the resumption of air travel between Britain, the Falklands and Argentina.

Howe's strategy is to establish a normal pattern of relations to outflank the Argentine plan of going to the UN. Whether Thatcher manages to back out relatively unscathed, or becomes embroiled indefinitely either with heavy costs or a backlash at home, this episode still further illustrates the reason for the whole adventure.

Foreign investment and low government expenditure are important for British capitalism, but so is a working class diverted from its real struggles and up to now the Falklands has proved to be the best diversion of all.



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After the day of action

The day of action in defence of trade union rights at GCHQ took almost everybody by surprise. It was much better supported than the government, the TUC, and ourselves, expected. It proved that on a concrete issue of opposition to the Tories there still exists a substantial body of working class opinion that is ready to fight.

Yet within two days of the protest, the government was apparently within reach of victory, having whittled down the number of those refusing to sign the union ban to around 300. The trade unions, it seems, have managed to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory. Whatever happens now, union organisation at GCHQ has taken a major hammering.

It is worth while going over some of the issues involved, since they illustrate very clearly some of the problems with the movement.

There is no doubt that the government miscalculated with its initial announcement of the ban. So feeble were their arguments about some alleged threat to national security, over which it had taken them some two years to make up their minds to act, that even a large number of their own close supporters, always keen to attack unions, thought that it would be too risky to try it on at this moment.

The 'opposition' from Tory wets, and indeed even from right-wing Tories, had little to do with their own principled defence

of free trade unionism. It was more a question of worrying that a tactical victory here would be bought at too high a strategic cost. It would be a bit awkward, for example, to continue to denounce Jaruzelski from Tory platforms after this performance.

No one on the trade union side, not even the most decrepit and right wing bureaucrat, has dismissed this attack as unimportant. They have all seen the issue of the right to trade union membership as a question of principal. The trade union bureaucracy as a whole has shown here that it recognises that it must insist on being able to recruit.

Almost everything else, however, they have been quite ready to negotiate away. The allegation that there has been a conflict of interest between trade union membership and national security has been the one that they have bent over backwards to deny and the 'no disruption' offer has been the deal that they have been keenest to sell.

Even if the government's miscalculation now forces them to make a small concession and negotiate with the unions, the starting point of any such negotiations will be the

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effective hamstringing of trade unionism at GCHQ.

Of course there is a conflict of interest between trade union membership and national security. No matter how loyal and patriotic the workers at GCHQ might think themselves to be, and many of them have been key right wing activists in the past, the trade union organisation of which they are members exists to defend their interests against those of the employer. The employer in this case is the very state that defines what this 'national interest' is. Any industrial dispute with the employer is *bound* to be one which leads to damage to the nation's interest.

The personal loyalty of individuals, the possibility of KGB men in trenchcoats stalking around outside branch meetings looking for likely recruits, and all that sort of cloak and dagger nonsense, is a complete diversion. Whether you sell your labour power to the local ruling class (loyalty) or to one from somewhere else (treachery) has never been the issue. What has been at stake is whether the principle of collective organisation in order to ensure the best possible deal in the sale of labour power should be suspended because it conflicts with the interests of the ruling class in defending the nation.

Epoch

The dispute at GCHQ is an echo of a question that has haunted the labour movement ever since Marx wrote that the working class has no fatherland. Sometimes, as now, it has been of relatively muted importance, but on other occasions, most notably in August 1914, it has proved the decisive point around which political allegiances are formed.

For Marxists, the national state is the product of the bourgeois epoch, formed by the need of the ruling class to establish a coherent national territory and thus a market under its own undivided control. The 'United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland' is exactly such an historical formation. It was based on the military subjugation not only of local populations in both England and the other constituent parts, but also on the fusion of various ruling classes and the destruction of those sections which sought to continue with

their particular local interests.

The national state, and thus the national interest, are formed by the bourgeoisie itself. To base a political position on the overriding importance of such categories is to accept the political framework, and hence the political leadership, of the bourgeoisie.

The idea that 'the working class has no fatherland' is not only a statement that the basis for socialism is the development of a world economy but also a recognition that organising on the basis of class necessarily defines the interests of workers in opposition to those of 'their own' national state.

If the idea of 'nation' is the key concept, around which the ruling class organises the rest of its view of the world, then the idea of class is ours. Just as the two social classes upon which these ideas are based are willy-nilly in perpetual conflict, so there is a continual struggle, now open, now hidden, between the two views of the world and thus the two ideas.

The union leadership have been running away from that logic as fast as they can. The offer of a 'no-disruption' agreement effectively amounted to arguing that all they were interested in was collecting the dues. Having the ability to defend the members' interests, which is obviously what disruption is for, is apparently not vital to the bureaucrats' view of the world.

Just as serious as the capitulation on the issues at stake inside GCHQ has been the way in which the campaign has been conducted outside the place. Every effort has been made to make sure that the platforms of the campaign include as wide a representation as possible. Allegedly 'progressive' Tory MPs are not the half of it; John Gorst, of the Freedom Association and architect of the smashing of trade unionism at Grunwicks, has been included on platforms.

The result of this sort of strategy has been that the campaign outside of GCHQ has been conducted at the level of morality and abstract principles. It has not been *built* around the need to organise resistance. So it has not been able to mobilise any significant level of action to pressurise the government into changing its mind. Pressure on the ruling class comes from workers' action, not from the speeches of MPs. Without that action, the Tories have felt no need to make any concessions.

In their refusal to organise any serious

campaign over GCHQ the leaders of various unions have no doubt been guided by a variety of considerations—some to do with their political positions and others based on tactical assessments of the situation. Underlying all of these divergences, however, there has been a striking similarity. All union leaders have seen the importance of defending the right to organise and all have been wary of going too far and starting a genuine struggle against the state.

In this they have provided an excellent illustration of a position argued by this journal over the last few months: the activities of the trade union leaders have fitted very precisely with our conception of them as a *trade union bureaucracy*.

Because they are a social layer which depends for their existence on the existence of trade unions even the most right wing of them has been forced to defend trade union organisation. But because their own reason for existence is the continuation of the bargaining process with the employer, none of them have been prepared to challenge the basic definition laid down by the employer: the national interest has remained a holy cow to which they have all genuflected.

The apparent exception to all this was the call for a day of action. It came from, of all people, Len Murray, just four days before the action, as a result of a highly unsatisfactory meeting with Thatcher.

Framework

First of all, it is important to be quite clear that, even at its first utterance, Murray's call was never a strident appeal for militant action. He restricted himself to asking the members of other unions for, as he put it: 'just and proper action in defence of a freedom intrinsic to democracy that is and must be our paramount concern.'

The extent of Murray's call for action was, even then, determined by the framework of bureaucracy. Murray insisted that the TUC could not call for strike action since this was a matter that constitutionally concerned the executives of individual unions.

Nevertheless, this did represent a shift of position in a campaign which had, up till then, been dominated by keeping very quiet about the prospect of solidarity action. One popular explanation is that Murray felt personally outraged by the way in which Thatcher dismissed his representations and accused trade union members of at least potential disloyalty.

Such a view is mistaken. No doubt Murray was outraged when Thatcher granted the General Secretary of the TUC just eight minutes of an audience on such an important issue. No doubt Murray was indignant at being accused of being a potential subversive. No doubt his indignation was both genuine and deeply felt. But there is a more important factor underlying his actions.

Behind Murray's purely personal pique lies the recognition of the fact that if the bureaucracy of the unions is to be taken seriously by the ruling class and its representatives then from time to time it needs to show that it commands real social forces and thus is worth taking seriously.

The TUC has, of course, done rather well

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at the negative side of this social role over the last few years: few could doubt that it has an important part to play in settling, or rather selling out, disputes. There is a long run of disputes, including most prominently ASLEF, the health workers and Warrington, in which the TUC has demonstrated its ability to hold the line.

But this negative side is not the sole aspect of the bureaucracy's claim to be taken seriously. It also needs to prove that it can mobilise people and that therefore it is worth placating. And it also needs to demonstrate to its own members that it is doing something, that it is rather more than a paper tiger.

Thatcher's cavalier treatment of Murray and company was a reflection of the fact that she, and the ruling class, no longer believe that it is vital to take every little move of the bureaucracy that seriously. Even if the time is not ripe to dispense with their services, they certainly do not need to be taken that seriously, reasons Thatcher.

Murray's little left turn is his response to that. It is his attempt to show that the trade union bureaucracy can still make life difficult for the Tories and therefore should be awarded rather more respect. Personal pique is at best the vehicle for a reaction which springs from the social position of the bureaucracy. If the ruling class will not negotiate with us, thinks Murray, then they will have to learn that we are important people: let us show them that we represent real forces.

Even this limited left stumble bears all the marks of bureaucracy. Murray's call came out of the blue, after several weeks of public debate during which no effort had been

made by any section of the bureaucracy to go out and lay the groundwork for industrial action by other sections of workers.

But stumble or not, there is no doubt that the call was taken up with enthusiasm by large numbers of workers. Not only was there a large stoppage in the civil service and solidarity action from parts of the public sector, but even some private engineering factories which have been silent since the early seventies were out.

In a number of places it was the rank and file that took the lead. Some stewards committees that had only narrowly and hesitantly voted to put strike action to a mass meeting found their recommendations endorsed overwhelmingly. In other places calls for a demonstration turned into votes for strike action.

Positive

On the other hand, the stoppage was patchy. For example in the mines, where the NUM leadership have often talked about the need for action to defend trade union rights, there seems to have been very little strike action.

The balance of the day, however, was very positive. It did what many previous days of action, most notably the disastrous 14 May 1980, failed to do: it gave workers a sense of their own strength and built their confidence.

It means that there is now the possibility of strike action should the government dismiss people for refusing to surrender their union cards.

The fact that the government have the possibility of recovering from this setback is

entirely due to the way in which the rest of the campaign has been conducted. The stress on not endangering national security meant from the beginning that the workers at GCHQ were placed in a passive role. Any collective action they might take would be bound to endanger security.

Consequently, the initiative inside GCHQ has rested with the management and the government. They have been able to approach the workers as isolated individuals and put very heavy pressure on them to sign. Because these workers were not engaged in any form of collective action, it was relatively easy for management to lean on them one by one. Just as the build-up outside of GCHQ was going on, there was a build-up of management pressure inside the place.

The factors of the possibility of the sack and loss of earnings loom large in any dispute. Inside GCHQ they loomed even larger and there was not even the sense of collective strength which comes from a dispute to counter them. The people who did stand out against the threats deserve our admiration.

Whether the brave resisters are quickly sacked and thus provide the focus for a bigger wave of protest or whether the government works slowly towards some sort of deal is, unfortunately, entirely in the hands of the government.

The sharper minds in the government must see the advantages of delay, but this whole episode shows how prone to miscalculation and error the government is.

Since the election there have been a number of upsets for the government and these have had the effect of shaking Tory confidence. It remains the case, however,

that these have been unforced errors by the Tories and thus have not proved fatal for their strategy.

In general there are two sorts of pressure that force governments to make mistakes and serious miscalculations. The fall of Ted Heath illustrated both. Under pressure from the miners he announced a three day week in an attempt to isolate them from other workers. He failed because the overall level of class struggle was such that it seemed to other workers that what was going on was the fault of the government rather than the miners.

Having failed to defeat the miners quickly, Heath then came under new pressure, this time from the ruling class, who effectively told him: 'settle or get out'. The combination of these two pressures were enough to force him to call and lose an election.

It is obvious that the situation today is quite different. The Thatcher government is not under either or both of those sorts of pressures. The errors and mistakes have a much more accidental quality than that.

In reality, they are not *entirely* unforced. There are divisions of opinion inside the ruling class as to what should be done next. These differences, over for example the future of the Falklands adventure or the extent to which it is possible and desirable to control local government expenditure directly, are important and real in terms of the balance of parliamentary debate. But they are hardly significant in terms of the class war.

Failures

To the extent that the ruling class is exerting pressure on the Thatcher government it is united; it wants them to make sure the real wages of employed workers are kept under control. From the point of view of the ruling class, this is one of the great failures of the Thatcher government. The wages of employed workers, particularly in private industry, have actually risen over the last few years. In contrast, they fell quite sharply under the last Labour government.

What is certainly not the case is that this pressure might lead to a substantial change of direction, of the sort needing a new



Militant Murray

government to carry through. And it is also certainly not the case that the working class movement is subjecting the government to the sort of organised pressure that would be needed to shift governmental power in any significant way.

It is important to be quite clear about all of this for two reasons. One of the currently fashionable arguments on the left is that the way to defeat the Tories, or at least the Thatcher wing of the Tories, is to build the broadest possible alliance of forces, including such 'progressive' Tories as it might be possible to recruit. This broad popular front, it is argued, will isolate Thatcher and mount sufficient pressure to force her to change her mind.

There are numerous current examples of this sort of thinking. The theory is provided by the Eurocommunist wing of the Communist Party around Eric Hobsbawm and the magazine *Marxism Today*. The practice is provided by the campaign over Cheltenham and the defence of the GLC.

The reality is that such popular fronts do not mobilise pressure on Thatcher or anybody else. There is no evidence whatsoever that recruiting George Tremlett or any other local London Tory has put any significant

pressure on the Tory government. And there is no evidence that Tory MPs or whoever, expressing concern about Thatcher's plans for GCHQ, exerts any pressure on the government to change their minds.

In fact the Labour Party refused to vote on the issue of GCHQ in the House of Commons debate on the explicit grounds that, if it came to a vote, those Tory MPs who expressed 'disquiet' would rally round the government and save its face by giving it a massive majority.

The only thing which has come at all near forcing a change of line on the government is the stubborn persistence of the workers at GCHQ and strike action outside. The Tory opposition to Thatcher's plans does not go so far as endangering the interests of their government, let alone the real interests of the ruling class. And to buy the half-hearted support of these people, the organisation and mobilisation of workers has been neglected. That is the real price that is paid for a few speeches from 'progressive' capitalists.

Chesterfield

The other current mistake caused by thinking that there is considerable pressure on the government is that of overestimating the strength of our own side. This sort of illusion is currently being bolstered by the little electoral revival the opinion polls show the Labour Party to be experiencing, and by the Benn campaign in Chesterfield.

The fact that Benn won in Chesterfield means that overestimates of a revival are a particularly left illusion, assiduously fostered by papers like *Socialist Action*.

Whatever the reality, there is no doubt that the Benn victory has been seen as a major triumph for the left. It therefore does have some effect on reality. It has given a new confidence to the Bennites, and indeed to wider layers of activists. But we also have to stand against the wilder belief that the result represented a turning point of historic dimensions in the class war.

The Chesterfield election measured votes and not the relative strength of classes in struggle. A parliamentary vote is essentially a token, a passive permission for somebody else to act on your behalf. It is very different from a commitment to change the world yourself.

And the Chesterfield result cannot be taken as indicating any sort of *left* victory. The Benn campaign was in no way a left activity. The key speakers included not only the likes of Kinnock, new found friend of Ronald Reagan, but also Roy Hattersley and others on the unreconstructed right.

The campaign was conducted by the new, united, respectable, harmless Labour Party, and not the fiery monster of the joint imaginations of the *Daily Mail* and the erstwhile Bennite left.

A clear appreciation of the actual balance of class forces is important if we are to have any serious discussion of steps that can be taken to strengthen the working class movement. This issue has become particularly crucial given the holding of the Broad Left Organising Committee's conference at the end of this month.

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The main political force organising the conference is the Militant Tendency. We look at their political positions in rather more detail later in this issue of the Review. The conference, however, will not be exclusively made up of supporters of that newspaper and it undoubtedly reflects an important current of opinion inside the labour movement today. What happens at the BLOC conference is therefore of substantial moment for developing a fightback against the Tories.

Although some of the people involved in the conference will have a perspective simply of winning positions in the trade union bureaucracy, the dominant view is likely to be a little more sophisticated than that.

The Militant and those around them will argue that it is necessary to combine an approach which has a focus on the rank and file with one which seeks to win elected positions in the trade union bureaucracy.

At one level there is nothing wrong with this sort of approach. Changing society involves changing the trade union movement from bottom to top and no social revolution will take place in Britain without very substantial changes in the leadership of the trade unions. The real problem is one of priorities.

If you start from the belief that the British working class movement has a high level of organisation and combativity and is moving inexorably to the left under the pressure of the capitalist crisis, then clearly the issue is one of winning control of the unions in order to bring the leadership in line with the sentiments of the membership. You might still argue for rebuilding at the base, but in reality you hold the opinion that much of that work has already been done by the objective development of the crisis.

If you start from the belief that the British working class movement has been on the retreat for the last few years and that its organisation and confidence has been eroded by the pressures of unemployment and class collaboration, then you have a radically different perspective.

Guide

Although you might still believe that it will, in the future, be necessary to win the leadership of the national union organisations, you will concentrate your efforts for the time being on the groundwork of rebuilding the rank and file base that can make union leadership a serious proposition.

Stated as abstract propositions these two perspectives might not seem to diverge too much, but they are not simply abstract views of the world. They are also ideas which guide what people do in the reality of the class struggle. The perspective of believing that the working class is on the offensive has to be implemented in the real world. In that real world the emphasis on winning leadership positions which follows from the general political analysis will tend to dominate.

It will tend to dominate not because the people who hold it are naturally corrupt office-seekers who want nothing more than a chance to get a nice office and a chance to sell out the working class, but because of the nature of the current situation.

The very weakness and lack of organ-



Benn's back!

isation in the movement means that determined activists, *despite* their political positions, are under enormous pressure simply to keep the union organisation together and thus to run for higher and higher office.

So in practice the wrong assessment of the political situation in the working class leads to a pressure to win election for offices. And once those offices are won, then the lack of an active and combative rank and file creates further problems.

A union official whose members are constantly in action, always threatening to turn him or her out of the comfortable office, always pressurising the official in this way and that, is under different stresses to one that occupies the same office in a period of membership passivity.

In the current period, to become a union bureaucrat means that the only consistent pressures you are likely to be under are those to accommodate and collaborate. And because social being determines social consciousness such a bureaucrat *inevitably* starts to bend and accommodate.

The political adaptations, the shift to the right, which we can trace in the careers of the left union leaders from Hugh Scanlon to Kevin Roddy, are the result of those pressures, not the cause. So the idea that the situation can be substantially improved by electing even purer trade union leaders is as much a myth as the notion that if only purer MPs got elected then the Labour Party would not sell out once in government.

To the extent that the BLOC conference discusses these differences in perspectives seriously, it will be a very important step in the rebuilding of the movement.

All of the events of the last few months since the conference was called confirm that there is a serious need to rebuild. From major confrontations like GCHQ and Warrington through the union retreat on the political levy to the failure of 'left' trade union leaders in less well-publicised disputes like the current bakery strike in Liverpool, point to the weakness of the movement.

Bolshevik

Rebuilding can only start from a recognition of the need for principled inflexibility both in terms of a focus on the rank and file and on the impossibility of achieving any serious gains in the system. But that principled position needs to be combined with sufficient tactical flexibility to permit a response to developments in the class struggle.

The movement will not be constructed simply by speeches about the strategy of the Bolshevik party in 1908. That is a vital part of organising and building the revolutionary organisation that must be at the heart of the rebuilding, but it is not that rebuilding itself. The problem is to relate those general concerns about changing the world to the concrete concerns of large numbers of workers.

That, essentially, calls for agitation around real struggles.

Militant's short cut to socialism

Militant are heavily involved in the Broad Left conference taking place this month. **Ralph Darlington** looks at their strategy for industry, and how it fits in to their general politics.

One aspect of the politics of the Militant is their vision of constant left advance inside the Labour Party. As Liverpool councillor Derek Hatton informs us: 'The working people of this country are ready to reclaim the Labour Party for socialist policies.'

The downturn and its *actual* impact inside the Labour Party have highlighted Militant's flight from reality. The Benn bandwagon of three years ago, whatever the internal constitutional changes enacted, did not stand a chance against the combined pressure of electoralism and the sabotage of the trade union bureaucrats.

The recent spectacle of Roy Hattersley and Tony Benn, traditional representatives of the party's right and left, burying all their differences in a united bid to win the Chesterfield by-election for Labour has shown how far there has been a shift to the right inside the party.

This is something Militant consistently refuse to come to terms with. Every week in their newspaper they continue to argue that the party has been changed beyond all recognition, is moving inexorably to the left, and is *the* force for social change.

Ripple

Labour's devastating electoral defeat last June, we were informed, was because genuine socialist policies hadn't been projected to the electorate. Shortly afterwards, the election of the so-called dream ticket of Neil Kinnock and Roy Hattersley was greeted with the *Militant* front page headline 'Labour Must Unite'. They refused to acknowledge that it indicated any change at all in Labour's 'radical measures': 'Moreover, any attempt to roll back these policy gains will meet with ferocious opposition from Labour's rank and file.' The recent expulsion of six Militant supporters from the Labour Party in Blackburn hardly created a ripple anywhere.

The last few months have accelerated Militant's own swing rightwards. They are under constant pressure to adapt to the environment they have chosen to operate within and blunt their politics.

When the Labour Co-ordinating Committee ditched their left wing policy credentials to back Kinnock's new look party, Militant remained silent. Similarly, they have studiously avoided any criticism of Tony Benn's willingness to woo traditional Labour voters with policies of moderation in Chesterfield.

Any such move would further jeopardise

their already badly shaken position with the party leadership. Left wing criticism of Benn's new allies on Labour's right wing would not go down very well in the party at the moment. Worse, it might alienate potential voters.

The pressure to adapt to the right is a fundamental part of electoral politics. As a result, as Benn moves closer to Kinnock Militant are forced to move behind them or risk sharp and potentially fatal conflict with the party. Militant end up acting as a left cover for Benn and thus for Kinnock.

Likewise, their industrial strategy is further evidence of notions of left advance camouflaging an actual rightward shift.

The electoral gains of the Left in unions like the POEU and NUR are offered as evidence of the forward march of labour. Militant's newspaper regularly denounces those socialists who argue there is a downturn in the working class movement as 'the Jeremiahs and pessimists of the labour movement'.

Militant never offer an examination of the real balance of class forces in Britain. Upturn, downturn, ebbs and flows in struggle, all are absent. There is no analysis of the relative strengths of shop steward organisation or the role of trade union bureaucrats. Instead we are regularly offered a glib, superficial world that sees the working class constantly on the offensive against the Tories.

To appreciate quite how extreme this can be we need to consider their own highly optimistic perspectives for the 1980s:

'The victory of the Conservatives in the May election (1979) marks a decisive change in the history of Britain. It will prove to be as decisive as the election of the Tories in 1924. But it will have even more profound consequences.

'A Tory government is seen as the traditional enemy by the working class—as the direct representative of big business. It can therefore expect no co-operation from the mass of the working class...The present Tory government, far more than the Baldwin government of 1924, is preparing the way for an explosion of hatred against it and against the ruling class.

'The level of struggles opening up will dwarf even that of 1970-74. It is by no means certain that the Tories will succeed in maintaining themselves in power for a whole term of office. Even if the Tory government survives it will only be for one parliamentary term.'

The centrepiece of their industrial strategy over the last few years has been the building of new Broad Lefts in the unions. Militant have filled the vacuum left by the declining Communist Party. Many of their leading members in the Broad Lefts now occupy positions in the lower echelons of the trade union bureaucracy.

Whatever Militant may say, the Broad Lefts are not organised with the explicit purpose of intervening to assist workers' struggles. Instead, they are essentially electoral machines whose ultimate goal is to remove right wing union officials and replace them with left wingers. For Militant, the real divide is between right and left, not rank and file and the official union leadership.

Yet it is because today's new Broad Lefts are being built not in the fairyland world Militant imagine but amidst the real downturn in class struggle that they have become even more susceptible to orientation on the union apparatus. The actual shift to the right inside the working class movement over recent years has succeeded in making Militant's efforts at leadership demoralising for workers in struggle.

Illusion

One example of how Militant's refusal to be uncompromising in relation to the union bureaucracy can lead to disaster was in the POEU, a union dominated by a new Broad Left. The union's campaign against Mercury and privatisation ended in utter defeat. Yet the POEU Broad Left and Militant's strategy within the Broad Left directly contributed to the debacle.

Throughout the dispute Militant fostered the illusion that mere control of a union executive meant major left advance. In practice they worked *against* the development of independent rank and file initiative to win the dispute by exclusively campaigning for their members' loyalties to be extended to the Broad Left. They even opposed all-out strike action, encouraging the view that selective strikes were sufficient to stop the Tories.

In reality the POEU Broad Left executive members acted exactly in the same way as the old 'right' officials they had recently replaced. They demoralised and then sold out their membership in classic style. Militant's role was indistinguishable from the Broad Lefts.

The pressure on Militant members to move right can be vicious. Take the CPSA. Last year when virtually every DHSS office in Liverpool walked out on strike in protest at job losses it was leading Broad Left and Militant supporters like Kevin Roddy who immediately got them back to work and restricted the strike to just two offices. Militant members argued against any escalation.

Perhaps the most glaring recent example of the consequences of Militant's industrial strategy is the capturing of union positions in the Bakers Union, headed by Militant supporter and union general secretary Joe Marino. Militant have not bothered to build up a Broad Left grouping in the union.

Extra-parliamentary activity, strikes and so on, are essentially subordinate to what goes on inside the Labour Party and parliament. The real role of the new Broad Lefts in the unions is to deliver block votes for control of the party manifesto.

Secondly, the machinery offered by Militant to achieve socialism is fundamentally the same as that which has failed Labour repeatedly in the past. It is unashamedly a parliamentary road to socialism. Militant make the same mistake as their supposed adversaries in assuming the state machine is neutral. They seem to think that people who run the state institutions are impartial civil servants willing to do the bidding of whatever party gets a majority in parliament.

By 'workers' control' revolutionaries mean workers' power, taking control of workplaces from below, smashing the old capitalist state machine and replacing it with new institutions of workers' councils. All that has been ditched by Militant. Instead 'workers' control' is merely state ownership of industry, to be inaugurated from above, and is there to strengthen the existing state apparatus not to destroy it, even after nationalising the 200 top monopolies. Militant inform us that 'within a generation it would mean the abolition of classes'. Not only is socialism possible through parliament—but parliament is the key organ which will reform capitalism out of existence

into communism.

What Militant do not consider is that ruling class resistance does not have to happen *immediately* after a left wing government has been elected when it could most rely upon genuine working class support and loyalty from below. The more astute sections of the ruling class are more likely to wait until the balance of class forces has been shifted sufficiently in *their* favour and judged a suitable moment to act against it.

It is quite possible for big business and their friends in the state apparatus to adopt a policy of co-operation with the left reformist government leaders, provided of course they and the trade union bureaucracy were prepared to extend a certain amount of co-operation in return. Such a strategy would be implemented with the long term perspective of gradually whittling away the strength and cohesion of the workers' movement and its ability to resist a ruling class offensive at a later stage.

Amidst general economic crisis, with mounting unemployment and rampant inflation it may be possible to undermine the Labour government's popularity and thereby prepare the ground for a full-blooded counter-attack upon it. Such a scenario is not an imaginary twist of possible events. There have been a number of left wing governments elected to power with mass popular support that have faced this dilemma, including those in Germany 1918,

Spain 1936 and Chile 1973.

That is exactly what would happen to a left Labour government in Britain. It would be concerned to defend itself from economic and political sabotage. The key problem would be seen as maintaining the authority and legitimacy of parliament and its legislative programme. Its prime concern would be to restabilise the economy, to do nothing that would rock the boat and precipitate a fatal conflict. As a consequence it would round severely on strikers.

We can see a similar approach being adopted in microscopic form today by Militant-influenced Liverpool City Council. They not only refused to concede the residential social workers' recent claim for reduced working hours but pointedly tried to dampen down the struggle escalating into strike action. As one Labour councillor pointed out: 'If the escalation goes any further, as far as I'm concerned they are being irresponsible.' Even Militant members actually found themselves opposed to any escalation, because their employer happens to be a 'socialist council'.

Workplace

Ironically, Militant always claim they would rely upon the strength of the trade unions to prevent any fatal moves against a Labour government by the ruling class. Similarly in Liverpool time and time again Militant councillors have stressed they cannot defy the Tories' spending limits alone. They need trade unionists prepared to take industrial action, if necessary, to ensure left policies are implemented.

Trade union strength is not something *fixed* regardless of conditions. The power of workers depends upon the level of organisation, confidence and political consciousness that exists in every workplace. That is something that can't be relied upon to just develop spontaneously. Nor can it be turned on or off like a tap.

The pre-condition for a powerful workers' movement able to defend a Labour government or Liverpool City Council is a confidence in its own power generated from and steered in dozens of earlier struggles to defend wages and conditions. Trade union organisation has to be built up *independent* of reliance on MPs or councillors and often in *opposition* to them.

Militant do not see *economic struggles* as something on which to build the *political consciousness* of workers, merely as an adjunct to reform from above. For Militant the fight for higher wages or shorter hours is economic, while the struggle to defend Liverpool City Council is political. In reality there is no such division. Success over the small issues builds confidence and helps the general political fight. In contrast Militant's electoral strategy is likely to prevent the development of the kind of trade union muscle which they claim could back up the manoeuvring of MPs and councillors when the crunch comes.

In their private meetings their members would admit that far from a Labour government being pushed continually leftwards, it would instead flounder and end up betraying its own supporters.

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Similarly, despite a public pretence that Liverpool City Council is united in its battle with the Tories, they would secretly admit they are facing increasing pressure to step back from confrontation. Neil Kinnock and the Labour Party nationally are almost certainly not going to sanction a potentially bruising illegal battle over spending cuts. Kinnock believes instead that councillors should stay in office to minimise the impact of cuts in jobs and services.

Furthermore, there is a bloc of right wing councillors who may well defect to the Liberals and Tories rather than vote in favour of an overshoot budget. This would allow the 'soft left' councillors the chance to let themselves off the hook by abandoning the struggle before it really begins.

But on both the national scale and in Liverpool Militant refuse to honestly and openly discuss such obstacles and the necessary tactics to overcome them. As they put it:

'The broad masses will have to go through the experience of seeing the programme of Tribunism in action, of left reformism and its inadequacy to deal with capitalist crisis.'

In other words, the whole experience of a Labour government or Liverpool City Council being knocked off course would arouse a still undefeated working class movement. This would be reflected in a swing to the left inside the Labour Party with further influence for Militant and the prospect of more radical measures to follow. As Militant inform us:

'An inexorable process of turning and moving towards the left will take place in the labour movement as a whole, and will turn the Labour Party into a left reformist or even a centrist direction...the working class will find that industrial action is not enough to solve their problems, and that political action is necessary.'

'Once they take the road of political action, there is only one way they can go, and that is to try and change the organisation which was built by the trade unions to solve their problems and that will be to move into the Labour Party with the purpose of transforming it to meet their needs.'

'As under the hammer blow of events the Labour Party will move to a more and more radical position, the masses will stream in their tens and hundreds of thousands to active membership of the Labour Party.'

'Under these circumstances all the attempts to compromise between left and right wings of the Labour Party, particularly under the pressure of right wing trade union leaders will not succeed...there is not the slightest hope or future for the right wing. It is doomed in spite of all its frantic efforts to maintain its position, on the basis of decades of domination of the LP and the trade unions. The ideas of Marxism will gain enormous support.'

In other words, *whatever happens*, the job of Militant members is to stay inside the Labour Party, gain positions in the party apparatus and by building up a Marxist current gradually capture the party. Defeat in Liverpool will likewise only strengthen the

influence of Marxism in the city.

However, this imaginary scenario of an unrelenting shift to the left is not necessarily what would happen at all. It's true the most politically advanced shopfloor workers could be radicalised and move towards revolutionary ideas. But the working class is only powerful when the vanguard of the class can lead the less confident, less experienced. That is not a foregone conclusion. It depends on a strategic approach that differs in every respect from Militant's.

The majority of the working class does not automatically and spontaneously move to the left, even when it begins to lose faith in left reformist leaders. Much of it can drop into apathy or demoralisation. The failure of Mitterrand's experiment in France has not led Communist Party and Socialist Party members to attempt to organise workers' resistance to the new employers' offensive, sanctioned by the 'left' government. Instead, many have found themselves paralysed, divided and demoralised. The atmosphere has been exploited by the French Nazi National Front.

'The majority of the working class does not automatically and spontaneously move to the left, even when it begins to lose faith in reformist leaders'

It is also not the case that the reformist political organisations like the Labour Party would *automatically* swing to the left. In Chile the Communist Party and the Allende wing of the Socialist Party swung to the *right* as the final confrontation with the ruling class approached, trying to get an alliance with the Christian Democrats and falling over themselves to recognise the constitutional and non-political character of the armed forces. Similarly in France today the Socialist Party has swung rightwards to defend the government's austerity measures as unfortunate but necessary.

Of course it *is* possible for the election of a left Labour government coming into conflict with the ruling class to spark off a groundswell of rebellion among many of its erstwhile supporters who want to go much further than their reformist leaders will sanction. But such a social crisis will not have a successful outcome unless there is a powerful body of revolutionary socialists operating in every workplace *offering an alternative* to such disillusioned and newly radicalised workers.

That revolutionary socialist alternative cannot be simply an *ideological* one. It has to be *practical* as well. There has to be a revolutionary organisation that supports every workers' struggle by providing the kind of leadership that can win them, however embarrassing to a Labour government. It has to be a revolutionary alternative that warns workers not to place their reliance on

'left' MPs, trade union leaders or councillors but instead shows that in workers' self-activity there is an alternative to the hesitations and betrayals of reformism.

Militant claim that it is possible to build that alternative pole of attraction *inside the Labour Party*. Past experience teaches us otherwise. Militant spends its time in the Labour Party passing resolutions about what a Labour government should do in the future. It sees various manoeuvres within the party machine as more important than workers' struggles taking place outside. What Militant do not do is to organise rank and file workers for a struggle against the left reformist leaders in the one place where workers can rely on their own strength: the workplaces.

The very nature of the Labour Party's structure maintains this separation of the political and industrial. For Militant offering a practical alternative inside the Labour Party in Liverpool means campaigning for trade unionists to support the Labour Party in the City Council, not in proving the relevance of their politics in leading day to day struggles.

The problem of reliance on left reformists does not simply arise at the moment of profound social crisis. It begins long before that. In the crunch approaching Liverpool City Council Militant have deliberately fostered illusions that the Labour Party, nationally and locally, will unite in backing their stand against the Tories. Derek Hatton has triumphantly declared: 'We are confident that we will have the full support of the Labour Party leadership. Mr Straw and Dr John Cunningham have indicated they don't think we have any alternative.'

Throughout the City Council campaign Militant have acted as cheerleaders for the Labour group, left and right. At a recent public meeting a Militant member said: 'Thank goodness we have got a socialist council that will stick to its commitments.' They have not produced one note of caution, let alone criticism of the Labour Party's tactics.

They have helped nurture amongst a layer of council shop stewards a sense of loyalty to the Council which has succeeded in disarming many workers from preparing for the kind of independent all-out strike action that would be the *only* guarantee that jobs and services are defended, regardless of how left wing the council.

Let us repeat: for revolutionary socialism to act as a pole of attraction it has to be both theoretical and practical. That means *both political and organisational independence from left reformism*. In fact the arguments as to whether socialists should stay in the Labour Party are very much a repeat of those held some 80 years ago. The example of Germany in 1918 provides compelling evidence that, put to the test in a major social upheaval, the consequences of staying inside a reformist party lead to catastrophe.

Militant, originally revolutionaries entering the Labour Party to win reformists to the notion of an independent revolutionary socialist party, have themselves ended up as a left reformist tendency within it, accepting its entire parliamentary and electoralist approach.

The real lessons of UCS

Scott-Lithgow workers backed down from occupying against redundancy at the end of February. Dave Sherry looks at the background to this dispute and at the 'tradition of UCS' that the Scott-Lithgow stewards invoke.

For the last two years workers at the Scott Lithgow shipyard on the Clyde have been living under the threat of closure. Last month the Tories announced that British Shipbuilders were washing their hands of the yard, and that the workforce had two options: total closure and the loss of 4,000 jobs by March — or privatisation of the rig building operation with the retention of very few of the jobs.

Not so long ago the national shipbuilding unions had a formal policy of 'one out all out'. In other words, any attempt to impose compulsory redundancies would be opposed by an all out shipyard strike. However that particular pretence was abandoned when the CSEU officials capitulated over the 'survival plan for the industry' in January.

Deprived of one channel of officialdom the shop stewards merely turned to another, the avowedly left-wing STUC. Together, they announced that 'they would mount a UCS style campaign' to oppose the threat, and that they would 'appeal to all sections of the Scottish people for support.'

When the first wave of redundancies was announced in January, the shop stewards unveiled their campaign. At a mass meeting they came up with the idea of a 'work on'.

As workers were sacked they were asked to ignore their redundancy notices and report to the yard for work as usual. Stewards

would clock them on and find them work to do. Their wages would be made up from a weekly levy of the rest of the workforce.

The most obvious criticism of the 'work on' is that shipyard workers are now paying other shipyard workers to work for their common exploiter—British Shipbuilders. But there are other, more practical problems with the whole strategy. As the lay-offs progress the situation will soon be reached where more workers are claiming from the levy than are actually paying into it. If the 'work on' continues, at the end of March all 4,000 will be claiming from the levy!

But fundamentally the 'work on' is self-defeating. Because it's neither an occupation nor a strike, the workers are continuing to work and complete the few remaining orders. Unbelievably, the stewards argue that this proves that the workers are responsible, rallying public opinion to their side. Shop stewards' convenor Duncan McNeill says: 'We have a responsibility to our customers and to the yard. Because of that we will continue to work normally.' The stewards even agreed that completed orders could leave the yards.

This is suicide. By continuing to work normally the workers are working themselves out of a job, and by handing over completed orders, they are throwing away the only leverage they have on the government and British Shipbuilders.

At the beginning of this month the workforce looked dead and buried. The government felt cocky and tried to rush through a quick privatisation deal with Trafalgar House, the giant engineering and shipping multi-national, which contributes thousands of pounds to Tory Party funds. The bones of the deal were that Trafalgar House would get the yard and facilities for nothing, plus a large public handout. It

would then re-employ only 1,000 workers. But this time the Tories had gone too far, and the announcement of the deal sparked a rank and file rebellion. 4,000 workers struck without any lead from the senior stewards.

At the mass meeting the next day feeling was so high that the stewards were compelled to take a firmer stand. Overtime was banned and the workforce refused to release a boat for sea trials.

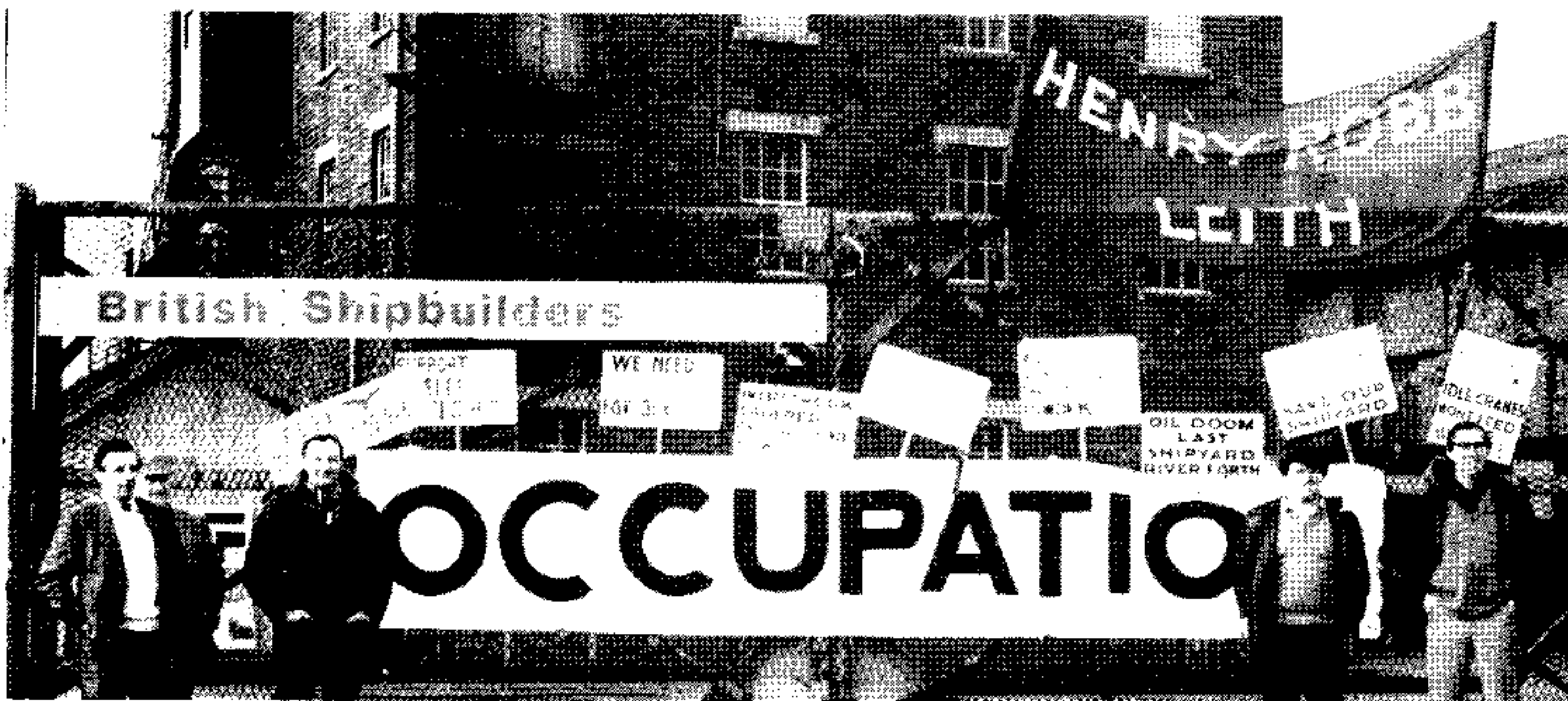
More significantly, the meeting voted for occupation if there were any further attempts to force through compulsory redundancies and privatisation without the shop stewards' agreement.

While the walkout showed the workforce still have fight left in them, it didn't go far enough. The lack of organisation and leadership at rank and file level means there is no credible alternative to the senior stewards.

The stewards are not opposed to privatisation and job losses in principle — merely the manner in which privatisation is to be achieved. And because that willingness to compromise lies at the heart of their whole approach, then it is the negotiating skill of the shop stewards and not the power of the rank and file that will be pitted against the might of British Shipbuilders and the Tory government. With the workers now safely back at the 'work on', the stewards see the occupation threat as a bargaining counter to be used on the negotiating table, and not the key instrument in an offensive struggle against the government's plans. A real opportunity to generate a fight has been squandered.

The tragedy is that the one day walk out *did* force the Tories to hold off on the initial deal. It *did* force Britoil to extend the deadline on their rig contract. It proved that mass action can force the employers to make real concessions.

At every stage the shop stewards and their political mentors at the STUC have stubbornly refused to prepare the workforce for the crunch. Not only is their strategy one that avoids confrontation, it is a recipe for demoralising the workers, encouraging them not to *fight* compulsory redundancy but to



Occupied Henry Robb shipyard in Leith, Scotland

volunteer for it instead. Since the 'work on' started, hundreds have taken or applied for, voluntary redundancy.

This strategy wasn't plucked out of the air. It has a long pedigree. Its main proponents are not the 'right wing' trade union leaders, but those on the left.

At Scott-Lithgow the STUC claims that 'traditional strike action will play into the government's hands by alienating public opinion'. The 'work on' is a tactic that can win the hearts and minds of the Scottish people.

The Communist Party in Scotland, in the shape of miners' leader Mick McGahey claims the 'work on' can 'generate support through the calling of an all-Scottish Peoples Convention, representing every section of the Scottish People'.

It's a strategy that tries to emulate the famous Upper Clyde Shipbuilders 'work in' of the early seventies where, as legend would have it, a great working class victory was won.

For many people today, UCS is just a name. For others it is a legend. But what really happened, and what are the lessons for today?

In June 1971 the Heath government announced that Upper Clyde Shipbuilders was bankrupt, and that in line with the 'no lame ducks' policy, it wasn't going to provide the funds to save it. Out of the 8,500 workers, 6,000 were to be sacked and at least three of the five yards closed. An additional 20,000 jobs that depended on the yards were now in peril. The previous year unemployment on Clydeside had risen by 40 percent.

Troops

There was no alternative but to fight, and on 30 July, the shop stewards' co-ordinating committee announced 'they had taken over the yards' and were beginning a 'work in' to save the jobs.

It's difficult now, to convey the feeling on Clydeside that summer. At the start of the 'work in' the government and the authorities were worried. David 'Hammer' McNee, then chief constable for Glasgow, had phoned Heath to warn him that the police couldn't guarantee order in the city if the yards were forcibly closed. Aware that the police in the area might not be able to contain a situation involving thousands of workers, the Tory cabinet actually postponed the closure announcement for two weeks to allow them to bring troops back from Northern Ireland.

When the government's liquidator was appointed he was told by local police chiefs: 'We can get you into the yards, but don't expect us to try and get the workers out.' They were not willing to take any action that might provoke a situation that they couldn't control.

The initial response to the 'work in' was magnificent. Within a few days a call for solidarity action brought massive support. Two one-day general strikes occurred throughout the west of Scotland, and Glasgow saw its biggest street demonstrations since the days of the 'red Clyde' at the end of the first world war. Cash and telegrams of solidarity flooded in from all over the country. In virtually every organised workplace collections

were taken for the 'work in'.

But this spontaneous movement was not just based on sympathy for the shipbuilders. It served to inspire other workers up and down the land into taking action themselves, making the summer of 1971 a crucial turning point in the fortunes of Heath's government.

In the months that followed the idea spread that unemployment need not be passively accepted. Inspired by UCS, workers at Plessey in the west of Scotland, Fisher-Bendix in Liverpool and at Allis-Chalmers in north Wales all occupied their factories against redundancy.

Undoubtedly the UCS campaign slogan 'The Right to Work' made a deep impact on workers faced with rising unemployment. But even during the course of the UCS 'work in', the rotten political ideas that have dominated the shop stewards' movement in shipbuilding for the past decade, were apparent. They came to dominate the struggle and led it into a shabby compromise.

When the 'work in' ended a year after it started, 2,000 jobs had been lost, UCS had been broken up, and new work practices and wage structures were introduced, all aimed at breaking down demarcation and increasing productivity. The stewards at the Govan yards agreed to a 120 percent increase in productivity with a smaller workforce.

John Brown's of Clydebank, was taken over by the Texas-based Marathon Company. To clinch the deal, Jimmy Reid, leading CP steward, and the other stewards agreed to sell hard won conditions. They even signed a binding four year 'no strike' clause. These concessions badly undermined shopfloor organisation in all the Clyde yards. The agreements were used as models for elsewhere, and helped pave the way for the onslaught of the ensuing decade.

The UCS struggle which had begun so promisingly ended as a serious setback for the workforce involved. The outcome was not inevitable. It was a direct consequence of the policies and tactics employed by the leading shop stewards. Their emphasis, then as now, was on influencing the community and winning public opinion. That was the central core of the whole UCS campaign. As a result they dismissed any notion of militant struggle and self activity of the workers themselves.

It was their politics which led the stewards to call for a 'work in' rather than a real occupation. The Communist Party's pamphlet on UCS written in 1972, makes this clear:

'The problem facing the leaders of the UCS workers was to devise a new technique of struggle which would achieve their objective — to prevent redundancies and closures in what would be a tough struggle. A strike could play into the hands of the employers when they were set on closure anyway. A sit-in would have been difficult to maintain for long enough. It would also have given the employers a good excuse to attack the workers by arguing that the sit-in made it impossible to fulfil any contract and aggravated the bankrupt situation. This could have helped the Tories to alienate public opinion from support of the UCS

workers.'

It was Jimmy Reid who spelt out what this strategy would mean in practice. Addressing the Clydebank workforce at the start of their 'work in' he boasted:

'This is the first campaign of its kind in the history of trade unionism. We are not going to strike. We are not even having a sit in strike. We are *not* strikers. We are responsible people and we will conduct ourselves with dignity and discipline. We want to work, we are not wildcats. There will be no hooliganism, there will be no vandalism ... there will be *no* bevvying.'

Unfortunately it was neither 'public opinion' nor 'responsible people' like Jimmy Reid who'd frightened the chief constable of Glasgow and the Tory Cabinet. It was the possibility of militant action and the confrontation with 8,500 shipbuilders.

Sadly, that possibility was never allowed to materialise. Despite the mythology that surrounds UCS, it must be remembered that during the year-long 'work in' the yards were never occupied, production never halted, and over 2,000 workers took voluntary redundancy out of boredom or despair.

Reid even argued against the tactic of holding the completed boats until the jobs were safe although the majority of the workforce actually supported this tactic. Again his main concern was the need to protect the 'respectable' image:

'We've got to make sure that the government get no pretext for saying that these obscurantist saboteurs, the shop stewards and the workers, have blasted negotiations.'

Confrontation

In the middle of a national miners' strike, at a time when 13,000 Scottish vehicle workers were on strike in central Scotland, and the Tory government was in trouble, the UCS stewards were carefully avoiding any further confrontation in case they lost public support. For these 'left wing' leaders, negotiation and not class struggle was the way to deal with the employers. Inevitably that approach meant that the workforce were treated like a stage army.

While the famous leaders spoke, travelled, negotiated and even appeared on TV, the workers were only required to work. Occasionally they would attend mass meetings that were themselves more part of a publicity campaign than a democratic workers' assembly that would argue out and decide on tactics.

This allowed the government to avoid the confrontation that it feared so much. Heath had decided that at no stage in the crisis would the government precipitate a showdown. He was considerably aided by the shop stewards' refusal to increase the tempo of the struggle. In truth, neither side wanted a confrontation and the efforts of each to avoid one, both complemented and reinforced the circumstances by which it was prevented.

The 'work in' gave its leadership the appearance of being militant, without actually having to lead a fight. The alternative, a militant occupation, linked to a campaign for mass industrial action outside, was

definitely on. In 1972 the miners took on the Tories and hammered them. If they'd waited on public opinion winning them a wage rise, they'd be waiting yet.

The truth about the 'work in' and the attitude of its own leadership was revealed by the *Morning Star* when it reported during the 'work in':

'All UCS workers are determined to do their best for *their* yard. Now it really is teamwork. The feeling that you're letting the side down is one experienced by the very few latecomers — yes, even time-keeping has clocked new records of precision. It is summed up by the fact that the traditional lunchtime pint is downed minutes before the horn goes.'

The occupation of a factory is a tactic of class struggle and not an experiment in workers' control. Fantastic confusion has arisen about this matter since the UCS 'work in'. That leads to the kind of nonsense quoted in the article above being repeated time and time again.

In a hostile sea of capitalism it is impossible for real workers' control to exist in the isolated island of one factory. The very dependence of such a factory upon its outside suppliers destroys such an attempt even before it can get off the ground.

Dissipated

There was certainly no workers' control in UCS. The 'work in' never disputed the right of management to manage. The superficial appearance of defiance never challenged the government liquidator's authority. In fact the liquidator, Robert Smith, has himself argued that the effect of the 'work in' was grossly exaggerated and misunderstood:

'There has been a widespread misconception of the nature and extent of the "work in", often misquoted as a precedent for quite different industrial action of a totally obstructive or "sit in" nature. In any organisation negative or obstructive control can be exercised by any group of people on whom the operation depends, and it is generally to the credit of the shop stewards' co-ordinating committee that they have exercised their potential for negative control with considerable restraint, and have been ready to see that the practical needs of the situation demanded the co-operation of all the interested parties.'

Praise indeed from the Tory government's butcher!

The 'work in' was deliberately designed to take the political heat out of the situation. As a consequence the bulk of the massive amount of cash raised for the 'fighting fund' was diverted into providing a free labour force for the liquidator and not for any fighting. Most damning of all was the fact that the 'work in' actually dissipated the spirit of those involved in it. At the start of the 'work in' in July 1971, 69 percent of those made redundant were taking part. By December this figure had fallen to 27 percent and by the end in June 1972, less than 14 percent were involved. Precisely because the workforce were treated as a stage army, it became an army that dwindled away.

Workers facing redundancy, like the



Workers vote to continue occupation at UCS in 1971

thousands at Scott-Lithgow today, should take a cold hard look at UCS before they adopt this 'unique form of struggle'.

Instead of mobilising a mass struggle against unemployment and the UCS closures, the Communist Party-dominated shop stewards' committee directed their efforts towards a publicity campaign, with respectability as the keynote.

The campaign included 'A Scottish People's Convention' with church leaders on the platform. There was no demand for nationalisation. Most important of all, there was no attempt to direct the tremendous support they had received into a challenge to the Tory government.

It's hardly surprising that the employing class should pay such wonderful tributes to the 'statesmanship' of the UCS leaders.

The class collaborationist tactics which proved so dangerous in 1972 — a period when masses of workers were moving onto the offensive — have proved disastrous in the years that have followed. As far as shipbuilding is concerned, the UCS sell-out marks the beginning of a long decline.

Since British Shipbuilders was nationalised in 1977 the total workforce has been axed by 33 percent. Of course, much of the credit for this 'achievement' has to go to the last Labour government, and the national union leaders who've bent over backwards to appease both Labour and Tory administrations. Their acquiescence in the latest 'survival plan' is nothing new.

But the UCS legend, and the leaders who helped create it also have a lot to answer for. In 1977 Jimmy Airlie, still the convenor at Govan, recommended that the Govan workers should scab on their brothers on

Tyneside. He argued that Govan should accept an order transferred from Swan-Hunters, after the workers there had refused to accept the conditions that had been attached to the work being done in their yards. It proved conclusively that the rot had set in, and that fierce competition and scabbing had replaced the solidarity shown to the UCS workers in 1971.

Charade

A heavy price is being paid for the glaring weaknesses that have been allowed to develop in the Clyde shop stewards' organisation. The political weakness so apparent during the UCS 'work in' has been magnified under the more rigorous conditions of the downturn. These weaknesses are now much more decisive. That's why the Scott-Lithgow 'work on', an attempt to emulate UCS, is only a pale shadow of its dodgy predecessor. And if the Scott-Lithgow shop stewards continue with their charade, then the whole workforce is headed for a terrible defeat.

That defeat can still be avoided but only if 'the UCS style campaign' is quickly booted out of play. The shop stewards' fixation with a 'Scottish People's Convention' bringing together churches, councils, community associations and political charlatans of every hue, is simply a rehash of the old UCS formula. It's a formula that not only *can't* win, but one that actually prevents workers themselves from putting up an effective fight.

It's a short cut for those who've abandoned all faith in the ability of workers to fight at all.

Burning Reagan's fingers

The sight of US marines scuttling out of the Lebanon has pleased all socialists. The collapse of Reagan's 'peace keeping' plans is indeed a major setback for efforts to keep the region safe for imperialism. In the following three articles we look at the background to the events in the region.

The latest wave of fighting in Lebanon's long-running civil war has destroyed the US equipped army, led to the withdrawal of British and US 'peacekeeping' forces from Beirut, and rendered Phalangist President Gemayel's hold on power extremely fragile.

The constitution of the Lebanon, decreed by the French when they decolonised, guaranteed state power to the Maronite Christians. The justification for this was that, according to a dubious census, they constituted 51 percent of the population. They have, naturally enough, made sure there has never been another head-count—it is generally recognised that Muslims now constitute the majority of the population.

Pressure for political equality from the Muslim population and the creation of an armed neo-fascist Christian force, the Phalange militia, to stop them, led to the present civil war which exploded in 1975. The occasion which began the hostilities was the murder of a bus load of Palestinian refugees by the neo-fascists.

Civil war

The Palestinian presence in the area was the result of 'Black September', when the Jordanian state killed thousands and drove the rest across the border into the Lebanon. Once there, they found themselves allied with the mainly Muslim leftist forces.

The alliance of Palestinians and the Muslim left was very successful in the early phase of the civil war. They gained control of two thirds of the country, although neither group seems to have had any idea that they could use their military strength to take over the state. All they did was to open the road to Syria, which ended the fighting by sending the *Saiqa*, its stooge army of Palestinians, into the Lebanon, ostensibly to aid the left.

In the event, worried by the prospect that a leftist victory in Lebanon would lead to a rebellion at home, the Syrian-controlled forces turned on the left and, with US and Israeli support, tried to break the PLO. Despite the large scale slaughter of Palestinians, the Syrians were unable to win a decisive military victory and agreed to a Saudi inspired plan that granted equal representations for Muslims and Christians, but with the balance held by a president who was always to be a Christian.

The Phalangists, as the main Christian and right-wing force, had been getting weapons and money from Israel for years. Now this was stepped up as the Israelis

US and Israeli plans for a stable Phalangist-led regime in the Lebanon are in ruins. **Russ Escritt** looks at the background and prospects.

moved towards direct intervention in the country.

The second Israeli invasion, in 1982, had as its aim the crushing of the PLO military apparatus and driving them out of the Lebanon. In this it was largely successful. The PLO was quickly defeated and the majority of its fighters forced to withdraw to other Arab countries, none of which have a common border with Israel, and none of whose leaders have the slightest intention of translating their rhetoric into action against Israel.



The other aim of the invasion was less successful. The Israelis aimed to install the Phalangists in complete control of the Lebanese state and force the Syrians out of the north of the country. Their chosen puppet was Bashir Gemayel who quickly became president. However, he was soon assassinated and was replaced by his brother Amin. His government contained prominent Muslim politicians and seemed to enjoy some support.

In reality, his government was only stable while the Israeli army controlled Beirut. Once they withdrew, the civil war broke out again. It was at this point, a year ago, that the alleged 'peace keeping' force drawn from various interested imperialist parties, entered the arena.

In theory this was a force aimed at im-

partially holding the ring. It rapidly became clear that its real role was to help the Phalangists to rebuild their control. The US, for example, quickly began shelling Muslim positions.

The other external pressure on the situation is provided by the Syrians. It was they who backed the faction of the PLO led by Abu Musa which blamed Yassar Arafat for the military disasters, accusing him of being more interested in UN negotiations than in fighting Israel. Although they succeeded in driving him out of the Lebanon, the move has in fact backfired on both Abu Musa and the Syrians. Arafat has been able to rebuild his popularity with the Palestinian rank and file, particularly on the West Bank.

Syria's second string has been its backing of the Shi'ite Muslim Amal militia which has led the fighting against Gemayel in the last weeks.

The current crisis was precipitated when Chaffic Al Wassan, prime minister since 1980 and a Muslim, resigned. It was starkly obvious that the Gemayel government was an instrument of the Phalange. So widespread was that belief that, attacked by the united Muslim forces, the Lebanese army, lovingly rebuilt by the US and containing soldiers from all communities, fell apart almost at once. The 57 percent of soldiers of Muslim origin could see little point in dying to save a sectarian Christian regime.

The imminent fall of Gemayel is without doubt a defeat for the US and their clients, the Israelis. It is not, however, the start of a new era in the Lebanon. All the signs are that the outside parties involved will agree to some sort of deal.

One of the demands of the Muslim forces is for the tearing up of the 'May 17 Agreement', a deal Gemayel made with Israel which allows them to continue to occupy the south of the country until the Syrians leave the north. Another major demand is for the resignation of Gemayel for ordering the indiscriminate shelling of Muslim areas and the consequent slaughter of many civilians. The signs are that the Syrians are already pushing for a compromise, perhaps involving Gemayel remaining as president but with a new set of Muslim ministers.

Although the Syrians back the Shi'ites as a means of thwarting US and Israeli plans in the area, the last thing they want is for their allies to win and set up their own radical-sounding little state, since that would have unpredictable effects amongst the

population of Syria itself.

For their part, the US and the Israelis might settle for a UN based peace keeping force. This would be no hindrance to any of their vital interests. One such force has been in Southern Lebanon since 1978 without hindering Israeli military operations. For the US, its huge fleet just off Beirut remains as a powerful bargaining counter to ensure that things do not get out of hand.

If we take the Lebanon in isolation, there is little to stop the various ruling classes getting away with it. The working class in the Lebanon is tiny; the former prosperity of the country was based on its role in banking and trade rather than production. The opponents of the Phalange have also been excluded from jobs inside the Lebanon. The Palestinians in particular have lived mainly inside refugee camps on the margins of Lebanese society.

The Lebanon is in fact something of a trap in the Palestinian struggle. Although they see it as a base for military operations against Israel, the evidence is that, with massive US aid in terms of money and the most modern weapons, the Israelis are too powerful to be defeated militarily by the PLO.

Even a Muslim-run Lebanon would be no better than any other Arab state when it comes to the question of a real fight against Israel. From Egypt and Jordan to the more radical sounding, none of the rulers of these states are interested in the Palestinians as any more than a 'left cover'. The 'struggle against Israel' can serve as a wonderful excuse for keeping down living standards for the

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workers and peasants at home.

Fortunately neither Lebanon nor the Palestinians exist in isolation. The last few decades have seen a major transformation of the Middle East as a whole, with the emergence of a new working class and the first signs of it flexing its muscles.

Iran provides the clearest example of the growth of a proletariat in the region. In 1953 the working class numbered around 800,000; by 1978 it was over three million. It was this class, through actions like the oil workers' strike, that played a decisive role in the defeat of the Shah.

Nearer to the Lebanon, there is a large and militant working class in Egypt. In January 1977 President Sadat tried to push through sharp price rises in the cost of basic goods. Within days mass demonstrations were attacking police stations, casinos and other symbols of authority and privilege.

Ten thousand steel and armament workers marched from Helwas to Cairo. Six thousand dockers led the storming and burning of the government offices in Alexandria. When the government responded by establishing a curfew, working class areas of the cities became no-go areas for the state machine.

After three days of working class action the price increases were withdrawn and a ten percent public sector wage rise was announced. The Sadat government itself only narrowly survived the crisis.

These examples illustrate both the existence and the potential of the working class in the middle east. It is this class that

provides the way out of the stalemate.

The Palestinians are in fact in an ideal position to relate to this newly developing class. Not all of the refugees are huddled powerless in camps. There has also been a dispersal of large numbers throughout the whole Middle East. The majority of these Palestinians are themselves part of the working class.

The strategy of Arafat and all the other sections of the PLO is based on reliance on the allegedly 'progressive' Arab states. It is a strategy which rests on diplomatic negotiation with occasional bouts of fighting. But it is necessarily tied to the policies of the leaders of the Arab states. None of them are willing or able to risk their own survival in a struggle for the Palestinians.

What is more, the strategy of relying on the leaders of these states means that the Palestinian workers in these states are encouraged not to play any leading role in workers' struggles to overthrow these very same rulers.

In order to break out of the dead-end they now find themselves in the Palestinians need to turn to organising alongside the working classes of the Arab world *independently* of the rulers of any Arab state, no matter how 'progressive' their rhetoric. Only by leading a struggle for socialism as well as a struggle against Israel can the Palestinians hope for any real advances.

Such a struggle would not only provide a way forward for the mass of Palestinians and Arab workers, but it would also provide an alternative to the deadlock in the Lebanon.

With the invasion of Lebanon putting added strains on the economy of Israel, Sue Cockerill and Neil Rogall look at the nature of the state of Israel.

The words 'soaring inflation' and 'huge foreign debts' immediately bring countries like Brazil, Argentina and Mexico to mind. But a country whose annual inflation rate recently topped the thousand percent mark, and whose debts are, per head, seven times as big as Brazil's, is not in Latin America. It is Israel.

Israel's role as policeman in the Middle East cannot be separated from its economy. Well publicised 'successes' of Israeli industry and agriculture are totally dependent on outside investments. Nor is it ordinary investment (which only occurs if profits are big enough). This inflow of funds is largely in the form of grants or very favourable loans. Without this Israel would go bankrupt.

Israel owes foreign creditors \$5,500 per man, woman and child. On top of this the state receives huge 'grants' of two-and-a-half to three billion dollars a year, half from the

USA. Per head, these grants amount to more than three times India's total income per head. This makes the idea of Israel as a model for other 'Third World' countries a sick joke.

These facts alone speak volumes about Israel's role. America spends almost a third of its total foreign aid on Israel. They get plenty in return. Israel's military machine — which swallows a quarter of its national income — is more than a match for any Middle Eastern state which might threaten US interests in the area.

Advisors

Israel is not the only watchdog for the US in the region, and the Israeli ruling class is not merely an American poodle. But the idea that the US is trying to restrain Israel from its 'excesses' is belied by the fact that the cash keeps flowing in. Besides the Middle East, Israel serves US interests elsewhere providing a channel for arms and technology and 'advisors' to US clients in Central America. Somoza's Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala, as well as African regimes are all examples of Israeli intervention.

No wonder Israel's debt doesn't receive the same attention as Mexico's. While the banks and the IMF demand a high price for

bailing out Latin American debtors, the Americans keep on stumping up the dollars for Israel. Nevertheless, the economic chaos caused by rampant inflation has prompted the government to try to cut part of the indexation of wages which has up to now ensured that Jewish workers' incomes have kept up with inflation. These efforts led to mass public sector strikes in protest.

The most bizarre aspect of the strikes was the doctor's hunger strike, which involved doctors collapsing and having to be treated by each other.

Israel's finance minister wants to introduce austerity measures to cut inflation and increase exports. This plan would be a mild dose of the IMF 'medicine' being forced down the throats of Latin American workers, involving cuts in public spending and subsidies on essential goods and services. The aim is to cut real wages, to become internationally more competitive.

The economic chaos plus the increasing discontent over the aftermath of the so-called 'peace for Galilee' invasion of Lebanon is likely to mean a change of government. The opposition Labour Alignment doesn't really want to take over yet, because it cannot solve the problems. But it seems possible that there will be another Labour government before too long. It is

worth stressing therefore that such a change will not mean any 'progressive' policies.

The media, here and in America, are very fond of the myth that it is only since Begin and his Likud coalition came to power that there has been an ugly face to the Zionist project. Such a belief is also common among the old reformist left (including Tony Benn). This is completely false.

The Labour Party isn't really a party of labour at all, but the party of the Labour bureaucracy which was the core of the ruling class until the 1970s. 'Left' Zionism is no less Zionist than the Likud — it was responsible for the founding of the state and the expulsion of the Palestinians. The Kibbutzim which are also seen by many as socialist institutions were founded on land from which Palestinian peasants had been evicted. In very few places has Israel really made the desert bloom. In fact Kibbutzim play only a tiny role in Israel's economy, and while they don't allow Arabs to join, are increasingly dependent on hired Arab labour.

Subsidy

Israel has been compared favourably with the 'feudal' Arab regimes around it, as a democratic state, with progressive social policies. In fact, its level of economic and social development was fundamentally dependent on its imperialist role. Israel could not have existed, let alone become prosperous, without continual subsidy.

That subsidy was forthcoming precisely because Israel was able to 'discipline' any of the Arab states whose interests conflicted with and threatened US domination of the region.

The wars of 1948, 1956, 1967 and 1973 are presented as 'just' wars to protect Israel from outside aggression. We are asked to believe that the territories occupied in those wars would have been handed back to the Arab states in return for guaranteed security. In the first place, this ignores the fact that Israel was founded as a state on land occupied by the Palestinians who were driven off. Secondly, the Labour governments moved just as quickly as Begin to establish settlements in occupied areas. Even the Biblical literalism which is deplored in Begin and Shamir, with their talk of 'Judea and Samaria', turns out to be a precise echo of such 'socialist' heroines as Golda Meir.

At present it suits Western ruling classes to suggest that the massacres and expansionism seen in Lebanon are an aberration from the history of Israel, rather than a logical consequence of the Zionist state and its role in the region. They explain Begin and Shamir's regrettable popularity by talking about their base among the Sephardic Jews — people who have come to Israel from the Arab countries rather than Europe or America.

In reality the Sephardim or Oriental Jews, vote for Likud not because of a lack of political sophistication or fanaticism, but because Labour didn't deliver the goods to them. The Oriental Jews were not involved in the Zionist project — they weren't participants in the colonisation and only flocked into Israel in the 1950s. They were enticed there by propaganda by the Ashkenazi state promising fantastic material benefits.

When they arrived there was no land of milk and honey for them. Instead they found the harsh work of the agricultural settlements and development around the borders of the country. While they are better off than the Palestinian workers they have suffered low wages, unemployment and racial discrimination. The support for Likud is comparable to the racism and reaction of poor Southern whites in the USA. At other times in Israel's history there have been elements in the sephardic communities who turned to radical politics — the Israeli Black Panthers of the early 1970s for example.

The problem is that because all Jewish workers are wedded to the Zionist state as the guarantor of their relative privileges, discontent with Labour manifested itself in support for right-wing Zionism, not a class alternative.

There have been several strike waves in Israel's history, including the one of the last two years or so. Many of these strikes have been militant, not to say violent. The tactics of the El Al airline workers in blocking the airport runways in protest against job losses in 1982 was a memorable example. But when it comes to the crunch, workers will not challenge the basis of the state. There are no organisations of the working class which are independent of the state.



Even the army is unable to lift the economy

The Histadrut, which we have to refer to as a trade union for want of a better description, was founded as an exclusively Jewish, not exclusively working class body. Its general secretary at the time, Lavon, spelled this out in 1960 when he said: 'It is not a workers' trade union.' On the contrary, it is a major employer, owning a bank, insurance and construction companies and other enterprises. It is part of the Zionist state, controlling a sizeable chunk of the economy. It has been a major recipient of the funds channelled from abroad through the state. Workers automatically become members since it is via the Histadrut that the health insurance scheme is operated. Many workers do not experience it in its 'trade union' role at all.

Many Arab workers are also forced to join the Histadrut, but since they aren't entitled to the medical and welfare benefits, they get absolutely nothing out of it at all.

Though the Histadrut can oppose this or that government policy, especially Likud's rather than Labour's, it has spent most of its existence crushing strikes, not calling them. It can never be an organisation for indepen-

dent working class action.

The Israeli working class is engaged in producing a surplus. As such its class interest lies in fighting the Israeli ruling class. But also it is a partner with that ruling class in sharing the benefits of Israel's imperialist role. The position of the working class was summed up over ten years ago in an article called *The Class Nature of Israeli society*:

'As long as Zionism is politically and ideologically dominant, there is no chance whatsoever of the Israeli working class becoming a revolutionary class. The experience of fifty years does not contain a single example of Israeli workers being mobilised on material or trade union issues to challenge the Israeli regime itself. On the contrary, Israeli workers nearly always put their national loyalties before their class loyalties.'

Israel is increasingly dependent on Arab labour, both from within its 'official' borders, and on the basis of 'pass law' type labour from the West Bank. It is said that before 7am Israel is an Arab country. Arabs do many of the dirty jobs which Israelis don't want to do.

The post-1967 military and political expansion created a huge demand for Jewish labour in the armaments' industry, the army and in administering the 'occupied territories'. The result was that Arab workers began to form a key part of the labour force of the Zionist state which until then had consisted of Oriental Jews. They work essentially for the private sector and constitute a reserve army of labour.

Construction

According to government statistics — which underestimate the real figure — 110,000 Arabs resident in Israel are part of the workforce. It is more difficult to assess the number of Palestinian workers who commute daily into Israel. The number seems to be between 100,000 and 120,000.

In total Palestinians form about a fifth of the Israeli workforce, concentrated in the productive core of the economy: manufacturing, construction and agriculture. Nearly 80 percent work in these sectors compared with under 40 percent of Jews. That means about 30 percent of the labour force in productive industry is now Palestinian — a vast turn around from the Zionist intention of a closed Jewish society depending exclusively on Jewish labour.

But on their own, these workers cannot overthrow the Zionist state.

The importance is that they are organising and have shown their willingness to strike against the Israeli state. Together with workers in the Arab countries in the region they represent the only force capable of smashing imperialism and of overthrowing the Arab regimes. Regimes which have paid lip-service to that struggle while brutally repressing their own workers and the Palestinians.

Looked at in isolation, there would be no chance of the Zionist state being overthrown by working class action. Looked at in terms of the region as a whole, where the Arab working class is growing in numbers and strength, it is clear where the future lies.

The Zionist threat

Noam Chomsky has just written a major new work on Zionism and the plight of the Palestinians. John Rose gives a critical assessment of the book, and of Chomsky's politics.

Noam Chomsky's *The Fateful Triangle, the United States, Israel and the Palestinians* (Pluto Press. At £6.95 it's good value, it's a very big book). It is a very important attempt at an encyclopaedic summary of the evolution of the Zionist state in the aftermath of the Lebanese invasion. Its account of that invasion is both comprehensive and gripping. And the book is worth reading just for that although much of the material will be familiar to *Socialist Review* readers.

The collusion of the US government with the invasion and the stupendous increases in US financial and military aid that went with it; the acquiescence of the Labour opposition in Israel; the clear objective to break the PLO in the Lebanon as a precondition for tightening Israeli rule on the West Bank; the deceit of the US government, which promised the PLO that Palestinian citizens would be protected after the PLO's forced departure from Beirut; the frightening degree of support for Begin and Sharon whose popularity in Israel soared as the numbers of dead and mutilated Arab bodies soared in Lebanon; the courageous yet ultimately powerless Israeli peace movement ('the 400,000 strong demo wasn't the tip of the iceberg, it was the iceberg') which still hasn't toppled the Likud Government.

Pogrom

The Kahan's Commission of Inquiry's whitewash of the slaughter at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps and the macabre similarity of Sabra and Shatila with the Czar's Easter pogrom of Jews at Kishenev in Russia in 1903; the growing number of Israeli Rabbis who preach that events are confirming the Jews' 'true sanctification of God's Name in the world'; the former leader of the American New Left Tom Hayden (and Jayne Fonda) and the liberal left in the US generally who supported the invasion...

All of this and a great deal more—is thoroughly argued and minutely documented.

Yet at the same time, Chomsky's book is positively absurd in its fanciful and apocalyptic gloom. For he argues that the Americans have created a Frankenstein in Israel which is now virtually out of control. That although Israel was originally funded by the US to protect its oil supplies (a recently declassified government document from 1958 stated that opposition to radical Arab nationalism depends on the US supporting 'Israel as the only strong pro-

West power' in the region), Chomsky argues that Israel is now so strong (the world's fourth largest military power according to the Institute of Strategic Studies) that it can dictate terms to its former master. It's a case of the mad dog that drags his unwilling owner down paths he doesn't want to go.

Israel gets its way with its paymaster (Israel is America's most heavily-subsidised client) by threatening military destruction in the Middle East — including bombing oil fields. Chomsky gives several examples of this and concludes ominously that this explains Dr Kissinger's oft-quoted remarks about the dangers of 'harassing' Israel into 'emotional and psychic collapse'.

Israel is now so dangerous, says Chomsky, that it has become the single most likely cause of World War Three, a fact about which, he wearily complains, he has been unable to persuade the Western anti-missile movement to take seriously enough. He also provides evidence for Israeli medium term thinking for the total domination of the Middle East based upon updating the method of rule of the old Turkish Ottoman Empire.

This would mean undermining all the Arab states (which, anyway, were only the constructions of British and French imperialism) and replacing them with a cluster of religious-ethnic semi-feudal groups constantly in conflict with each other and hence subordinate to Zionism.

This is not so far-fetched. Israel already arms both sides in the battles in the Chouf mountains between the Christians and the Druze. And Zionism has already proved its capacity to politicise and make fanatical all the religious currents in the region.

Only America can stop Israel, argues Chomsky, and so far she shows no sign of

doing so.

To understand how Chomsky arrived at this position we need to return to the debate that raged in the 1970s about the solution to the Palestinian problem. For it was then, as Chomsky correctly reports ad nauseum, that what he calls an 'international consensus' had been established for a settlement.

This consensus accepted by Europe, the USSR, the Arab states and the PLO saw Israel withdrawing to its pre-1967 borders in return for recognition by the Arabs and it came to include a mini Palestinian state on the West Bank between Israel and Jordan. Yet every time an attempt was made to apply the principles of the 'consensus' it was blown out by Israel and the USA.

A most striking example of this, argues Chomsky, was the fate of the Sadat Peace Plan in 1971. According to Chomsky this was sabotaged by Kissinger who boasts in his memoirs about outsmarting the State Department.

The absurdity of reducing the failure of 'peace' in the Middle East to personalities (even one like Dr Kissinger's!) reaches full flight of fantasy when Chomsky offers a review of Kissinger's memoirs by James E Akins (a former US ambassador in Saudi Arabia) for our serious consideration:

'The truly tragic consequence of Watergate is that President Nixon was not in a strong enough position to dominate his secretary of state ... He allowed Kissinger to frustrate his own Mid East design. Had it not been for Watergate ... it is probable that Nixon would have achieved a just and lasting peace in the area.'

Gosh, how the Palestinians must have been wishing that Nixon was in a stronger position in the early 1970s.

Imposed

Obviously Chomsky's despair springs from his realisation that America could not or would not impose its will on the 'fateful



Young Palestinians—future victims or future fighters?

triangle'. This seems to defy all rational logic for Chomsky. It also betrays a hidden elitism which suggests that 'enlightenment' for the Middle East — the international consensus — could only be imposed from the outside by the West.

But, quite apart from that, the argument is flawed. Why should America have gone to the trouble of a showdown with Israel in the 1970s for the sake of the 'international consensus'?

After all, its global power had been severely weakened following its defeat in Vietnam.

Why turn on its most trusted ally in the Middle East? If Israel could keep the Palestinians on their knees why should America interfere?

Of course it could maintain a public posture of ambiguity. Nixon, and the others who followed him could always say that they would like to see 'justice' for the Palestinians and they could always privately curse Israel when they were courting the oil sheiks.

For Israel could not lightly be bullied into accepting a West Bank state (although America has and had the power to do so *if she wished*). Chomsky knows this only too well. His book is studded with examples of Israel's persistent strategy of destroying all vestiges of Palestinian nationalism whether by crushing any signs of Palestinian cultural renaissance or by simply killing Palestinians. As one of the founding fathers of Zionism, Ben Gurion, put it:

'There is no conflict between Jewish and Palestinian nationalism because the Jewish Nation is not in Palestine and the Palestinians are not a nation.'

And Chomsky himself writes:

'As long as any trace of an organised Palestinian presence remains anywhere nearby, the legitimacy of the Israeli national rebirth may somehow appear to be in question.'

He goes on to quote Meron Benvenisti, a former Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem and author of several studies of the tightening grip of Jewish settlement control of the West Bank:

'We cannot stand a symmetry of claims. Israelis have a profound feeling that once they accept the symmetry that the other side is also a legitimate national movement, then their own feeling about their own right and legitimacy will be dimmed.'

This leads to the final point about the West Bank state and the Palestinian attitude to it which Chomsky frankly skips over.

Because the fact is that the West Bank state would not have fulfilled Palestinian aspirations for national liberation, ie to reoccupy all their land.

Brutality

In fairness, in one sense, Chomsky acknowledges this. He writes of the many thousands of Palestinians in Lebanon who were bombarded by Israel in 1982 who were first expelled from Israel in 1948. The Zionists stole these people's land. No wonder they are worried about any reminders of their 'legitimacy'. And as Chomsky also acknowledges the brutality of

'Greater Israel' has its roots in this first phase.

Maybe the PLO would have settled for a partitioned West Bank state. But the struggle for total liberation would have re-emerged in much the same way as the struggle for Irish liberation has re-emerged after the partition of Ireland in the 1920s.

In fact, the analogy with Ireland is important for another reason.

Throughout his book Chomsky insists that he is in favour of 'Israel's right to exist'. How he squares this with his anti-Zionism is never made clear. The same argument is repeated in Maxine Rodinson's *Cult Ghetto & State** and continues to haunt many Jewish anti-Zionist intellectuals whose work otherwise has made a profound contribution to the Palestinian struggle.

In the case of Chomsky his total isolation and constant vilification by American Jewish and Israeli spokesmen — Labour Zionist Abbe Eban, allegedly a 'dove' on the Palestinian question, has accused Chomsky of a 'basic complex ... of guilt about Jewish survival' — seems to have helped prise this uncomfortable concession from him.

A 'Marxist' gloss is sometimes added to help defend Jewish national right to self-determination (similar to the 'two nations' theory in Ireland). Just to confuse matters further the Fourth International have just published Trotsky's writings on the question of Jewish national self-determination. Though they couldn't find a defence by Trotsky of fulfilling this wish by stealing Arab land.

Actually this helps us clarify the problem. There is no defence of a nationalism, however oppressed it itself has been, that owes its very survival to the oppression of another nationalism. Where this is the case all the other claims to national liberation (culture, language etc) become superfluous.

This applies as much to Ulster Protestantism, the Afrikaners in South Africa as it does to Jewish Zionism. In fact the siege colonial mentality is common to all three. And in all three cases these virulent nationalisms (all racist note) have only come into play at all because of their service at different times to the global imperialist structure of power.

Their destruction starts with uprisings by the oppressed. A prospect which Chomsky now completely rules out at least as far as the Palestinians are concerned.

In fact he seems to regard the Palestinian cause as totally hopeless. For when it comes to the Reagan Peace Plan (advanced in the summer of 1982 at the height of the Beirut crisis and revived again at the time of writing) which Chomsky dissects very effectively as a complete fraud because it excludes the PLO, he nevertheless can write:

'Given the objective constraints established by US power a case can perhaps be made that the wisest course for the Palestinians would have been to accept the Reagan proposals, thus committing national suicide, but at least raising some obstacles to the US-backed Israeli take over of what remains outside Israel's complete control in the occupied territories.'

Maybe this was written with tongue in

cheek but the fact remains that Chomsky has nothing else to offer the Palestinians.

What, though, is the solution?

Throughout his book, Chomsky, tends to treat the Palestinians as victims. He rarely sees them as revolutionary fighters. The enthusiasm and courage of the Palestinians seeps through the pages only occasionally. Yet, despite all the terrible defeats, hundreds of thousands of young Palestinian men and women remain dedicated to the armed overthrow of Zionism as the only means of destroying it.

As *Socialist Review* readers will know we have always greatly feared a defeat for the PLO. Its strategy of combining the armed struggle with reliance on the (usually corrupt) Arab regimes rather than with the struggle of Arab workers and peasants against those regimes was doomed from the start.

The failure of an alternative strategy to develop was and is ultimately a failure for the revolutionary left which emerged in different forms throughout the world at the same time as the PLO itself emerged in the 1960s.

Serious examination of this is beyond the scope of this article but suffice to note that Chomsky's tragic vision of Zionist rule smashing up Arab states and reducing the entire non Jewish population in the Middle East to serfdom belies one rather important truth.

Discipline

Despite the world recession the Middle East has been industrialising. In fact it has been industrialising quite quickly. Zionist rule itself has transformed thousands of peasants into workers.

One reason for the recurring form of rule by brute force in Arab state after Arab state is to maintain labour discipline. Another reason is to silence news of explosive incidents of labour discipline breaking down from spreading. All of this has momentous implications for the Palestinians who must soon begin to see their part in this development fused with the only power that can bring about their liberation, the Arab working class throughout the region.

FOOTNOTE:

* published by Al Saqui Books, and distributed by Z Press.

Rodinson is a former member of the French Communist Party.

Cult, Ghetto & State collects several of Rodinson's articles over a fifteen year period which frankly add little to his first major work.

However, one essay certainly does deserve mention. In *Jewish Nation & Jewish Problem* Rodinson comes to the defence of Abram Leon's *The Jewish Question*.

Leon was a Jewish Belgian Trotskyist who perished in Auschwitz. His book challenges the whole basis of nationality in Jewish identity and history. He offers instead a closely argued case for understanding Jewish survival in terms of economic roles performed in pre-capitalist societies particularly in Russia and Poland.

Rodinson's promotion of Leon's much ignored work is a great bonus.

Dictatorship on the brink

The military regime in Uruguay is facing mass opposition. Mike Gonzalez looks at another tottering dictatorship.

Uruguay has lived under military rule for ten years. Its torturers have been as bad as Pinochet's, and its repression more complete than Argentina's. Though it has lived under the shadow of Chile and Argentina throughout the last decade, it has been an important ally for the military dictatorships. Perhaps because it was not so much in the public eye, it has gone further in its monetarist model and deeper in its corruption than either of the other two.

Yet as the level of struggle rose throughout 1983 in the southern cone of Latin America, Uruguay too has experienced the rebirth of the mass movement. In November, half a million people marched through Montevideo—one-sixth of the population in a single demonstration, and about half of all the workers of Uruguay. In January, a strike of fishermen and an occupation of a textile factory were followed by a spontaneous transport strike in Montevideo and a battle over wages in the energy and communications industries.

These actions were a prelude to a massive General Strike called for 18 January by the illegal trade union congress, the PIT.

Jailbreaks

Unlike its partners in the military alliance of the Southern Cone, the Uruguayan military has not, until now, faced, since the coup of 1973, any significant mass resistance. The major guerrilla organisation of the left, the Tupamaros, had earned itself a reputation for miraculous jailbreaks and spectacular military actions in the early 1970s. But it had also resolutely refused to develop any forms of mass organisation. The Tupamaros were the purest form of Guevarists. The task of the militants in the trade union movement they said, was 'to organise support for the armed struggle and preparation to join it'. Thus although the Tupamaros claimed most of the newspaper space, and incurred the wrath of the military, control of the trade unions remained overwhelmingly with the Uruguayan Communist Party.

It is ironic that the years when the Tupamaros were most active (1967-72) were also the years that marked the highest level of mass struggle that Uruguay had ever experienced. Until then, Uruguay's reputation as a stable democracy, and its skeletal welfare state, bred a trade union movement more directly integrated into the state sector than elsewhere in the continent.

As Uruguay faced its first major recession in the late 60s, therefore, the government of

Pacheco Areco faced well-organised if firmly reformist unions. It responded with extraordinary brutality, imposing a total wage freeze and instigating the systematic torture of mass leaders.

It was at this time that Dan Mitrione, expert in torture for the CIA, went to Uruguay to train his local counterparts. As the film *State of Siege* narrates, he was later captured and executed.

The coup of 1973 was the culmination of the policy. The campaign against the Tupamaros provided an excuse for the imposition of a state of emergency, and a systematic repression of the left. Some deputies in parliament, the rector of the University and a range of workers' leaders were jailed and tortured for supporting the Tupamaros.

Because they wanted to distinguish themselves from the revolutionary left, the reformist parties, the Blancos and the Colorados, and the Communist Party, allowed this to happen.

When the coup of 1973 brought the process to its logical conclusion, as the military took power directly, the major trade union federation even supported the coup in the belief that it was progressive sectors of the military who were in charge. As the almost total privatisation of the economy, and the savage repression of all forms of working class organisation followed immediately, their protests sounded particularly hollow.

For the next ten years, Uruguay was a model military dictatorship. Despite some pious hopes of internal rifts (the usual desperate and baseless talk about splits within the military), the army was solid. Military personnel had their wages doubled, and all officers were provided with free cars and petrol among other privileges. The police, too, were incorporated into the military organisation, and received similar special treatment.

By 1982, military expenditure accounted for 60 percent of the annual national budget. A series of military decrees ensured that the oppositional press (particularly the excellent *Marcha*) was closed, and that the remaining newspapers were subjected to prior censorship. The censors forbade the use of certain words ('Tupamaro', 'Communist', 'Marxism' among others). The National Anthem was even changed so that the words 'tyrants will tumble' could not be stressed when the anthem was sung.

Trade unions were dismantled and replaced by corporate associations. In the economy all protectionist legislation was rescinded, allowing foreign banks and companies direct control over all capital and production within Uruguay.

By 1983, Uruguay provided a home for the most rapacious end of multinational capital. Of its 22 banks, 20 were foreign-owned; and their owners included the Moonies, whose \$100 million dollars-worth of investment in the country were the result of favours shown by the president, Alvarez, whose father-in-

law was a vice-president of Moon's worldwide political organisation—Causa.

Another bank was owned by the Spanish company Rumasa, which recently collapsed after massive corruption was discovered throughout the company. Still another was owned by the Banco de Chile, one of the banks through which Roberto Calvi laundered Vatican funds. Furthermore, the major Uruguayan bank was owned by P-2, the Italian Masonic organisation which had been discovered to be preparing a possible military coup in Italy. Like Chile, the Uruguayan model required total incorporation into the world economy, meeting the consequent demands for a dismantling of trade union organisation, controls over wages, and the maintenance of repression and terror.

If the silence has now been broken, it is fundamentally for economic reasons. The Uruguayan model ensured that the banking crisis would bite as deeply here, if not more so, as in Brazil, Mexico, Chile, and Central America. The immediate effect, early in 1983, was a 50 percent rise in the cost of living and an unemployment level of 30 percent. A number of banks were taken over by the State, though this was useless as a political instrument. Uruguay felt the full effect of the crisis, and when it renegotiated its foreign debt in April 1983, it accepted without question the harshest conditions imposed by international finance.

The same month (May 1983) saw the first mass demonstrations in Chile—and they continued, on the eleventh of each month, from then on. The mass protests that began in Uruguay were directly influenced by those events, and by the similar path that each country had followed since the military coups of 1973. And Argentina, which has always dominated its much smaller neighbour, was also witnessing the most massive and combative May Day demonstration since the military took over there in 1976.

There was, nevertheless, a key difference between Argentina and Uruguay. For in Argentina, throughout the period of repression, mass workers' organisations had continued to exist and to fight—and only the Falklands factor enabled the Argentine military to divert a growing working class movement in the direction of a nationalism whose final fruit was the Radical government of Alfonsín.

But Uruguay had not experienced working class struggle for ten years. The PIT (the clandestine trade union organisation) claimed to represent 220 unions by November of 1983—yet it was not directly responsible for the rising level of struggle. It remained, however, the only organised force to assume the leadership of the movement when it did arise.

Protests

Its very strength, however, reflects a fundamental problem for the developing working class movement. For Uruguay has no independent revolutionary organisation active in an organised way within those working class struggles—and it is a bourgeois opposition with a long history of betrayal of workers' interests which is now

reaping the political harvest and preparing a long, slow return—in consultation with the military—to a limited form of democracy twelve months from now.

The unpalatable truth is that all sections of the opposition see the mass demonstration as a form of pressure, to bring the military to the bargaining table. The traditional bourgeois parties—the Blancos (Whites) and Colorados (Reds)—collaborated directly in the early preparations for military rule. It was a Colorado government that introduced the State of Emergency, and the Blancos are no less culpable. Both seek dialogue with the military, though it is the leader of the Blancos—Aldunate—who has emerged in the last few years as the champion of human rights. Ten years ago, he was also a presidential candidate, with a right wing policy. Today, he has changed the smile to the left side of his face in an effort to win the votes of those 50 percent of the electorate who marched through Montevideo in November.

As far as the Communists and Socialists are concerned, their main demand is the release from prison of the retired Admiral Seregni, who had been the candidate of a broad left alliance very like Chile's Popular Unity, in the elections of 1971.

By July last year, the military government had entered negotiations with the opposition organisations. Their object was clear: to establish control over an emerging mass

movement, and to tie the political leadership of the opposition (as they saw) to a long process of preparation for a guided democracy.

The government of Alvarez insisted, at the same time, on a tighter control over trade unions, the judiciary and the press, and a freer hand in the transition period to destroy all political 'threats to democracy'. The quid pro quo was Presidential elections early in 1985. The negotiations did not last. A series of protest rallies in August and subsequent months were banned and then attacked by police and troops.

The revolutionary organisations (which were tiny) were brutally destroyed in 1973-4, with the tacit acquiescence of the opposition parties of today. The last organisation to be repressed was the Communist Party, many of whose members in the trade union federation CNT (later dismantled) had welcomed the 1973 coup.

The Communist Party has certainly been active—though fundamentally in international campaigning. Yet today, and despite the terrible lessons of a decade ago, its central demand for the release of Seregni suggests that it has set its sights on the electoral process, even if that means mortgaging the mass movement to negotiations with the military. The left has nothing to offer, and the ghost of the Tupamaros has left nothing but nostalgia for the individual heroes of another time.

Alvarez, the military president, has watched events in Argentina and Chile during the past months. He has seen his military colleagues brought to trial in Argentina for crimes no worse than those committed by those under his command. And he has seen Pinochet mount a new campaign of repression and terror with the approval of a world capitalism growing increasingly anxious about its ability to impose its global solutions to the crisis.

Directly to the north, the Brazilian working class movement has provided a magnificent lead for workers' organisations who have lost their faith in long-term democratic solutions that always function at their expense. For Alvarez, the tiny cracks opened in 1973 have now been definitively closed. Those who talk of bargaining with a murderous military, and those who seek divisions within a military apparatus that has consistently and unrelentingly destroyed workers' organisations and revolutionary parties, are sowing a dangerous delusion that will guarantee only that history will repeat itself as tragedy.

For a working class without an independent political leadership, time is short and the task urgent. The lead is coming from Brazil, where workers have answered the IMF with strikes and occupations. For the working class of Uruguay, that is the road to the future.

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Greece's 'curious' socialists

The Papandreou government in Greece has been caught in the classic trap of both trying to run the system and to reform it. Noel Halifax looks at how it has solved its dilemma.

Greece has a small, ramshackle capitalist state with old fashioned industrial and state machinery. Internationally it is not very competitive; like Britain only more so.

The Greek Socialist Party (PASOK) inherited an antiquated state machinery with laws owing more to the era of Metternich than the age of the EEC. There was no civil marriage. Adultery was a criminal offence. Trade unions had almost no rights.

Greece had been ruled previously by a military junta whose main concern was crude repression and developing the tourist trade. It was followed by a right wing government of the New Democratic Party, which was so incompetent as to become something of a joke.

When PASOK was elected in October 1981 it was pledged to change the fabric of society, to introduce social justice, a better deal for workers, freedoms for the unions and to transform Greece into a modern efficient industrial state.

The similarities with the 1964 Wilson government are clear. Papandreou wrote his *A Strategy for Greek Economics* back in 1963, and the strategy was, and is, to modernise Greece by return of state planning. PASOK's programme was to get Greece out of NATO and the EEC, grant social reforms and improve living standards. It was a programme that was popular and PASOK won a clear and absolute majority on a wave of popular expectations and hope. There was no need for any compromises or fudging to win the support of minority parties.

Reforms

For the first year or so PASOK embarked slowly on its programme of reforms. It gave a 6 percent increase in real earnings. A 40 hour week was introduced. The laws on marriage and women's rights were liberalised. The government drew up its economic plans. Even in its early days, though, it failed to legalise sympathy strikes as it had promised, in spite of having already drafted a bill to do so.

From the start the reforms upset the Greek economic order. The world crisis was hitting Greece hard. GNP fell in 1981 by 1.5 percent, then stabilised in 1982. It only increased by 0.3 percent in 1983 in spite of the 6 percent increase in earnings and the plans. Inflation remained at 20-25 percent, productivity declined and unemployment in-

creased to an estimated 8-10 percent of urban dwellers, so that one in three school-leavers were without work in 1983. In 1982, Greece's balance of trade in agricultural produce went into the red for the first time. Its debts increased and the level of investment went down.

The reforms had lowered productivity and led to a decline in investment in spite of the new tax concessions and aid schemes to industry. To modernise Greece means increasing investment and productivity. To increase investment means having a high level of profit. That in turn means cutting real wages. The logic of the system is for the 'socialist' government to attack workers' ability to resist real wage cuts. It means attacking the very people who voted PASOK into office. It is a logic that PASOK has not shied away from.

The government started its attacks by dropping plans to introduce a minimum wage and bringing in a wage freeze for 1982. Predictably there was no freeze on prices. At the same time, January 1982, the Drachma was devalued to make Greek goods cheaper to foreign buyers. The economics minister, Armenis, appealed on national TV for support for an austerity programme and a U-turn on the reforms.

There was widespread opposition to the austerity programme, led by the Greek Communist Party (KKE) which, through the unions, has a large influence in the working class. Though only 25 percent of workers are unionised, they are in the important and dynamic public sector which makes up 50 percent of the GNP, and have a tradition of militant action.

Throughout the spring of 83 strikes broke out in the public sector, (in transport, schools, banks, taxi-drivers, hospitals). An anti-austerity demo drew over 100,000 in Athens (Greece has a population of around 8 million).

The government's reaction to the strikes was to appeal to the patriotism and fear and hatred of Turkey and America. Nationalism has always been a feature of both PASOK and KKE rhetoric. When this failed, the government threatened to conscript the strikers into the army. Finally it went to the courts and had the strikes outlawed. Against this the KKE huffed and puffed in opposition, calling token strikes and demos. In the end it refused to spread the action to a general and mass strike. They eventually backed down in the courts. The KKE is heavily imbedded in the bureaucracy of the unions.

The government's spring offensive did not stop with the wage freeze. The logic of the system in crisis is that the gains given in 81/82 have now to be clawed back for the plans for modernising to succeed. The government aimed to increase profits, drop its pledges, blind workers with nationalism and fears of a military coup and to call for unity at all costs. Greece has not withdrawn

from NATO or the EEC. Instead the government has been renegotiating its agreements to get more for allowing American bases on Greek soil and to get more from the Community agricultural policy.

Typical of the government's actions is its intervention in Greek shipping. Shipping is one of the few very successful bits of Greek capital. On the one hand it has attempted to integrate it into its planning schemes and rationalisation plans and on the other to increase the owners' profit.

In February 1983 the government allowed foreign ratings on Greek ships to be paid the rates in force in their own countries and not the far higher rates for Greek seamen, which they had been getting. With a 30 percent 'ceiling' on how many foreign crew a ship can employ, it has been estimated that this will 'save' the owners £600-£2,000 per month, per ship. As a sop to the unions there is a £560 levy per month, per ship, to go to the Greek seamen's unemployment fund. The bigger the ship and the larger the owner, the more money is 'saved' in the scheme. It increases the owner's profit, encourages rationalisation and undermines union organisation on board ship. A more divisive scheme would be hard to imagine.

The most spectacular attack on the unions has been the bill introduced in parliament in May 1983 to limit the right to strike in the public sector.

The Economist noted with envy:

'It is much more radical than the mild limitations on trade unions proposed by Mrs Thatcher in Britain'. (28/5/83)

The article was called 'How to be a socialist Union-basher'.

The Greek equivalent of the TUC, the GSEE (General Confederation of Greek Workers) agreed to the anti-strike bill. Up until 1982 the GSEE was dominated by the right-wing New Democracy Party (NDP), even though many unions are controlled by the KKE.

Manipulation

The new government challenged the right-wing leadership in court, and had the court appoint a new 'temporary' council, with 35 PASOK and seven KKE supporters.

This was such an obvious political manipulation of 'free' trade unions that even Len Murray complained about it. It is this PASOK dominated GSEE which agreed to the anti-strike bill. In a similar court action the government replaced the right wing leadership of the Civil Servants' union with a PASOK-supporting executive.

The bill was pushed through parliament on emergency procedure which allows only three days of debate. Again there were strikes in the banks and by transport workers. But there was no mass action, and after the initial campaign the scene quieted down. Once again, Papandreou has got away with it. *The Economist* remarked in awe: 'He is certainly a curious sort of socialist.'

The government has not been slow to follow up its successes. By June 83 the anti-strike bill was passed. In September the government dropped its self-proclaimed 'generous pay policy' and a partial indexation of wages was announced which resulted

in a 4-5 percent drop in real earnings.

In October the scheme to introduce a state health service was dropped. It was the last of the promised reforms not already abandoned.

There has been some resistance. In February 1984 workers in private industry won a claim matching inflation (20 percent) but only after the unions, under government pressure, agreed to drop demands for indexation. They had been threatened with the courts.

But the hopes of a new society introduced by the PASOK government have been dashed. What is enlightening is not what has happened but how PASOK has been able to get away with it. The KKE is, after all, a large

government in purely electoral terms. The KKE received 20 percent (up from 13 percent) in a local Athens election. The more the government attacks its own base, the more the KKE hopes workers will vote for them and force PASOK to form a 'left coalition' government on its terms.

Cretinism

Such an analysis is parliamentary cretinism in the extreme. It overlooks the actual effects of the government on the balance of class forces. PASOK's action can only demoralise and weaken the working class and restrict its ability to fight. Just as Callaghan paved the way for Thatcher with

dition of rank and file activity or a shop steward movement. This is in part a hang-over from the days of the Junta and state-controlled unions.

Neither are the problems helped by the nationalism of both PASOK and KKE. All parties play on the patriotism and particularly anti-Turk and anti-American feeling. To get through its unpopular policies, PASOK has constantly played the patriotic card. Hence the erratic foreign policy and the row over the Elgin marbles. The KKE responds by being more patriotic and anti-American.

The KKE is one of the more Stalinist Communist parties. It did not support *Solidarity* for example.



What's a Greek earn?...Not enough!

party with a good industrial base in the important public sector. Why is it the KKE has not led a struggle similar to that led by the much smaller British CP in the 70s against Heath, or earlier to sabotage the Wilson plan for union bashing?

Part of the answer is the severity of the crisis and the resulting toughness of the government, which has far less room to manoeuvre than before. PASOK has, via the courts, been able to undermine any anti-government move coming from the GSEE. But, more importantly, is the failure of the KKE and the lack of any left alternative to the government.

Instead of using the government's attacks to organise resistance through strikes, the KKE has seen the unpopularity of the

the social contract, so PASOK could be paving the way for the right or even the military.

The KKE is unable to lead any real fight partly because of its belief in parliamentary politics and its aspirations for governmental office. But it is also imbedded in the trade union bureaucracy. Both its Stalinist ideas and its position in the union bureaucracy lead it to see workers as a stage army to be called on to act at the Party's orders. The idea of mass self-activity by workers is both alien to its politics and to its practice in the unions it controls.

In spite of widespread anti-government feeling and a wave of strikes, there is no alternative leadership to take on the government's policies. In Greece there is no real tra-

Behind all this looms the military. There is no doubt that the more intelligent of the Greek ruling class see little to fear and much to gain from the present PASOK government. But not all the ruling class are as farsighted. There is always the option of a military takeover if PASOK fails to deliver the goods.

This is especially a possibility if the working class has been defeated and demoralised. But even short of the tragic consequences of a military coup, the government's actions do nothing but prepare the ground for the right. Despite real fears of a coup, the government has failed to reform or weaken the armed forces. Its only action has been to use the fears to drum up support for itself and call for 'unity'.

Symbol of decline

The recent writings of Germaine Greer have surprised many of her admirers. Sheila McGregor argues that Greer's failings are indicative of the failings of the women's movement as a whole.

In the past few weeks Germaine Greer, author of *The Female Eunuch* and one-time symbol of the Women's Liberation Movement of the 1960s, has reappeared in the media with a series of articles in the *Sunday Times* based on her forthcoming book *Sex and Destiny*.

Many people will probably have been shocked, angered and somewhat bewildered by her utterances on women and sexuality. In her second article on 22 January she defines the 'problem':

'If we are to rescue our young women from the nightmare of unsuitable contraception, promiscuous and uncommitted sexual activity, unwanted pregnancy and illegitimacy, we will have to find the way forward.'

The way forward Germaine Greer proceeds to outline is nothing but reactionary. Sexual activity (referred to at times as 'lechery') should be replaced with 'chastity', all forms of contraception with either 'non intravaginal intercourse' or coitus interruptus plus abortion! Relationships between men and women should give way to the 'primary family' of mother and child.

The articles are composed of a horrifying, highly subjective confusion of statements about 'ideal' traditional societies in India, Italy and Burma, spiced with wonderful statements about young Islamic Marxists who consider debauchery to be the cause of political impotence in the West.

Reasonable observations about the abuse of female sexuality in the media, problems of motherhood in modern society, are answered with pleas for sexual restraint and a return by women to 'surrendering to the peremptory demands of her child'. For someone trying to wean us all away from sex, she spends an awful lot of time writing about it.

If Germaine Greer's transformation from a symbol of women's liberation into one of reaction were an isolated event, it could be simply dismissed as individual crankiness. Unfortunately however, other women have also radically changed their views: look at Betty Friedan, author of *The Feminine Mystique* and founder of the US National Organisation of Women, or Erin Pizzey, who took up the cause of battered wives. And the Greenham Common women's campaign for peace is based on the reactionary premise that women as child bearers are congenital peace makers in opposition to male aggressors.

The abandonment of its ideals by the Women's Liberation Movement since its inception in the late sixties is not an isolated occurrence to be explained by individual quirks of personality. There has taken place a political transformation of the movement and it is there the key to what has happened to Germaine Greer can be found.

To begin to understand how ideas develop and change, we need to understand where ideas come from, how they are shaped and how they change in the course of history. In *The German Ideology* Marx explains the development of ideas from the materialist conception of history:

'...(that) does not explain practice from the idea but explains the formation of ideas from material practice, and accordingly it comes to the conclusion that all forms and products of consciousness cannot be dissolved by mental criticism, by resolution into 'self-consciousness' or transformation into 'apparitions', 'spectres' 'whimsies' etc but only the practical overthrow of the actual social relations which give rise to the idealistic humbug...'

This provides us with the key to understanding the development of the ideas of the Women's Liberation Movement and those of its articulate exponents such as Germaine Greer.

Workforce

The Women's Liberation Movement developed in the late 1960s as a product of the expansion of higher education in the post war boom. As huge numbers of women entered colleges and universities with aspirations for comfortable jobs in the New Middle Class, many of them came up against barriers of sex discrimination. It did not require much insight to realise that women were going to have to fight for access to the lifestyle of the New Middle Class.

This was how the WLM was born in Britain, the USA and other countries. However, it was not a movement born in isolation from wider society. This was a period still characterised by Harold Macmillan's famous phrase: 'You've never had it so good'. It was a period of almost continuous expansion, with the building of the welfare state in Britain, the advent of the Pill and the possibilities of real birth control.

Millions of working class women entered the workforce as a permanent feature. Capitalism seemed to promise an endless ability to concede reforms and satisfy people's aspirations. Free legal abortion, equal pay, and an end to sex discrimination was, formally at least, granted. This seemed to herald a permanent weakening of previously powerful reactionary institutions and ideas. Surely everything was possible under capitalism after all? Certainly some, like Betty Friedan, thought so. But there were also other forces at work which shaped

the origins of the WLM.

The 1960s was also the period of civil rights campaigns — for Catholics in Ireland, for blacks in the USA — as well as the international campaign against US intervention in Vietnam and the triumph of the Cuban and Chinese revolutions. In Britain, the working class was shaping up for huge struggles which were to put an end to Tory government and anti-union legislation alike. This period also saw a rebirth of revolutionary socialism struggling to gain roots independently of the Stalinist Communist Parties. All these forces were brought to bear on the WLM, influencing and shaping its development. All the time however it was bound by the material basis of the movement itself — upwardly mobile students. Moreover, the basis of the upward mobility was individual competitiveness in the academic field.

In the beginning, sections of the WLM certainly felt an affinity with working class struggles and the aspirations of revolutionary socialism. In its early period in this country the WLM marched on 'Kill the Bill' demonstrations and some even joined organisations like ours. However, the WLM was always a heterogeneous movement composed of autonomous groups with radically varying political viewpoints ranging from reformists to radical feminists through to libertarians and quasi Marxists.

Essentially what united them all in practice was a preoccupation with challenging the sex roles of men and women under capitalism, with an emphasis on consciousness raising groups as a central means of achieving this. What united such women was the common revolt against reactionary views of women's role in life being defined by motherhood, passivity, femininity, subordination to men in personal relations and women as sex objects.

Hence there developed a practice which concentrated on attacking conventional sex roles, trying out new kinds of relationships, asserting women's independent sexuality, attempting to challenge women's role in the media etc. After all, for middle class professional women what is crucial is that their careers are not thwarted either by permanent motherhood, chauvinist male partners or sex discrimination.

Hence the WLM showed all the characteristics associated with its class position. Its relationship to women workers in struggle was marginal and the only real national campaign it ever fought was a defensive one over abortion.

Women workers' struggles are characterised by quite different features: strikes and occupations over issues such as unionisation, pay, jobs and conditions, and are often either mixed struggles involving men or are dependent on male workers for solidarity. Women workers come up against the same forces that inhibit their struggle as male workers: the trade union bureaucracy, lack of solidarity, the law and the press.

The class position of the WLM determined both its content and its form, and it is in its early stages that Germaine Greer made her name as a proponent of Women's Liberation: a strong woman who challenged accepted definitions of women as

weak, passive sex objects consigned to permanent motherhood. Her book, *The Female Eunuch* published in 1970 rages against society's role for women, their sexuality and place in society as wife and mother:

'Hopefully this book is subversive. Hopefully it will draw fire from all the articulate sections of the community. The conventional moralist will find much that is reprehensible in the denial of the Holy Family, in the denigration of sacred motherhood, and the inference that women are not by nature monogamous.' Just how subversive was Germaine Greer being?

For Germaine Greer, women were the only true proletariat and therefore had to 'withdraw' from society, but not by going on strike and mobilising workers' power

For her withdrawal means women simply refusing what they are supposed to be. A clearer indication of this is contained towards the end of the book when she writes:

'I thought again of the children I knew in Calabria and hit upon the plan to buy, with the help of some friends with similar problems, a farm in Italy where we could stay when circumstances permitted, and where our children would be born.'

In other words, Germaine Greer only offers individual rebellion and alternative living arrangements. We could say along with Marx in the *Communist Manifesto* writing about 'Critical Utopian-Socialism and Communism': 'These proposals, therefore, are of a purely Utopian character.'

Material

The *Female Eunuch* betrays one of the central weaknesses in the WLM: an inability to locate the oppression of women with all its manifestations of sexual behaviour, sex discrimination, pay, jobs etc in the material relations of the society we live in. Marx describes in the *German Ideology* the task we have to perform to understand oppression:

'This (materialist) conception of history thus relies on expounding the real process of production — starting from the material production itself — and comprehending the form of intercourse connected with and created by the mode of production, ie civil society in its various stages on the basis of all history; describing it in its action on the state, and explaining how all the different theoretical products and forms of consciousness, religion, philosophy, morality etc etc arise from it, and tracing the process of this formation from that basis, thus the whole thing can of course be depicted in its totality (and therefore too, the reciprocal action of these various sides on one another)'

Hence the task for us, as Engels outlines in *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*, is to explain the rise of the family and how it has been shaped according to the material form of production. We have to explain the alienation of men and women, one from the other, how sexual relations—the most intimate form of communication between two people—have become an alien power used for the buying and selling of commodities.

Moreover, we have to try to do justice to the complexity of relations between people. Not all men hate, beat up and rape women. Not all women are passive doormats, abused as sex objects. Millions of men and women struggle together for something better and altogether different. We have to look at the impact on men and women of their working together, the impact of working women on their husbands or of work on women's own aspirations and conceptions of themselves, of contraception on personal and sexual relations, and the effect of mechanisation of housework.

How does the material basis of today's society reflect itself in ideas, attitudes and behaviour? And if it is true that sex has replaced religion as 'the opium of the people', we have to explain that heaven is not to be found in bed on a capitalist earth. There is no escape from alienation under capitalism.

This is the limitation the WLM came up against. The WLM was engaged in a sexual revolution without understanding the material foundation on which all social relations are based. It soon perceived its limitations. Men were not to be changed so easily. Thus came the development of political lesbianism with separation from men as the means to achieve the goal. As Beatrix Campbell puts it in her essay: *A Feminist Sexual Politics—Now You See It, Now You Don't*:

'Secondly, there has been the equation of lesbianism with prioritisation of women and not wasting time on men. Strategically, this approach allows only flight from heterosexuality which is represented as sex collaboration—fraternising with the enemy.'

That such ideas have come to the fore in the WLM is itself a reflection of what has happened to it as a movement. Limited in its conception of the struggle to be waged, the WLM initially hovered between socialist and feminist politics, socialist organisation and consciousness raising.

With the decline of working class struggle, and the shift of the founders of the WLM into the New Middle Class, came a growing disbelief in the working class as a material force for social change and finally the abandonment of the working class altogether. With the overall shift to the right in society there is nothing to hold them from drifting.

Sheila Rowbotham marks the break with the working class in *Beyond the Fragments*. In its place, we have reformist solutions in the Labour Party (see *Sweet Freedom*) and radical feminism — another accommodation to the status quo. And now we have Germaine Greer. Her response to the failure of the sexual revolution is of the worst kind. She has lapsed into reaction.

Only when you stand on the ground of the proletariat, the only revolutionary class, is it possible to make sense of the world in which we live. As Marx put it in the *Thesis on Feuerbach*: 'The coincidence of changing circumstances and of human activity can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionising practice'.

When Germaine Greer argues that women using contraception are 'jeopardising their

health and fertility with potent medication and mischievous gadgetry', we have to reply that, imperfect though the Pill may be, it has meant sex without fear of conception for millions of men and women and brought planned parenthood within the grasp of many.

When she postulates chastity as an alternative to 'intravaginal sex', we should reply that sexual activity is a normal part of human relations, not to be constrained by old customs developed as primitive forms of birth control. In answer to her plea for coitus interruptus and abortion we should point out that any sexual practice which gives complete control to one party inevitably involves complete dependence by the other.

We want equality in sexual relations, not dependence. Abortion as a means of birth control is damaging both physically and mentally for women who want to control conception, not conceive in order to have to abort.

Constraints

And as for the ramblings about Islamic Marxists, we should remind her of the students in Iran who, when faced with their non-veiled headmistress being sacked and replaced with a veiled one said: 'We are going to count to 15, and if you are still here, we will not answer for your safety'. The veiled woman landed up in hospital.

The Ayatollah Khomeini had to reimpose the veil and other reactionary practices on men and women in Iran by force, as part of a process of breaking working class organisation. And when Germaine Greer drivels on about the primacy of mother and child relationships over relations between men and women, we should point out that for the working class today relationships based on what Engels calls 'individual sex love' are a huge advance over previous relations determined by a more backward society. They bring onto the agenda the possibilities of loving and caring between human beings freed from economic and social constraints. We can only expect a flowering of human relations with the advent of the socialist revolution. To Engels belongs the last word:

'Thus, what we can conjecture at present about the regulations of sex relationships after the impending effacement of capitalist production, is in the main, of a negative character, limited mostly to what will vanish. What will be added? That will be settled after a new generation has grown up, a generation of men who never in all their lives had occasion to purchase a woman's surrender either with money or with any other means of social power, and of women who have never been obliged to surrender to any man out of any consideration other than that of real love, or to refrain from giving themselves to their beloved for fear of economic consequences. Once such people appear, they will not care a rap about what we today think they should do. They will establish their own practice and their own public opinion, conformable therewith, on the practice of each individual — and that is the end of it.'

Morris the revolutionary

William Morris was probably the greatest socialist England has produced. Typically, in this most bourgeois of nations, as Engels called it, he is better known for wallpaper than for workers' power. **Geoff Ellen**, outlines his politics.

He was born 150 years ago this month, by odd coincidence in the same week that saw the making of another great legend the Tolpuddle Martyrs.

His story could hardly have been more different. Where the Tolpuddle farm workers were sober, Christian trade unionists seeking to ease 'their savage exploitation', Morris was well-to-do, privileged, atheistic and committed to overthrowing the system that created that exploitation.

He was also, after a comfortable ruling class apprenticeship at Marlborough and Exeter College, Oxford, one of the most feted artists of his day.

Designer, architect, typographer, poet, the range of his work was startling and so were the ideas he brought to it.

Morris, a product of a Romantic tradition which stretched back to Wordsworth and Blake, was inflamed by the new world he saw about him.

Crushed

Amid the sheer ugliness of 19th century capitalism—its ugly social relations, its ugly degradation of work, its ugly factories spewing out ugly smoke and ugly goods — his conception of art led him to a devastating critique of Victorian 'civilisation'.

'I don't want art for a few', he insisted, 'any more than education for a few, or freedom for a few.' For art was 'the expression of man's pleasure in labour', a pleasure crushed by capitalism:

'To compel a man to do day after day the same task, without any hope of escape or change, means nothing short of turning his life into a prison-torment. Nothing but the tyranny of profit-grinding makes this necessary.'

Or again:

'Nothing should be made by man's labour which is not worth making; or which must be made by labour degrading to the makers ... Simple as that proposition is ... it is a direct challenge to the present system of labour in civilised countries.'

This, the dream of the 'whole man', echoed some of the most powerful passages in Marx's early writings. It was essentially a moral response to capitalism but, again like Marx, Morris offered a materialist solution:

the class struggle.

'The antagonism of classes, which the system has bred is' he wrote 'the natural and necessary instrument of its destruction'. It could not be done by 'individuals of good will belonging to all classes'; only the working class could emancipate the working class.

It seemed a pretty distant prospect in the Britain of the 1870s. The great challenge of Chartism was but a memory, socialist ideas were virtually unknown, and Marx and Engels wrung their hands in despair at the passivity of the workers.

Something, nonetheless, was stirring. The 'workshop of the world' was plunging into the Great Depression, and as it did so it carried with it the triumphant certainties of the Victorian ruling class.

An intellectual ferment was under way and from it came many of Britain's pioneer Marxists. In 1884, a number of them launched the Social Democratic Federation, Britain's first Marxist organisation. They included, to the ridicule of polite society, William Morris.

Inside the working class, the worst unemployment for 40 years combined with an employers' onslaught to create a mood of resentment and bitterness. The result, when the economy temporarily revived in the mid-1880s, was an explosion of mass strikes, most famously among previously unorganised unskilled or semi-skilled workers, and of trade union members.

The New Unionism, as it was generally known, seemed to signal the re-awakening of the working class. The outlook for Morris and his friends looked hopeful indeed.

The SDF was led by a rich stockbroker, Henry Mayers Hyndman, whose political career was marked by jingoism, anti-Semitism, opposition to women's suffrage and Irish republicanism, and contempt for strikes. For a Tory, which Hyndman had hitherto been, these were probably useful qualifications: for an allegedly revolutionary Marxist, they were something of a handicap.

Some idea of the bombastic absurdity of the man can be glimpsed in his confident assertion that the Revolution would begin in 1889, for no better reason than that it was the centenary of the French Revolution.

In the event — despite two SDF leaders scouring London armouries to note down where all the capital's machine guns were kept, so as to be quite ready — the big day passed without incident.

Inevitably, Morris's partnership with the insufferable Hyndman was shortlived. In December 1884, four months after the SDF's founding conference Morris and a majority of the Executive split to form the Socialist League.

Though personality clashes played their part, the main rift was political. The other side of Hyndman's revolutionary bluster was an electoral opportunism which turned Morris's stomach. For Morris, Parliament had only one use: the Palace of Westminster

ought to become, he said, a storehouse for manure. There was also the matter of Hyndman's chauvinism, 'the persistent foe of Socialism' as Morris and his comrades called it.

The new organisation set out its position in a manifesto written by Morris and which still reads powerfully today, a century later. The debt to Marx's Communist Manifesto is obvious but it also contains Morris' own astonishing insights.

How about this as an answer to the Socialism in One Country of our century:

'The Socialist League therefore aims at the realisation of complete Revolutionary Socialism, and well knows that this can never happen in any one country without the help of the workers of all civilisation.'

Or this as an assessment of a Labour Party still to be born:

'No better solution would be that State Socialism, by whatever name it may be called, whose aim it would be to make concessions to the working class, while leaving the present system of capital and wages still in operation: no number of merely administrative changes, until the workers are in possession of all political power, would make any real approach to Socialism.'

Elsewhere, he was even more acutely prophetic:

Speeches

'Attempts at bettering the condition of the workers will be made, which will result in raising one group of them at the expense of another, will create a new middle class and a new proletariat; but many will think the change the beginning of the millenium ... This transitional condition will be chiefly brought about by the middle class, the owners of capital themselves, partly in ignorant goodwill towards the proletariat (as long as they do not understand its claims), partly with the design both conscious and unconscious, of making our civilisation hold out a little longer against the incoming flood of corruption on the one hand, and revolution on the other.'

Reading Morris on the State, on capitalism, on the class struggle or on communism, it is only with difficulty that you remember that these were the writings of a relative newcomer to Socialist theory — and a newcomer at a time when left wing ideas, having just emerged from the long, dark tunnel of mid-Victorian class peace, were inevitably hazy.

If the clarity of Morris's Socialist propaganda was remarkable, so was its volume. In *Commonweal*, which he edited (and largely funded) for the Socialist League, in works such as *News from Nowhere* and *A Dream of John Ball*, and in endless platform speeches, he brought revolutionary socialist ideas to thousands.

News from Nowhere, his vision of the new society, should be read by every socialist still. In a memorable chapter called 'How the Change Came', a veteran revolutionary looks back to the seizure of power, in which a revolutionary party, a general strike and the defection to the working class of the rank

and file of the army were all crucial.

Here Morris was drawing on the experience of the 1880s, with its New Unionism, its unemployment, and free speech struggles and its clashes with the state, most notably at Trafalgar Square on Bloody Sunday, November 1887. In all these events, Morris was centrally involved and they left him in no doubt about the nature of the state. Here he is speaking to a meeting of 2,000 striking Northumberland miners in April 1887:

'If there was such a thing as a general strike, he thought it was possible that the masters of society would attack them violently — he meant with hot shot, cold steel and the rest of it. But let them remember that they (the men) were many and the masters were few. It was not that the masters could attack them by themselves. It was only the masters with a certain instrument, and what was that instrument? A part of the working classes themselves.

'Even these men that were dressed in blue with bright buttons upon them and white gloves — (Voices: 'Out with them') — and those other men dressed in red, and also sometimes with gloves on their fingers, what were they: Simply working men, very hard up, driven into a corner and compelled to put on the livery of a set of masters. (Hear, hear, and prolonged hooting.)

'When these instruments, the soldiers, and sailors, came against them and saw that they were in earnest, and saw that they were many — they all knew the sufferings of the workers — what would happen? They would not dare obey their masters. The cannon would be turned round, the butts of the muskets would go up, and the swords and bayonets would be sheathed, and these men would say "Give us work: Let us all be honest men like yourselves".'

As socialist propaganda, this was superb. But in a sense Morris's great strength was also his great weakness.

The goal of socialism was exciting but abstract. On the immediate practical issues, Morris so often had little to say — 'into the details of the strike,' he told the meeting above, 'he would not enter' — betraying an all-or-nothing purism that was at best ambivalent towards reform or 'palliatives' as he and many of his comrades called them.

It was not that Morris failed to make contact with the mass struggles of these years. He spoke, after all, to countless — often very large — meetings organised around them. It was rather that pure propaganda, then as now, was unable to bridge the gap between fighting capitalism and overthrowing it.

This was true not only of Morris but of the Socialist League as a whole. In September 1886, it set up a Strike Committee to intervene in the major disputes then raging. However its standard strike leaflet, which was issued by the thousand, was such that, in the words of Morris's biographer, Edward Thompson, strikers may 'have sometimes been at a loss to decide whether they were being approached by enemies or friends'. Part of it read:

'You are now on strike for higher wages



or against reduction in your already small wage. Now, if this strike is but to accomplish this object and nothing more, it will be useless as a means of permanently bettering your condition, and a waste of time and energy, and will entail a large amount of suffering on yourselves, your wives and families, in the meantime.'

The leaflet then went on, in the style similar if vastly superior to today's Socialist Party of Great Britain, to argue for Socialism. The League's approach, in other words, was as Thompson puts it 'Utopian in form, but in actual effect and tone defeatist',

Throats

This was part of a general malaise among early Marxists who, Engels fumed, reduced Marxism 'to a rigid orthodoxy which workers are not to reach as a result of their class consciousness, but which, like an article of faith, is to be forced down their throats at once and without development.'

It is this weakness, rather than the incessant wrangling with the anarchists within its own ranks, that primarily explains

the Socialist League's ultimate failure.

Morris left it in 1890, eventually becoming reconciled with the SDF shortly before his death.

When that came, in 1896, it seemed to symbolise more than just the departure of a man who had done more than any to popularise socialism in England.

In his final years, Morris knew that he had failed to establish the revolutionary socialist organisation which he believed so important. And, depressingly, he saw the idea of a quite different body gaining ground — the Labour Party.

There could be no better epitaph than the words he himself wrote in *Dream of John Ball*:

'I...pondered how men fight and lose the battle, and the thing that they fought for comes about in spite of their defeat, and when it comes turns out not to be what they meant, and other men have to fight for what they meant under another name.'

The best available book on Morris is by E P Thompson. *William Morris* is published by Merlin for £5.95 and is available from Bookmarx.

Ransome and revolution

The Russian Revolution altered many lives. Jane Bassett looks at its impact on one of the more unlikely ones: Arthur Ransome.

Arthur Ransome today is best known as the writer of such well-known children's books as *Swallows and Amazons* and *Swallowdale*. They are based on a combination of adventure story, fantasy, and accurate and realistic descriptions of Ransome's own passions, fishing and sailing.

What is less well-known is that on and off for ten years he lived in Russia, where he first wrote for *The Daily News*, for which he covered most of the major events of 1917, and then for *The Manchester Guardian*.

During this time he was on friendly terms with many of the Bolshevik leaders, including Lenin and Trotsky, whose secretary Evgenia he eventually married. He tells the story of these events in his *Autobiography* and in *Six weeks in Russia in 1919*, a classic piece of reporting.

Ransome's ambition was 'to write stories', and he entered the 'semi-bohemian' literary world in London, writing hack articles and stories. Rashly, and somewhat naively, he agreed to the publication of a study of Oscar Wilde. This involved him in a libel action, brought against him by Lord Alfred Douglas, in connection with the latter's homosexual relationship with Wilde.

To escape this, and his own disastrous marriage, he set off for Russia in 1913 to collect and translate Russian folk stories.

He had a reckless audacity helped by his own private income, and a childlike conviction of his own immunity to danger.

He tells in his *Autobiography*, for example, of how he and Evgenia left Russia with Soviet papers in 1921. On approaching the White Russian lines, they destroyed the

papers and, trusting to luck, walked on. Luckily they met an old chess-playing acquaintance, now a White officer, who sent them on their way. Ransome was in fact bearing Soviet agreement to an armistice with the Estonians.

As a reporter he was immensely curious, always talking to people, and observing places and events closely. He insisted on taking the attitude of an open-minded, 'non-political' observer. Though his attitude to the Revolution changed considerably, and he grew far more sympathetic, in the final analysis he remained detached, and left things to the 'experts'. 'To those with a knowledge of Economics from both the Capitalist and Socialist standpoints, to which I cannot pretend.' (Introduction to *Six weeks in Russia in 1919*).

This 'non-political' standpoint led him into disastrous misunderstandings. Protesting against Intervention by the Allies, he had to be told by Lockhart, the British *chargé d'affaires* at Vologda, that: 'You don't seem to realise that these people (ie, the Bolsheviks) are our enemies'.

Armistice

On the other hand he sometimes saw the situation more clearly than many. He was telling a sceptical Foreign Office in 1916 that it should give more aid, and adjust its war aims, or resign itself to losing an ally.

Writing in *The Daily News*, he was in favour of a bourgeois/liberal democracy along western lines, and was strongly against the 'Extremists and Leninites'. On the unrest of July 1917 he wrote:

'Such a crisis as this may end in civil war ... It also opens the way to manifestations from the extreme left. In any case its whole character is likely to intensify class feeling, and to set democracy in opposition to the bourgeoisie, and the soldiers

against the officers, which ... is the end result of agitation by the extreme right or the extreme left. (*The Daily News*, September 1917).

He clearly saw the crucial role of the army, but put revolutionary outbreaks down to 'agitation' rather than the growth of mass consciousness and mobilisation. Indeed he described the revolution itself as a *coup d'état* taking place in a power vacuum, and largely dependent on 'despair and apathy'. he saw a desire for: 'Bread, peace and some kind of order' (*The Daily News*, Decembe(1917)).

Inconsistently he also attributed the revolution with a massive popular base, since a majority of the Soviets were in favour of it. He described the Soviets as: 'the broadest elected body in Russia'.

Once the revolution was an established fact however, and he got to know most of the Bolshevik leaders, including Lenin, who he greatly admired, his attitude changed.

Although he was unconvinced when Lenin told him that a revolution in England was both inevitable and desirable, Ransome was strongly attracted to the atmosphere of revolution:

'There was a feeling, from which we could never escape, of the creative effort of the revolution ... set against a background of that extra-ordinary vitality which persists in Moscow even in these dark days of discomfort, disillusion, pestilence, starvation and unwanted war.' (Introduction to *Six weeks in Russia in 1919*).

Ransome gave a brilliant account of a new society being made, despite the awful strains caused by the war:

'There can be no doubt about the starvation in Moscow ... I saw a man driving a sledge laden with, I think, horseflesh, mostly bones, probably dead sledge horses. As he drove a black crowd of crows followed the sledge and perched on it, tearing greedily at the meat:

Describing such horrors graphically, he also captured, the energy and determination to hold out and rebuild. He visited the headquarters of the Committee of State Construction, and heard about the building of new railways, and a new power station for the electrification of Moscow.

In the textile factories he saw how production had been rationalised by concentrating all processes in one area, and how necessity had had forced them to experiment and learn how to combine cotton and flax, a task previously believed to be impossible.

Above all he felt that democratisation was really taking place. Despite speculators, basic food was fairly distributed, as was housing, and the people were taking part in cultural life. He described a trip to the opera:

'The Moscow plutocracy of bald merchants and bejewelled fat wives had gone. Gone with them were evening dresses and white shirt fronts. The whole audience was in the monotone of everyday clothes.'

Ransome eventually returned to England, settled down and wrote his stories. But his accounts of the revolution are well worth reading, both for the fascinating and vivid picture he drew of the new kind of society, and for their depiction of a man whose attitudes changed so radically.



Writings of the 'renegade'

Pete Goodwin reviews *Karl Kautsky: Selected Political Writings* edited by Patrick Goode (Macmillan £6.95).

In theory this book should be essential reading. If only because Kautsky was such an important figure.

For twenty years, from the death of Engels in 1895 to the beginning of the first world war in 1914, Kautsky was 'the Pope of Marxism'. He was the number one recognised authority in the international socialist movement: a movement which included Lenin, Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg.

Yet today no-one reads him. As the introduction to this book rightly observes: 'For every hundred readers of Lenin's *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky* it is doubtful if one has read Kautsky's *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat* which Lenin was attacking.'

It might be thought that the reason for this in Britain at least, is the fact that Kautsky's works are very difficult to get hold of. They are either untranslated or the translations are long since out of print. *Karl Kautsky: Selected Political Writings* should remedy that.

I say 'should remedy it'. And I said the book 'should be essential reading.' But in fact it is difficult to read through it without a yawn.

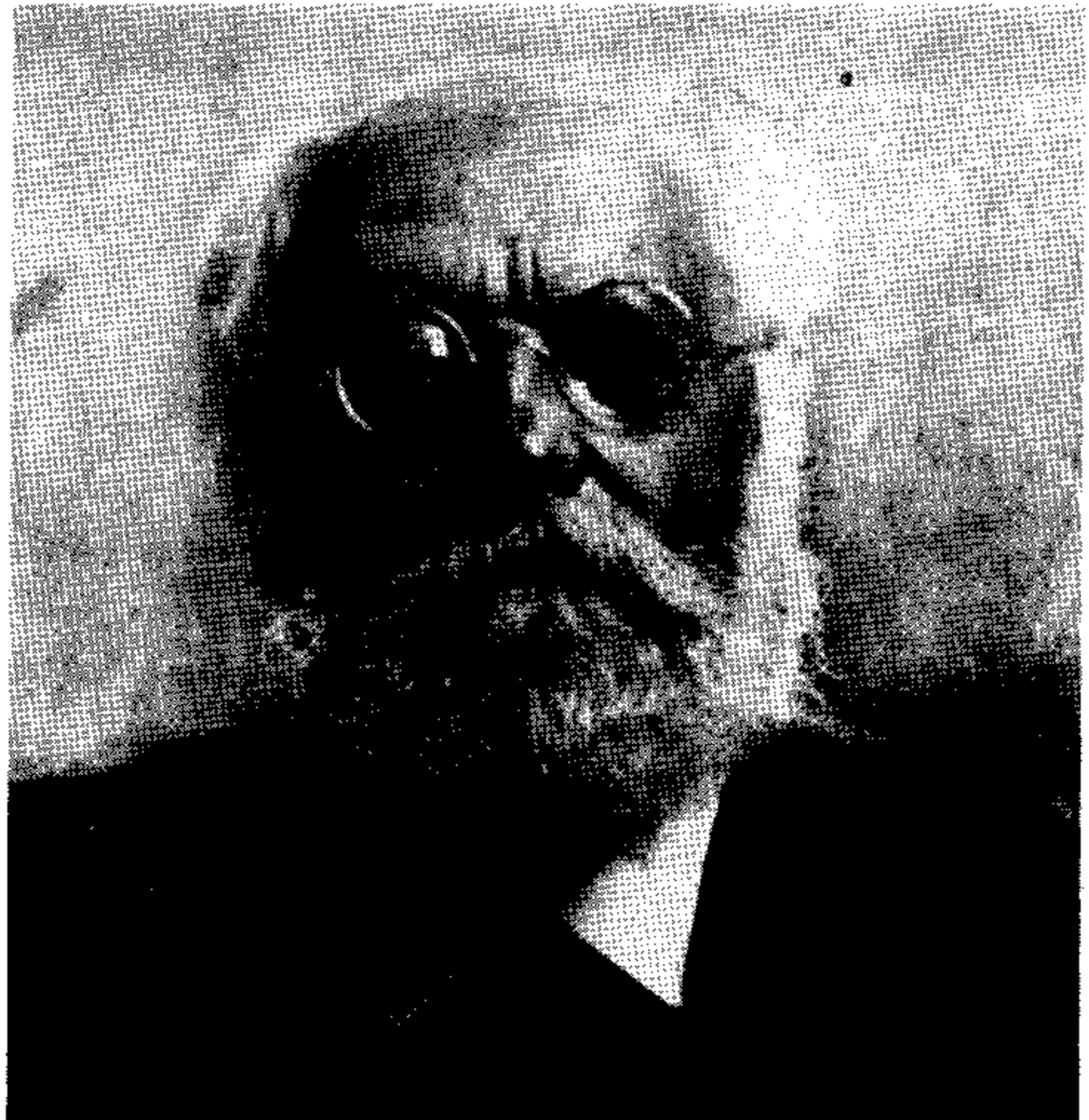
In small part this is due to the way the selection has been made and edited. (Although my main criticism here is that it doesn't actually carry enough material and it chops it around too much. But far more it is due to the very nature of Kautsky's Marxism. The reason why it is so barren is however of considerable interest. Let me explain.

Kautsky was no organisation man, but his authority as a theoretician was rooted in an organisation: the German Social Democratic Party (the SPD). From 1883 until well into the first world war he edited *Die Neue Zeit* the SPD's theoretical journal.

The SPD had been the first major national organisation to claim general allegiance to Marx's politics. It was founded in 1869 by Wilhelm Liebknecht and August Bebel. In 1875 it became the dominant organisation of the German working class when it merged with a larger non-Marxist organisation founded by Ferdinand Lassalle.

The merger was however on the basis of an extremely muddled programme, the famous Gotha Programme, so ruthlessly criticised by Marx.

The party survived and grew through twelve years of semi-illegality (the Anti-Socialist Laws 1878-90) and emerged from them to adopt what was seen by all concerned as a fully Marxist programme, the



Erfurt Programme of 1891.

On the basis of the Erfurt Programme the SPD continued its steady but spectacular growth with only one or two stumbles until the eve of the first world war.

The sheer scale of the SPD at its highpoint is worth emphasising. In 1914 it had just over one million members. Its press counted 90 daily newspapers with a total circulation of just under 1½m plus a host of well subscribed specialist periodicals including a women's paper, a satirical magazine, a gymnastics magazine and even a journal for stenographers.

Pariah

Nearly three million workers belonged to the Free Trade Unions, aligned with the SPD. Hundreds of thousands belonged to the party's sporting and cultural organisations. And at the 1912 election (the last before the war) the party polled 4.25 million votes; 35 per cent of the total.

And remember that supporting the SPD was no easy option. It meant being a pariah from the official life of the Kaiser's Germany. Remember too that this huge support was for a party which was at the centre of an international movement, the

Second International, and was regarded internationally as the model of what a Marxist party should be.

On 4 August 1914 the illusion was exploded. The SPD's Reichstag delegation voted for the war credits and became loyal supporters of the Kaiser's war machine. For Lenin it was a shattering fall from grace. But with hindsight it is possible to see the crash coming, years, even decades, before. The post-1914 Kautsky was not just a renegade from pre-1914. The 'Pope of Marxism' had had feet of clay all along.

Take for a start the Erfurt Programme of 1891. This consisted of two parts: a general statement of capitalist development and the aims of the socialists drafted by Kautsky and a list of immediate demands drafted (ironically, as it was to turn out) by Eduard Bernstein. It remained the basis for the 'tried and tested tactic' of the SPD right up until the war. And Kautsky was its most vigorous defender against any opponents from left or (more often) right.

Subsequent revolutionary criticism of the Erfurt programme has focussed on its 'two-deck' character: the fact that it was the second half, the list of specific reforms, that was the operative part while the first half was just wheeled out for May Day speeches.

There is of course much truth in this. But it rather lets the first (Kautsky-drafted) half off the hook. And this first half is by no means revolutionary. It stresses that the working class cannot achieve 'the passing of the means of production into the possession of the collectivity without having acquired possession of political power'. But it provides no further elucidation about how the working class is to acquire that power.

In *The Class Struggle* a book Kautsky wrote at the time specifically to amplify the Erfurt Programme, he filled in the gap: the workers were to seize political power through *parliament* which was 'the most powerful political lever that can be utilised to raise the proletariat out of its economic, social and moral degradation'.

So Kautsky and the SPD were from the start committed to the parliamentary road. Of course that was a *serious* parliamentary road. It didn't mean taking office at any opportunity. It meant remaining in absolute opposition until you won a majority in parliament.

When this majority was finally achieved the SPD would, it was believed, use it to totally expropriate the capitalist class. There was no talk of 'Broad Democratic Alliances' or 'Alternative Economic Strategies.' It was nevertheless the parliamentary road, and that remained a constant in Kautsky's political vision until his death.

But because it was a serious parliamentary road and because the question of smashing the bourgeois state had been so deeply buried in the years between the defeat of the Paris Commune and the first world war it could appear to be revolutionary. Lenin, for instance, in 1899 had this to say about the Erfurt Programme:

'We are not in the least afraid to say that we want to imitate the Erfurt Programme: there is nothing bad in imitating what is good, and precisely today, when we so often hear opportunists and equivocal criticism of that programme, we consider it our duty to speak openly in its favour.'

And Kautsky had not just drafted the programme. He was involved in a series of famous controversies defending the programme against critics from the right. Extracts from Kautsky's contributions to two of these are included in *Karl Kautsky: Selected Political Writings*.

Revisionism

First is the controversy over the peasant question. From the early 1890s Georg von Vollmar, leader of the SPD in Bavaria, argued that the party should adapt its programme to better secure peasant votes. Kautsky replied that the inevitable laws of capitalist development would lead to the proletarianisation of the peasantry. The dispute looks rather academic. But what was at stake was the first appearance of 'revisionism' in the party.

Bavaria was not just an area with a weak working class and a strong peasantry. It was also an area with a rather more 'liberal' bourgeoisie. Here the SPD was not necessarily *forced* into the absolute opposition it was in Prussia. The temptations of 'practical



August Bebel

politics' were far greater here, not just on the peasant question.

Kautsky apparently won the day. The 'orthodox' position of the inevitable proletarianisation of the peasantry was reaffirmed at the SPD's 1895 congress. And a few years later Kautsky published a weighty book on the peasant question which became the authoritative text on the subject in the Second International (the extract in this collection is from that book).

But that did not prevent revisionism maintaining and developing its hold on the Bavarian SPD.

The second major controversy featured in this collection in which Kautsky stood on the left is that with the most famous of all revisionists, Eduard Bernstein.

From 1896 to 1899 Bernstein published a series of articles which attacked Marxism all along the line. Capitalism was not fundamentally crisis-ridden, nor was it polarising into two major classes. The SPD must become openly a party of social reform.

A number of counterattacks were made to Bernstein, the most eloquent and famous of which was Rosa Luxemburg's *Reform or Revolution*. Kautsky joined in the controversy rather late and his attack on Bernstein was, in the words of the introduction to the selection here, 'rather pedestrian' in tone.

But at the time it was Kautsky's refutation of Bernstein that carried real weight. A resolution condemning revisionism was passed by 216 votes to 21 at the 1899 SPD congress and even more overwhelmingly at the 1903 congress held in Dresden. 'The declarations and votes in Dresden signify the burial of theoretical revisionism as a political factor,' commented Kautsky.

This was self-delusion on a grand scale. For the anti-revisionist motions were so general that the most prominent revisionists felt quite able to vote for them! Even the daddy of the revisionists von Vollmar did so.

Kautsky had reasserted the Erfurt orthodoxy but it was so toothless that it stopped no-one from getting on with the job of being a revisionist *in practice*. No wonder his contribution to the debate seems 'pedestrian'.

The same self-delusion emerges in the next major debate in the SPD that Kautsky was

involved in: the debate on the mass strike. Again Kautsky appeared to be the champion of the left.

The debate took place against the radicalising impact of the Russian Revolution of 1905. It radicalised the SPD which voted at its Jena congress in 1905 in favour of accepting the use of the mass strike in principle. And it radicalised Kautsky who joined in this advocacy of the *possible* use of the mass strike.

Even that alarmed the trade union leaders. At *their* congress in 1905 they condemned the idea of the mass strike in bitter terms. And the following year they effectively imposed their views on the SPD.

Under pressure from them, party leader Bebel proposed a resolution to the 1906 SPD congress at Mannheim which, while maintaining the theoretical possibility of the use of the mass strike insisted that without the 'adherence of the leaders and members of the unions the feasibility of the mass strike is unthinkable'.

In other words the union leaders would have a veto, which, as they had made clear, they would most certainly use. The Bebel resolution was passed. The union leaders had decisively imposed their authority on the party.

Fabricated

Kautsky protested. But three things show the shallowness of his protest and indeed of his whole commitment to the mass strike.

First, at even the high point of his support for the mass strike Kautsky attacked those on his left who wanted to go on to talk concretely about the steps necessary to actually use it. He warned them that its use would be a 'life and death struggle' and that 'revolutions cannot be fabricated'. In other words the mass strike was a theoretically possible tactic whose actual use was to be put off indefinitely.

Second, the mass strike was always just another *tactic*. Contrast that with Rosa Luxemburg, whom the 1905 Russian revolution prompted to write the magnificent *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions* in which the mass strike is 'the first natural impulsive form of every great revolutionary struggle of the proletariat, and the more highly developed the antagonism is between labour and capital, the more effective and decisive most mass strikes become.'

Third is Kautsky's judgement on the situation after the Mannheim congress of 1906. He claimed that it had put an end to the hopes the enemy had in 'practical revisionism' and that the 'mark of Mannheim' was 'above all a decisive left turn within the unions'. Again the self-delusion, for at Mannheim the right wing trade union leaders had in reality taken open control of the party. And over the next few years they followed up their victory by restrictions on the left wing youth and women's movements and on May Day strikes.

The *theory* of absolute opposition this side of a majority in parliament was more and more coming into contrast with the *practice* of the party where on one issue after another that absolute opposition was abandoned.

Bebel dissociated himself in the Reichstag

from anti-militarism and proclaimed himself more patriotic than the government. In 1913 the SPD deputies for the first time voted for a government tax bill raising money for military expenditure on the grounds that it included direct taxation.

Rosa Luxemburg saw clearly the way things were going:

'If you take the position of our deputation's resolution then you will get into the position where, if war breaks out, and if then the question arises whether the costs of the war should be covered by indirect or direct taxes you will then logically support the approval of war credits.'

But to reach this realisation she had to break with Kautsky. The break came in 1910. The question was again the mass strike. This time whether it should be used in the growing agitation over the restricted franchise in Prussia.

Rosa Luxemburg wrote an article arguing that it should. The party leaders refused to publish for fear of inflaming the situation. Kautsky also refused on the same grounds. Instead he wrote an article entitled 'What Now?' against Luxemburg. It is probably the most interesting part of this selection, because it musters apparently well thought out tactical arguments and carefully placed references to the theoretical possibility of a mass strike, to end with the pathetic assertion that in the actual circumstances everything has to be focussed on the next election (in two years time!).

In that election, with the war danger increasingly threatening, the SPD leadership deliberately downplayed the issue of anti-militarism to cement a squalid electoral deal with the pro-imperialist bourgeois Progressive Party.

Pathetic

Kautsky's role was now simply to provide apparently sophisticated Marxist justifications for complacency. They do not wear well. One article (unfortunately not included here) was entitled: 'The New Liberalism and the New Middle Class.'

It argued that 'all the plans of the reactionaries were ruined by the re-vitalised Liberalism which was now ready to struggle against the right'. The 1912 election had produced a situation 'unprecedented in the history of Germany'. Written less than two years before the first world war, this looks pretty pathetic today.

And equally pathetic was the shift in Kautsky's views on imperialism, a representative selection of which is provided in this collection. At his most radical in *The Road to Power* published in 1909, he had argued that because of capitalist development 'a world war is now brought threateningly close'. But as that war began he had changed to arguing that 'out of the world war of the imperialist great powers too there can now result a federation of the strongest amongst them, which will eliminate the arms race.'

So the war was a mistake for the capitalists, and support for it was equally a mistake, but only a mistake, for socialists. So although Kautsky opposed the war, from a pacifist standpoint, his whole position drove



Rosa Luxemburg

him to argue for the speediest possible resumption of 'business as usual' in the socialist movement.

That was why Lenin saw him as so dangerous during the war. The workers would begin to break in their masses from the right wing socialist leaders as the war progressed, but Kautskyism would prevent them drawing the necessary revolutionary conclusions. And so it was to prove in the year

immediately after the end of the war.

But by that time it is questionable whether Kautsky himself had anything really different to say than those right wing social democrats. Or at least anything that anyone took any notice of. For whereas most post war centrists paid lip service to the Bolshevik Revolution, Kautsky was quick to attack it.

Extracts from some of the works in which he did so form the last two parts of this selection. All the Marxist jargon is still there but in essence his argument is exactly the same as the right wing — the Bolsheviks were not parliamentarians. And from then, until his death in 1938, Kautsky was to occupy an honoured but irrelevant niche in, very plainly, unrevolutionary social democracy.

It had been a long political journey. But once the initial direction on the Erfurt Programme's parliamentary road had been set, then in the real world each step followed logically from the last. It was a journey of enormous importance and every revolutionary today should be familiar with it to make sure they do not retread it.

But unfortunately selections from Kautsky's copious itinerary, no matter how carefully selected, do not on their own make very exciting reading. You need the landscape around sketched in. For that far better to turn to Massimo Salvadori's *Karl Kautsky and the Socialist Revolution* or Carl Schorske's *German Social Democracy 1905-1917*.

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Squaddism in Nazi Germany

Beating the fascists? The German Communists and political violence 1929-33

Eve Rosenhaft
Cambridge £24.00

The fight against fascism is not a priority for revolutionary socialists in Britain at the moment. But it was back in 1977-78 when the National Front were growing fast and picking up more votes than the Liberals. And it may well be again in the not too distant future. So knowing how to fight fascism remains very important.

This book looks at the most important single experience we have to go by — that of the attempt to stop the rise of the Nazis in Germany in 1929-33. It does so by looking in detail at how Communists in working class neighbourhoods of Berlin organised to fight back against Nazi attacks.

Social democratic sources sometimes give the impression that the German Communist Party refused to fight the Nazis. This is utter rubbish. It is true that the party made gross errors, like supporting a right wing inspired referendum aimed at getting rid of the right-wing social democratic government of the state of Prussia.

But, as this book tells, the party was involved, day after day, month after month, in the physical fight to stop the Nazi advance. It recruited to itself many of the most active, militant working class youth, and, through a plethora of anti-fascist front organisations, sought to resist the Storm Troopers in their tracks.

With 30,000 members in Berlin, and a third of the total vote, the party should have been well placed to mount such resistance. But it continually ran into problems.

For instance, in April 1931 the party launched a campaign against the growing network of Nazi taverns, which were beginning to penetrate into traditional working class areas. Publicans who had previously hosted social democratic or Communist meetings now began to open their doors to the Nazis, and the taverns were soon operating virtually as Storm Trooper barracks in the middle of red areas. Closing them down was a vital part of any anti-fascist strategy.

But the party soon found it was a goal it could not achieve. Demonstrations against the taverns were attacked, not only by the Nazis but also by the heavily armed police. The anti-fascists had to stand impotently by while the Nazi barracks continued to flourish.

The party could issue the call:

'We must intensify the action against the Nazi barracks insofar as it is possible for us, through the organising of mass assault, which we must develop into mass terror action, to drive

the SA troops out of their murder dens.'

But it could not deliver effective 'mass assault action' because of the overwhelming police presence.

To many in the party — including sections of its leadership — there seemed an easy answer. If mass terror would not work, why not try individual terror?

A series of armed attacks were carried out against the taverns, and even against the police, by small, highly organised conspiratorial groups.

A typical action was that of 15 October against a tavern in Richardstrasse.

Members of the Communist-led anti-fascist fighting organisations were summoned to a 'mass demonstration' a kilometre away from the tavern by their leaders. But the only function of this was to distract the attention of the police. The real struggle was left to an armed group under the control of one of the local party leaders that was so secret that even the Berlin leadership of the party knew nothing about it.

'A young man was despatched to chain up the back gate of the police station. Witnesses in the Richardstrasse saw knots of men suddenly assemble themselves into a procession. Between 30 and 50 approached the tavern in a slow march, shouting "Down with fascism" and singing the Internationale. Suddenly there was a shout, the procession stopped and the first shot was fired. It was followed by at least 20 more, fired in rapid succession by four or five young men, while the crowd of demonstrators remained standing in the streets. The gunmen then fled and the crowd dispersed ...'

At first, the raid seemed a success. The landlord was killed and the tavern shut down. In October and November 1931 such shoot-outs cost 14 Nazi lives in the whole country, as against only six Communists. Local party leaders could easily draw the conclusion that this was the basis of a successful anti-Nazi strategy:

'With a really thorough application, it will be possible after four weeks to say that there once was an SA.'

But this was soon proved to be nonsense. The tavern was back in use as a Nazi hang out within three months, and in the meanwhile the police had arrested 22 of those involved in the raid. If it came just to shoot outs on the street, the police with their heavy armaments and the Nazis with their wealthy backers were bound to be more successful than the 30,000 Berlin Communists.

The Party leadership soon realised this, and on 31 November 1931 passed a resolution denounc-

ing individual terror. But leading Berlin members were not convinced. As one of them put it:

'In my opinion, mass terror is a sheer impossibility. Fascism can only be held down by terror now, and if that fails, in the long run everything will be lost.'

But it did fail, and everything was lost.

Was there an alternative? This book shows that in terms of the CP acting by itself, or through its front organisations, there was not. The party recognised the need for class action, for strike action against the Nazis. But in 1931 more than half Berlin's factory workers were unemployed. Under such circumstances, the 5000 Communists with factory jobs were not capable, by themselves, of pulling strikes in protest at fascist violence.

This was not, as is sometimes asserted, because the Communist Party had become a party of the lumpen proletariat. This book shows the great majority of its members, although young, were former factory or construction workers who had lost their jobs with the slump. The problem was that mass unemployment had produced a terrible downturn in the confidence of employed workers to fight, just as it had produced mass demoralisation and bitterness among many of the unemployed.

Under such circumstances 'squaddism' — the use of armed actions by small conspiratorial groups — was bound to seem attractive to anti-fascists.

Yet there was another option. In Brunswick mass workers' action, including strikes, did drive the Nazis from the streets in 1931 — even though the local state government was Nazi run.

But it could not be mass action of the most militant Communist section of the working class alone. It required the involvement of the majority of employed workers, organised by the reformist Social Democratic Party and its unions.

This alternative was not easy to get. The Social Democrats were loath to break in any way with constitutionalism, even if the Nazis were storming their way to power. Even after Hitler's accession to power in 1933, Social Democratic leaders disowned 'illegal' underground opposition groups.

During the last years of the Weimar republic, the Social Democrat leaders often saw the Communists as a bigger menace than the Nazis. On May Day 1929 the Social Democrat police chief of Berlin banned a Communist-led demonstration, and when this took place anyway turned his thugs on it. They shot demonstrators down on the streets and then turned their attention to working class areas, sealing off tenement blocks and breaking into flats. In more than three days of fighting, 30 civilians were killed — but not one policeman. Never did the Berlin police take any such action against the Nazis.

No wonder not only party hacks but the mass of Communist Party members hated the Social Democrat leaders. No wonder the real anti-fascist fighters had nothing but contempt for the Reichsbanner — a massive social democratic 'defence force' which always thought up some excuse for not mobilising against the fascists.

However, that should not have been the end of the argument. More than half the Berlin working class continued to follow the leadership of the Social Democrats. A way had to be found to get their support in the struggle against the Nazis.

There was only one way to fight for this support. It was to apply the tactic of the united front as worked out in the early years of the Communist International.

Again and again, the Communist Party should have been inviting the Social Democrat leaders to engage in united action against the fascists. Let Social Democrats and Communists together defend social democratic premises from Nazi attack, and then go on to defend Communist premises from the same attacks.

The Social Democratic leaders would try to avoid such united action by any means at their disposal. But such was the Nazi threat to their organisation that they could not always say no without the risk of driving many of their members to united action alongside the Communists in any case.

If the appeal was made to the social democratic leader for united action, then eventually united action would result—whether with, or without those leaders.

The German Communists refused to make such appeals. They had been told by Stalin that the Social Democrats were social fascists, and this tied in with much of their own experience of repression at the hands of social democrat-run police forces. Instead of teaching young workers to oppose reformism, but to fight with reformist workers against the fascists, they gave the impression reformism and fascism were the same.

Funnily enough, the people who most benefitted from this were the Social Democratic leaders. They could excuse their disastrous passivity in the face of the Nazis by blaming the Communists for 'dividing the working class'.

Meanwhile, the mistaken politics of the Communists led them into the blind alley of squaddism and individual terror.

This book does not go all the way in drawing these conclusions. The author does not even mention the person who best drew them at the time, Leon Trotsky. The book is also too academically oriented to be easy reading. Nevertheless, the author is to be thanked for throwing valuable light on a most important, and disastrous, episode in working class history.

Chris Harman

Brecht and Stalinism

Brecht in Context
John Willett
Methman £12.50

Willett's book is at once both fascinating and maddening. This is partly the fault of the book's origins in a series of different articles and lectures Willett had done about Brecht over many years. In the course of compiling the book Willett extensively re-edited and re-wrote many of his pieces giving the final book a curious feel, like several books on similar themes all collected together in one volume.

A more accurate title would have been *Brecht in Contexts*. The book is divided into chapters dealing variously with Brecht's work in the field of poetry film and theatre.

Not surprisingly it is the chapter dealing with Brecht's attitude to politics which provides the most interesting reading. Whereas Brecht is now considered suitable material for both the Royal Shakespeare and National Theatres, Brecht's politics are still a subject that can get people angry.

By far the most lively piece of writing in this book is John Willett's correspondence with Professor Hannah Arendt a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences about Brecht's attitude towards Stalinism.

The initial cause of the debate was whether Brecht had ever written an 'ode' to Stalin. Willett carefully details Brecht's references to Stalinism, certainly he states Brecht for many years supported Stalin. However, this support only came into print on three occasions and of these three statements the closest Brecht had come to saying anything in praise of Stalin was writing that he believed it was important that Russian industry be built up and Stalin's leadership was unfortunately probably 'useful' and necessary for this process.

Brecht's international reputation being what it was it was a considerable tribute but nothing like the praise poured on Stalin by other artists including Picasso. Yet it's hard to find a critic who will de-

nounce Picasso as an apologist for Stalin's crimes.

In fact one almost gets the feeling that Hannah Arendt was denouncing Brecht for *not* writing odes in praise of Stalin. If Brecht had obliged, dismissing him as a writer who had become lost to 'pure' (innocent) art by getting involved in politics would have been easy.

That this was Arendt's aim is very carefully demonstrated by Willett. It's thus even more annoying that Willett doesn't tackle other difficult problems about the effect Brecht's politics had upon his work.

In the chapter headed Brecht and the visual arts, Willett writes that the artist George Grosz became 'too' obsessed with Brecht's support of Stalin. In what way 'too' obsessed? Was it the subject matter of Brecht's poetry and plays that Grosz objected to? If so, which ones?

Grosz wrote to friends that he felt Brecht wanted him to work in a style he no longer felt relevant. He could no longer cope with political slogans.

It's an interesting point for by the time that Brecht had become most committed to communist politics in the late twenties Grosz had become disillusioned and sceptical of the German Communist Party and the direction it was taking.

Bearing in mind the degeneration of the Communist International Grosz had every reason to be sceptical about the political work required of him. This isn't to say that Brecht was wrong to make the political commitment when he did, it's just what exactly was the nature of that commitment.

How was it reflected in Brecht's art?

Apart from the debate with Arendt about the non existence of an ode to Stalin Willett does little to show connections between Brecht's writings and contemporary political events and debates. It's an annoying omission in what is in many respects an interesting and entertaining book.

Peter Court

'state ownership and state management of basic industries represented a process of capitalist rationalisation.'

From that first winter, the miners learnt through bitter experiences that state capitalism was still capitalism. And that meant workers still had to fight if they wanted to defend jobs and conditions. Until 1966 wages in the industry were decided much as they were in engineering. National agreements set minimum rates, while in the collieries local bargaining could force up piece rates.

Local bargaining meant local struggles.

In 1966, however, the National Coal Board moved to end local bargaining and break pit-bottom organisation. The result was the National Power Loading Agreement. The NPLA at first appeared to be just what the management consultant ordered. The NPLA forced down wage levels and reduced miners' control over the work process.

Within a few years, however, acquiescence turned to anger. Mass unofficial strikes in 1969 and 1970 paved the way for the national strikes of 1972 and 1974, and the fall of the Tory government. By centralising wage bargaining, the NCB were at least partly responsible for the unparalleled national unity created within the National Union of Mineworkers.

The unity was ultimately eroded by the 1977 productivity scheme, sponsored by energy minister Tony Benn. Under the scheme a Yorkshire faceworker could earn £90 more than his Welsh counterpart for almost identical work. To some on the left, the divisions created by the productivity deal and the subsequent ballot defeats for Arthur Scargill have effectively killed the union as a major force.

To judge by last year, it is a very lively corpse. In the first half of 1983, there were 143 registered strikes in the industry, and in the

Barnsley area 13,000 men came out on unofficial strike over victimisation. Such guerrilla action over bonus and discipline is the result of the scheme. Unable to take on the employers nationally the workforce has retreated into local, sectional battles. Each new management strategy produces its own response from the workforce.

Krieger's book contains many insights into this history, particularly in his case studies of individual pits. It is, however, a frustrating book. Written in sociological jargon, it is full of phrases like 'centrifugal undertows' and 'the excessive exigencies of capitalist accumulation/valorisation.' He appears quite ignorant of a socialist tradition which does not equate socialism with state ownership, but with working class self emancipation.

More seriously, his accounts of the conflict at the point of production are not related to the events in the broader class struggle. He places too much emphasis on 'regional differences', instead of analysing how they can be overcome by workers' struggle or intensified by management victories. In other words, he produces a work of academic industrial sociology rather than a contribution to socialist theory and practice. For a book which has the word 'dialectic' in its title it is distinctly un-dialectical.

It is a sign of the limitations of Krieger's academic 'Marxism' that he concludes his book with glowing praise of Arthur Scargill's leadership just as it has been found wanting. The embryo of future advances for the miners lie in the guerrilla struggles over bonus and manning levels, and the ability of socialists in the coalfields to relate these issues to pit closures and pay.

Neither left bureaucrats like Scargill nor academics like Krieger have much to say about such struggles.

Alan Gibbons

King Coal?

Undermining Capitalism; State Ownership and the Dialectic of Control in the British Coal Industry

Joel Krieger
Pluto Press £7.95

On 1 January 1947 the British coal industry was nationalised. Contemporary accounts tell of red flags being hoisted over some pits

and much singing of 'The Red Flag', or even the 'International'. The jubilation didn't last out the winter. The then Labour government demanded harder work and 'sacrifices for the nation'—the capitalist nation, that is.

Any strategy for socialism today must reject utterly the notion that state ownership equals socialism. As Joel Krieger rightly observes:

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Orwell and the Trotskyists

John Deason's article on Orwell was spot on, showing that Orwell, despite his faults, was a brilliant novelist and political writer, who for four years of his life saw himself as a revolutionary socialist.

However, I question one aspect of John's article. He says of the Trotskyists of Orwell's time: 'There is no evidence that Orwell had even heard of them.'

In fact in an essay 'Notes on Nationalism', written in 1945, Orwell devotes about a page to a description of Trotskyism, and seems to have read some Trotskyist literature:

'Trotskyism. This word is used so loosely ... I use it to mean a doctrinaire Marxist whose main motive is hostility to the Stalin regime. Trotskyism can be better studied in obscure pamphlets or in papers like the *Socialist Appeal* than in the words of Trotsky himself who was by no means a man of one idea.'

Orwell was not very complimentary to the Trotskyists:

'The Trotskyist is against Stalin just as the Communist is for him ... He wants not so much to alter the external world as to feel that the battle for prestige is going in his own favour.'

Why then did Orwell reject Trotskyism? Perhaps it was for the same reason that led him to reject the working class as the agents of change — his extreme pessimism and despair which led him to see workers usually as victims and sometimes as masses which had to be led by middle class intellectuals.

But for all that, perhaps Orwell had a point in his criticisms of some early Trotskyists.

Victor Serge, after being in the Left Opposition and escaping in the nick of time, had this to say of some of the Trotskyists he found in the West:

'Our oppositional movement Russia had not been Trotskyist, since we had no intention of attaching it to a personality, rebels such as ourselves were against the cult of the leader ... And now tiny parties like that of Walter Dauge in Belgium, which has no more than a few hundred members, termed him "our glorious leader", and any person in the circles of the "Fourth International" who went so far as to object to his propositions was promptly expelled and denounced in the same language that the bureaucracy had employed against us in the Soviet Union.'

If the 'Orthodox Trotskyists' that Orwell came across in his day bear any relation to the 'Orthodox Trotskyism' of the Workers Revolutionary Party of our days, perhaps we can forgive Orwell when

he wrote this of them:

'The fact that the Trotskyists are everywhere a persecuted minority creates an impression that Trotskyism is intellectually and morally superior to Communism; but it is doubtful whether there is much difference. The most typical Trotskyists, in any case, are ex-Communists.'

As John Deason says, what a shame Orwell missed meeting Reg Groves and the Balham Group. If he had, perhaps he would have joined them.

Stephen Arthur,
Skelmersdale

Self emancipation

Edward Stonehill's letter (January issue of *Socialist Review*) neatly summed up a view prevalent on much of 'the left'. The reason this view is totally incorrect is that it springs from a wrong basis. Socialism, if it is to be anything, must be the *self-emancipation* of the working class.

Not only can socialism *only* result from self-activity but nothing else can overthrow capitalism.

I do not doubt that the Labour left councils are well intentioned. The tragedy is that they are blind to reality. All they are doing is attempting to provide palliatives for the evils of capitalism. Not only is this futile — capitalism will not go away because of a few advice centres — but it misleads people away from the real struggle. These Labour councils are necessarily managers and landlords, employers and rate-raisers. They, to their workers and tenants, are *necessarily* part of the ruling class.

Moreover, they perpetuate the belief that the working class can entrust its destiny to the few enlightened beings who will ensure our salvation. The self-activity of the working class comes down to putting a cross in the right box at election time — what Edward calls 'local democracy.' But the whole point is that 'democracy' under capitalism, whether at parish or parliamentary levels, is meaningless. When the worker has no choice but to sell his or her labour for a necessarily exploitative wage, what does freedom mean? 'Parliamentary democracy' is merely one of capitalism's most subtle ways of placating the working class. It can, in certain circumstances, be used against the ruling class, but fundamentally, it is one of their tools.

All this is surely basic, but the 'fight to save the GLC' will show lots of people on the left, like Edward Stonehill, falling into the same old trap. The basis will not be a fight for *workers' conditions* but a

fight for a meaningless capitalist slogan: 'local democracy'. The fight will be rooted, not in the self-activity of the workers, but in attempting to change the minds of MPs of all parties!

There is no point in keeping silent on this or other similar points for the sake of unity. Any unity not based around some sort of workers' self-activity is futile, misguided and, from a Marxist view, wrong.

Nick May
Birmingham

PS: As a request, I would like to see further articles both factual and analytic on the US working class. It appears to me to be the most under-reported and under-analysed in Socialist Worker Party publications, or any other publications. What is the reason for the success of US capital in repressing and dividing its working class? What is the relationship of the US government to US capital? Do small firms continue to thrive, as the capitalist press reports? Does this not contradict Marxist analysis? Why does the palliative of religion continue to cast its noxious shadow?

Harman's innovation

Chris Harman's masterly summary of the balance of class forces (*Socialist Review* February 84) is marred only by a strange 'innovation'.

What is this 'bureaucratic mass strike' he has discovered? For us, the mass strike is of the greatest importance. By confronting the bosses as a united class and therefore inevitably the state as well, it raises the question of workers' power. Trade union leaders hate it like poison. As one of them said in opposition to Rosa Luxemburg: 'General strike is general nonsense'. They never call mass strikes, they never 'generalise (resistance) in order to control it' as Chris puts it. On the contrary, generalising is the key to class consciousness, to questioning the role of the bureaucrat. Sectionalism is essential to the official's power.

Instead trade union leaders call what Rosa Luxemburg describes as 'political demonstration strikes' — or one-day strikes as we usually refer to them, 14 May 1980 — the TUC's 'Day of Action', 22 September 1982 — the day in support of the hospital workers, and now 28 February, in support of the workers at GCHQ. In truth, these are not strikes at all in the proper sense of the word. A strike is a trial of strength; a battle. And by definition, that means the outcome must be, to some extent, uncertain. For that very reason, in their conservatism, officials hate them. How nice then to call something

By any other name

I never realised Pete Goodwin was so old. He must be in his eighties at least if he knew Rosa Luxemburg well enough to call her by her first name (see *Back Page* in *Socialist Review* of January 1984).

If the articles in *Socialist Review* on past socialist leaders regularly referred to 'Karl' and 'Vladimir', there would be no cause for comment. But I wouldn't dream of suggesting that an enlightened socialist journal would dignify *men* with surnames while trivialising *women* with first names.

Or is it to be: '47-year-old mother of two Klara Zetkin answered vivacious brunette Rosa's telegram ...' from now on?

Maybe the Leninist experts should remember that Lenin himself, while frequently disagreeing with Luxemburg, nonetheless honoured her with a surname.

Ben Ross
Leyton

that looks like a battle but involves no risk.

Nor do Chris's historical examples do anything but prove the opposite of his case. In 1926, the TUC General Council had not the slightest intention of going through with the General Strike when they called it. As the day drew close they put all their energies into trying to call it off. It was Baldwin the Tory Prime Minister who pushed them into it, knowing they would lead it to defeat and knowing that, initially at least, there was no danger of an alternative rank and file leadership wresting control from the General Council.

In 1968, in France, it is true that the national officials called a 'one day strike' in support of the students on the Monday 13 May. What Chris doesn't mention is that though the one day protest was far more successful than the bureaucrats had expected, on the Tuesday over 95 percent of the strikers were back at work. Only a handful of plants, like Sud-Aviation in Nantes, had occupied. It was they — not the officials — who played the key role, generalising the strike till it totalled ten million workers.

Chris is right in his conclusion the situation can change most suddenly. We will see more mass strikes and we will see the bureaucracy destroying them. But the strikes will have been created by workers, let's be clear about that.

Geoff Brown,
Manchester

Wild about animals

Andy Strouthous managed to mar an otherwise excellent review, albeit vitriolic, of animal liberationists and vegetarians by including an unscientific quote from Engels, to wit: 'The meat diet, however, had its greatest effect on the brain, which now received a far richer flow of the materials necessary for its development.'

Andy would appear to agree with this statement: 'Man rose above the other primates because he was the only one to eat meat.' The ramifications of this proposition are mind-boggling. It would explain why India, with a largely vegetarian population, succumbed to the meat-eaters of the East India Company. If only they had eaten meat, which presumably is fortified with materials which aid intellectual development, then they would have resisted colonisation.

Indeed, assuming the properties of meat to be as stated, then surely meat-eaters' flesh would be even more fortified. Therefore we should, as a party, start a programme of cannibalism. Andy could make the first sacrifice. (Blanquette de Strouthous?)

Personally, I shall be voting for Bhel Pourris twice a day, and I'm not a vegetarian.

J Fisher

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Engels, parrot fashion

The review by Andy Strouthous in last month's *Review* (SR 62) entitled 'Animal Crackers' was a sectarian jibe at animal liberationists rather than an attempt at a Marxist analysis of the pamphlets concerned. The lack of Marxist method of scientific investigation, the clearly incorrect analysis of the development of the human race, and the condemnation of the united front tactic leaves you questioning how such contributions get into *Socialist Review*.

The so-called review of the two pamphlets was a crude attempt to justify a sectarian opinion of animal liberationists by at best distortions, or at worst plain lying and prejudice. The quoted pamphlet by Engels was *The Part Played by Labour In The Transition From Ape To Man*, not the part played by *Meat*. All primates eat some meat.

Engels quite rightly points out the decisive step in the transition from ape to man was the adaptation to living on the ground. The consequences of the move from tree to ground, the development of hunting and gathering skills, the invention of tools and communication, all in all the social



organisation of early man, is what led to the advancement of the human above other animals. (Not the chewing of raw beef!)

Engel's pamphlet is correct in its overall theme, but its specific content is incorrect in many respects, eg ...yet birds are the only animals that can learn to speak (other than Humans)... Let no one say that the parrot does not understand what it says.?!'

Secondly, the article's total condemnation of all one-issue campaigns as a 'waste of time and energy' is cretinous to say the least. Has Strouthous forgotten the united front tactic? Were we wasting our time in the RTWC, ANL, or CND etc? If we are seriously to question whether we can involve ourselves in any united front action, we should assess the activities and campaigns of the organisations concerned at the given time and their relationship to the working class. To condemn the use of the united front tactic completely to justify our disagreements with the animal liberationists is ultra left.

The point of this letter is not to support the animal liberationists or to call for united front action with them, but to draw attention to the fact that Strouthous' article does not provide our members and contacts with a credible Marxist argument against the moralism of the animal liberation movement.

J Jackson

R Colyer

Kilburn

A vegi strikes back

Speaking as a vegetarian, Andy Strouthous probably thinks I'm deficient in brain cells. Nevertheless, I'd like to make a couple of comments on his article on animal liberation in February's *Review*.

Most of what Engels wrote is still

relevant today. He also wrote the odd bit of nonsense, influenced by the prevailing ideas of the society he lived in. To argue that human beings developed larger brains by eating more meat, may have been credible in the nineteenth century. It's certainly out to lunch now, and Andy does Engels no credit by resurrecting it. Actually, if Andy hasn't noticed, there are a lot of other sources of protein besides meat, and many other animals consume meat in large quantities without any noticeable increase in brain capacity.

There was a serious article to be written about the rise of the animal liberation movement. A lot of young people have been attracted to its mixture of reformism, semi-anarchism and activity. This shouldn't particularly surprise us in the downturn, but it merits some real critical arguments rather than wasting space in the *Review*.

Pete Cannell

HammerSmith

Meat and materialism

Andy Strouthous' review, *Animal Crackers*, (*Socialist Review* 62) is wonderful... up to a point. Namely, where he turns from basting the Animal Libbers' single-issue idiocy to dishing up his own peculiar and indigestible Roast Beef Theory of History, garnished as Marxism.

Andy asserts that man, his unfortunate synonym for human beings, the only meat-eating primate, developed organisation and weapons (tools) for hunting. As a result, the nutrients for a more rapid development of the human brain were secured, as were new skills in controlling nature. Thus, humans differentiated themselves from the rest of the animal kingdom.

Now this is a materialist theory, a very meaty materialism. But it is

also wrong.

Firstly, it is factually incorrect. Baboons, lower primates, like Andy, eat meat.

Secondly, it makes two false assumptions: that food gathering does not require organisation and tools and more importantly, that organisation and tool-using are specifically human traits. They are not, both are pre-human. What characterises human organisation and tool-using is *conscious* ingenuity. Animal behaviour is determined by inherited physiology, or instinct. That is why we have a self-made history and animals only a natural evolution.

This was Marx's position: 'What distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this: that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality.'

Finally, we come to the thesis, taken from Engels, that meat-eating speeded up brain development. There is not much to say about it, except that it shows the limited nature of scientific knowledge in 1876. Not one of the 50 or so essential nutrients for good health so far discovered (water, fats, proteins, carbohydrates, minerals, vitamins, acids and fibres) necessitate a meat diet.

Animal Libbers cannot be faulted on anthropological or nutritional grounds. Rather their defect lies in placing the needs of animals on a par with, or above, human needs which capitalism subordinates to the profit drive, destroying food stocks whilst tens of millions starve.

Of course the Animal Libbers play down this contradiction. We will never hear of them hijacking lorry loads of fly spray or organising consumer boycotts of de-lousing shampoos. But we should not be fooled. This is a reactionary suburban ideology of the well-fed middle class.

Rod Hudson

Building BLOC?

You may well have written to George Williamson over the past few weeks. Or rather, you may well have asked your union branch secretary to write to him.

If you haven't then pull your finger out sharpish and do so. For George Williamson is the person you write to to get credentials for the conference in Sheffield on 24 March called by BLOC, the Broad Left Organising Committee.

George is organising secretary of BLOC. He is also Chairman of the USDAW Broad Left and is known among USDAW activists as an open and committed supporter of *Militant*.

All of which makes George Williamson's views on the BLOC conference of considerable interest. They are set down in a full page interview in *Militant* on 10 February. It is worth quoting at some length.

Working class

The first striking thing about the interview is George's estimate of the current mood of the working class.

'According to the Tories, a "new realism" exists within the ranks of the trade union movement. They point approvingly to the level of days lost through strikes in 1983—the lowest since 1967—as confirmation of their claims.

'The Tories are in for a shock. Their "new realism" theory will be blown apart. Enormous anger is being accumulated in the ranks of the trade unions. *Everywhere there are workers trying to improve and extend their conditions and to build their organisations, but, first and foremost, to get rid of the Tories. They want their unions and their leaders to act with the same determination and tenacity which the Tories show on behalf of the bosses.*' (My emphasis).

That is one example of how George sees the current state of the working class. To make it quite clear that it is no slip of the tongue here is another.

'Unfortunately for the trade union leaders, the rank and file have no intention of letting their organisations, built painstakingly over decades of struggle, to be undermined and their gains frittered away over beer and sandwiches at the Department of Employment. *All the attacks will be forcefully resisted, postal ballots, political levy restrictions, enforced ballots on industrial action etc — all of these present the Tories with a potentially explosive minefield of opposition.*' (My emphasis).

Note carefully what George is doing. The quite correct general argument that *eventually* in the long term, there will be a sharp revival of industrial struggle is used to justify quite false assertions about what is happening at the moment or what is going to happen in the near future. The result is statements

like the ones above that I have put in italics. Just look at them again. If he believes them, George is living in a dream world. If he doesn't, then he is engaging in a dangerous bluff.

The second striking thing about the interview is what George Williamson says about the union leaders. It has its radical side:

'(The NGA dispute) showed that *the more vicious the attacks on the working class become, the more unable to lead a fight-back do the leaders appear to be.* The decision of the TUC General Council not to support the NGA in the dispute underlines even more clearly the need to campaign in the trade union movement to take the movement as a whole to its fundamental principles of defending working class rights: and the need to *transform the unions from top to bottom.*' (My emphasis).

Again, note particularly the bits I have put in italics. I agree with them. But does George Williamson? The rest of the interview indicates that he does not.

Firstly, for George the villain of the piece in the NGA dispute was the TUC General Council and he emphasises earlier that at the 1983 TUC the General Council was 'rigged to favour the right wing and the white collar unions.' He adds that the Congress itself 'saw the right forcing through an agreement to have talks with the Employment minister.' These events at the 1983 TUC were, according to George, 'the point of departure' for the BLOC conference.

So it looks as if when George refers to

'trade union leaders' disparagingly that is really a shorthand for *right wing* trade union leaders. So he says earlier in the interview 'the right wing TUC leadership have shown no willingness to fight.' What of the left wingers on the General Council? You may well ask. They only receive one mention in the whole of the interview. Here it is in its entirety:

'... Rodney Bickerstaff, Ray Buckton and Arthur Scargill have wished the (BLOC) conference success.'

Which immediately prompts the question: do NUPE, ASLEF and the NUM need 'transforming, from top to bottom'? George and the rest of the Broad Left Organising Committee act as if they do not.

Serious discussion

One last point. George Williamson explains why the 24 March conference has been called as follows:

'This conference will bring together rank and file activists to thrash out a strategy to defend the working class against Tory attacks.'

To 'thrash out a strategy' for the future requires a serious discussion of the balance of forces and a serious discussion of why past strategies have failed. In other words it will need discussion of exactly the sort of points I have raised above.

This makes me a bit disturbed by the fact that in the interview, George keeps alternating between referring to 24 March as a 'conference' and as a 'rally'. The two words do not mean the same thing. You *don't* 'thrash out a strategy' at a *rally*. The 'rank and file activists' in Sheffield on 24 March will have to be firm that it is a *conference* they have been delegated to, and they want to talk to each other, not be talked at.

Pete Goodwin

