

socialist worker Review

January 1985 Issue 1

60p

1905

80 YEARS OF THE MASS STRIKE



The anti-union laws
The general strike
Miners' wives and feminism

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of the month

CLASS STRUGGLE

Striking features

ONE event dominated British politics last year. And, whatever its course and outcome, the miners' strike seems set to do the same again in 1985.

The strike has polarised and defined much of the ground of British politics. It has exposed those lined up against the working class not only as the coal board and the government but also every major institution of capitalist society. The class nature of the state and the bias of the press have become obvious not just to a handful of socialists but to millions of people.

The miners themselves have shown that there are still large groups of workers prepared to fight against Thatcher. The level of support in the rest of the working class is still widespread.

But many supporters of the miners enter the new year feeling less than optimistic about its outcome. They reflect the nature of the strike itself, and the political mood and ideas it has generated, which are full of contradictions.

The strike has produced massive changes of consciousness among the miners and their supporters. But that change of consciousness has not generalised to lead the rest of the working class to take action themselves. This explains why, whereas there is wide financial and moral support for the miners, the TUC has been able, with the greatest of ease, to sabotage any solidarity that might have arisen. They have been helped by the fact that even a minority of miners have refused to join the strike.

And even within the most active minority of militants, it is not true that the ruling class offensive and the attack on the miners have led them to breaking from all the old ideas. The ideas which dominate among the *best* sections of the miners and their supporters inside the working class movement are particular sorts of reformist ideas.

So the militants on the one hand hate the police, and on the other hand believe that Britain is a police state and therefore the police are unbeatable. Consequently it is possible for many of the union's leaders to argue mass pickets cannot be successful and therefore should not be attempted.

And although the Labour Party leadership has scabbed on, and sabotaged, the strike, the Labour left is enjoying a revival, not least among miners. The idea that you should be inside the Labour Party trying to change it is one that has wide appeal at present. Similarly with the TUC. Norman Willis is much hated by supporters of the strike, but there is little analysis or criticism of the trade union bureaucracy as such.

Even those who reject the path of the trade union leaders still accept that *political* change must come from Labour in parliament. This was summed up by Tony Benn at December's Mineworkers' Support Committee conference when he said that workers have two weapons—the workplace and the ballot box.

Dominant ideas

In other words the industrial struggle must remain a sectional one, because general politics can only find their expression through the Labour Party. These are not the ideas of groups of workers who feel confident that their own struggles can not only win, but can generalise into an offensive struggle against capitalist society. Rather they are ideas which do accept that industrial struggle must remain sectional and therefore cannot win on its own.

The ideas which dominate among the *best* sections of the class are precisely those which have prevailed within the strike and which have prevented it being brought to a successful conclusion.

Despite the real need for mass pickets of steel earlier in the strike, and of the power stations today, there is no independent organised force inside the union which can break from the official machine and organise them. And because of the ideas which predominate among the *best* militants there isn't the push from below which can force such tactics.

There is therefore an increasing gap between the tactics needed to win the strike, and the course that the strike is taking. This

happens not just because of the particular characteristics of the miners' strike, but because of its whole political context.

The struggles of the past few years have been characterised by a high degree of sectionalism from different groups of workers, a heavy dependence on the trade union leaders, a lack of organisation independent of them and a high degree of passivity. Against this has been an increasingly generalised offensive by the employers.

The miners' strike broke this pattern in some senses because it was on a far greater scale, showed greater determination and invoked greater solidarity than any other strike in memory. But in other senses it reinforced the pattern. Its characteristics show how much it is a product of the period. The rank and file of the miners have found it hard to play a role independent of the trade union bureaucracy. Although the strike has generalised among miners, it has remained a sectional dispute inside the working class as a whole. So the contradictions remain of a strike with massive strengths but real weaknesses as well.

If this is true of the miners it remains even more true for their supporters. Thirty one percent backed the strike even in December, but the bulk of that support is totally passive. The acts of solidarity taking place in the power stations and the railways usually only involve a minority of the workforce. Even the miners support groups, which are mainly outside workplaces and which have done a very good job in collecting money, involve a small number of activists.

Again there is a huge gap between *passive* support and those prepared to engage in even minimal activity. Those passive supporters of the strike will not like the attacks on Scargill and the miners from Willis, Kinnock and their followers. But at the end of the day they will see no alternative to a TUC negotiated compromise and to the return of a Labour government.

The passivity has led some people to vastly overestimate the minority who want to fight, numbering them at several million. Although that is probably the number of people who don't like Thatcher and vaguely support the miners, the number engaged in activity is far, far lower.

Overestimating the minority willing to fight can be very dangerous indeed. It can be to mistake a level of passive support with

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activity and so underestimate the work which has to be done to build support.

Unless that is understood very clearly then it is much harder to face up to what the real problems of the strike are, and much harder to begin to overcome them. ■

MINERS' STRIKE

The road to solidarity

THE MINERS' strike, defying all predictions to the contrary, has remained solid. Christmas was a hurdle that the miners overcame. The back to work 'surge' predicted by the Coal Board hasn't taken off as we go to press. Prospects of settlement on both sides are still remote; despite the hopes of Kinnock and Willis, the miners seem determined to dig in for many more months if necessary. Yet such an approach can have real weaknesses in terms of allowing the initiatives in the strike to come from the Coal Board.

Even today, ten months into the strike, there is a way to win which doesn't consist simply of holding on and waiting. The power stations are crucial to the success of the dispute. Blacking of oil by power station workers could lead to victory very quickly indeed, as the Tories would be forced to eat their words about not implementing power cuts. Mass pickets of the power stations, organised by the NUM, could help to bring about the blacking.

The blame for the fact that this is not happening has to be placed squarely where it lies—with a trade union bureaucracy which wants to limit and contain the dispute, and which has been prepared to fritter away the feelings and actions of solidarity which have arisen.

If the TUC leaders had fought for blacking inside the power stations, and if the NUM officials had not backed away from mass

picketing, things could look very different today. Instead, despite the fine words of right wing union leaders like Gavin Laird and David Basnett at the TUC Congress back in September, nothing whatever has been delivered. Militants inside the power stations who want to take action have, if anything, been discouraged from doing so.

Consequently, although socialists argue for these sorts of tactics, we have also to recognise that they are still a long way from becoming reality. Although a minority among the miners and among some power workers have moved towards these sorts of ideas, they are still often very isolated among their workmates. The key task in the weeks ahead is to try to build on the level of solidarity which exists, and thereby be in more of a position to turn it into action at some point. There is little possibility of doing that unless we understand the way to build.

We won't build solidarity by issuing abstract calls like those for general strikes. It has to start with links among rank and file workers, at however small a level. Miners should be visiting the power stations. Militants inside and outside the power stations should be trying to set up miners support groups. At a very basic level—small groups of power workers collecting for the miners now, can help to win solidarity in the future.

Basic solidarity

On a more general level, different groups of workers already are, or will be, coming under attack from Thatcher. The public sector is already under attack. And the railway workers look set for battles in the coming year. These attacks cannot be fought successfully by workers, isolated from each other, fighting on separate issues.

What is needed now—in every union, in every union branch and trades council, and in every workplace—is for those who do want to fight the Tory attacks to get together and try to stop any retreat on a fight which may be signalled from the union leaders. There are a number of events which militants can work around in the coming months which can help to build inside the unions. The Broad Left Organising Committee Conference in March can provide a focus for grouping this minority together and beginning to organise to fight back. The campaign to elect John Tocher in the AUEW can provide a similar focus for engineers around the Broad Left.

There will be all sorts of other issues as well, which must not be passed up. Each of them can be important in building the confidence and organisation which will—as the length of the miners' strike has proved—be essential for taking on Thatcher.

For the small number of revolutionary socialists inside these campaigns there will be another urgent task. That is, to try to show the way forward in each of these campaigns and issues, and to try to convince those around us that it is through their own activity that they can change things. Given the dominance of reformist ideas inside the working class movement, that will be an uphill task, but one which can pay dividends in the longer term. ■

LABOUR PARTY

Left caught on a right hook

'THE NEXT general election will be won or lost over the coming year.' So argued the left Labour weekly *Tribune* in the front page editorial of its new year issue. The statement is very significant. Whether or not it is true, the threat of the election is already being used to ensure one thing: that the left in the Labour Party are kept in line.

The Labour leadership didn't think this would be too much of a problem after Labour's catastrophic defeat in 1983. All factions inside the Party could unite around the Kinnock-Hattersley 'dream ticket' and start the long, hopefully peaceful, haul until the next election. Unfortunately for them, one of the most rapid turn-arounds of last year was the revival of the Labour left.

The left's biggest shot in the arm came from the radicalisation around the miners' strike. Labour's conference in September showed that in debate after debate the left was making the running. They won commitment to a degree of illegality over rate capping and in support of the miners. They



defeated Kinnoek on the question of 'one person, one vote' in re-selection.

And successes weren't confined to conference. Many of the new people joining the Labour Party have been brought into activity in recent months, and tended to join on Labour left politics rather than anything else.

Kinnoek himself pushed many Labour activists who support the miners towards the left with his refusal to back the strike and his persistent condemnations of violence. In doing so he hoped to appeal to the 'moderate' voters who he believes will not back the miners or other strikes. He hasn't even succeeded in this aim. Kinnoek's standing in the opinion polls has been very low, and the Labour Party as a whole has lagged behind the Tories.

The Labour leadership and parliamentary party blames this not on their own pathetic failure to oppose Thatcher, but on the activity of the left. They are frightened that even if the miners' strike ends, issues such as the campaign against rate-capping or the fight to retain the metropolitan councils can once again make the Labour Party unpopular with the 'moderate' voters to whom they are so desperate to appeal.

This is the thinking behind the *Tribune* article. It is why the article declares that:

'Ultra-Leftism, which is only interested in using the miners' strike to attack Neil Kinnoek, must receive just as short shrift as the antics of Right-wingers who cannot wait for Arthur Scargill and the Left to come a cropper.'

They are already preparing a whitewash for Neil Kinnoek's role in the miners' strike, and paving the way for the Labour leadership's failure to back any councils which do fight rate-capping.

'Breaking the law should not be raised to the central issue as some kind of litmus test of socialist commitment.'

Tribune doesn't explain how any of these issues can be fought without breaking the law. It is clear why. They are putting all their hopes in the return of a Labour government and, in order to achieve that, don't want anyone to rock the boat.

That will suit the Labour right very well, and will suit Kinnoek, who, as even *Tribune* admits, sides 'with the Right so consistently'. Unfortunately the left seems to have no alternative. They have a leadership who will not defend workers who take action to defend themselves. But they can see no alternative to that leadership.

Tony Benn, the left's obvious leadership candidate, and one of a minority of Labour MPs who have consistently stood up for the miners, has already said he won't stand against Kinnoek for the leadership. In doing so, he is ensuring that the centre-right of the Party will continue to dominate. And the failure of the left to fight will mean that Kinnoek and the *Tribune* strategy will win out.

This is not because the Labour left have illusions in Kinnoek. He is thoroughly disliked and distrusted after his attitude to the miners. But even for the left, the winning of the next election is paramount. The *Tribune* article is no doubt a timely warning to them too, not to rock the boat. ■

COMMUNIST PARTY

Even the best of friends must part

THE bitter and now apparently inevitable split inside the Communist Party looks like coming to a head this month, when the suspensions of 22 of its leading London members (including three fulltimers) will probably be turned into expulsions.

This will be just the latest step in a long battle to see who controls the CP. Much of that battle has centred of late around control of the party's daily, the *Morning Star*. The Executive Committee has been trying to take control of the paper for some time. They want to remove the editor and deputy editor, replacing them with the Executive's own appointees. Indeed the row inside the CP is often described as between the factions around the *Morning Star* as opposed to those around the party's monthly, *Marxism Today*.

But it isn't simply the different approaches behind the two publications which is at stake. Nor is the row merely the internal faction fight of a declining and ageing or-

ganisation. The argument, the ideas behind it and its outcome will have much wider implications for the whole of the British left.

So what is the argument about, and how do the sides line up? There are a number of answers to these questions. At the most basic level, the argument is between the Eurocommunists and what they call the 'fundamentalists'.

The Eurocommunists (who at present comprise the leadership of the CP) argue that there is a phenomenon called Thatcherism which isn't simply old fashioned Toryism, but which has succeeded in developing a right wing populism. This has both undercut the traditional ground of Labour and the unions, and enabled Thatcher to win a second term of office with a massive majority. It cannot be combatted by the traditional labour movement methods.

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On the contrary, argue the Eurocommunists, the left needs to develop hegemony throughout society. In other words the left needs to struggle ideologically in every area of society.

What they mean by this ideological struggle is very vacuous. In practice it means an abandonment of talk of class or socialism.

Crucial to this light is a system of 'alliances'. These alliances are seen as specifically aimed at a broad left—a popular front against Thatcherism which would logically include the SDP and Liberals, plus anti-Thatcher Tories.

The fundamentalists, on the other hand, argue for a return to 'class politics'. They argue that Thatcherism is not a new phenomenon, but a traditionally right wing government attacking the working class. What is needed is a mobilisation of the traditional organisations of the working class. The miners' strike is seen by the fundamentalists as a key example of the way that class politics continues to dominate.

In addition, they argue, the working class movement in the West needs to make close links with, and play up the benefits of, the 'socialist' countries. They also criticise the Eurocommunists for having written off, or

for having been too critical of, 'the truly popular figures of the left—Benn, Scargill and Livingstone'. The Eurocommunists believe that these figures' outspoken denunciations of Thatcher and their espousal of class politics, can only harm a genuine popular alliance.

Behind these two views lie deep differences about the future of the left in Britain. The Eurocommunists are extremely critical of the Labour Party and its inability to 'hegemonise'. They are also critical of Benn, and believe him to be too far out on a limb to be the focus of any popular alliance. Some of them may indeed have written off the Labour Party as a majority government party.

Whatever their reasons, they want alliances with at least some of the openly bourgeois parties. They believe that—tiny though they are—the Eurocommunists through *Marxism Today* can provide the intellectual motor and thus the influence of such an alliance.

Break with the past

But to do this they have to be prepared to ditch much of their past ideological apparel. This is especially true in two areas. One is the British trade union and labour movement where the Communist Party traditionally has had much implantation and influence.

They are greatly aided in this by two different leading Eurocommunists: Scottish miners' leader Mick McGahey, who gives the CP leadership its greatest industrial credibility; and feminist journalist Beatrix Campbell, who by describing feminism in terms of an attack on 'the historic compromise between the class enemy and labouring men over women' equates male dominated reformism with capitalist rule.

The second area is the relationship with Russia and the East European countries. Although the Eurocommunists have never broken with the idea that these countries are socialist (their only critique being of 'socialist democracy'), they follow the

Italian CP in not finding close ideological links with these countries very helpful when building popular alliances in the West. Therefore they are prepared to distance themselves.

They differ from the fundamentalists on both these crucial areas. But are fundamentalists arguing for different politics? Basically no.

They have not broken with any of the politics that have characterised the CP for generations. They claim to stick by the CP's programme, the *British Road to Socialism*, which has always been in favour of alliances with sections of ruling class parties. They also want much closer alliances with the ruling classes of the east European countries—despite, for example, the Polish rulers allowing scab Polish coal to break the British miners' strike.

They do not criticise the trade union bureaucracy. Indeed, they tend to equate the trade union movement with that bureaucracy.

The argument inside the CP has led to the different factions aligning with others outside the party. A pamphlet written by leading fundamentalist intellectuals has an introduction written by Tony Benn. Ken Livingstone is also identified with them—a problem for Eurocommunists who see him as the personification of the popular alliance. The Eurocommunists have been identified particularly with Eric Hobsbawm, and with sections of the Labour Coordinating Committee.

Their political partners will lead many socialists to conclude that the fundamentalists are far preferable to the Eurocommunists. Actually, any cursory glance at their political positions (let alone the line of the *Morning Star*) demonstrates that this isn't so. Although many of their arguments against the Eurocommunists may be correct, their own political solutions are just as bankrupt.

Their strategy is to align themselves with the official trade union machine. But, as that machine moves to the right under the weight



The end of the road?

of the ruling class attacks (over, for example, the anti-union laws), the pressure will be on the fundamentalists to do the same. Far from this helping to increase the level of class struggle, it can act as a brake.

Both groups inside the CP are already moving to the right. Pressure from the forces they are allied with will also be in that direction. Whatever the outcome of the dispute inside the CP, that pressure is likely to continue. ■

STUDENTS

The class of '85

'A RETURN to 1968' was how some press commentators greeted the massive student protests over grants last term. Certainly many of the ingredients were there. Occupations, sit downs in the road, a very large demonstration in London, all showed the strength of feeling among students at Keith Joseph's proposals to cut grants through a huge increase in parental contributions, and through forcing some better off parents to pay tuition fees.

These attacks caused the largest outbreak of student militancy since the mid seventies. The scale of the protests took everyone by surprise.

Student grant demonstrations had become an annual ritual, with little spirit, anger, or militancy. This time it was quite different. Local regional and national demonstrations produced thousands.

The national grants demo in London led to set piece battles with police as students attempted to cross the Thames to get to parliament. The behaviour of the police led many who had gone for a peaceful protest to attempt to charge the police lines.

The NUS call for a 'Day of Action', despite being both tokenistic and badly organised, apparently being co-ordinated through announcements to the *Guardian*, was met with a very wide response, and in a small number of colleges the action was taken beyond this. North East London Poly went into indefinite occupation adding local demands to the national anti-Joseph protest, and their local demands were met.

At Portsmouth Polytechnic students voted by a staggering majority in a cross campus ballot to continue occupation. In the buoyant mood that followed the result, students almost spontaneously began occupying a whole number of buildings, and remained in them till late in the term when the police evicted them.

In a whole number of other colleges votes for similar action were defeated only narrowly.

The protests, plus a Tory backbench revolt, forced Joseph to ditch the proposals to charge tuition fees. But this—unlike the increase in parental contributions—would

only have hit the most wealthy parents. The other proposals still remain and still threaten to hit students, whose parents can't or won't pay, very hard.

The possibility of further fights on the issue are very real. Demonstrations in London and Leeds at the end of this month should gauge how far students will be prepared to fight. The grants issue is still the most central and important, and promises to remain so. A number of students, radicalised around building support for the miners in the colleges, were able to link the strike with the grants issue. Some students concerned over grants, especially those attacked by the police on the demonstrations, will already have begun to see the connection between the issues.

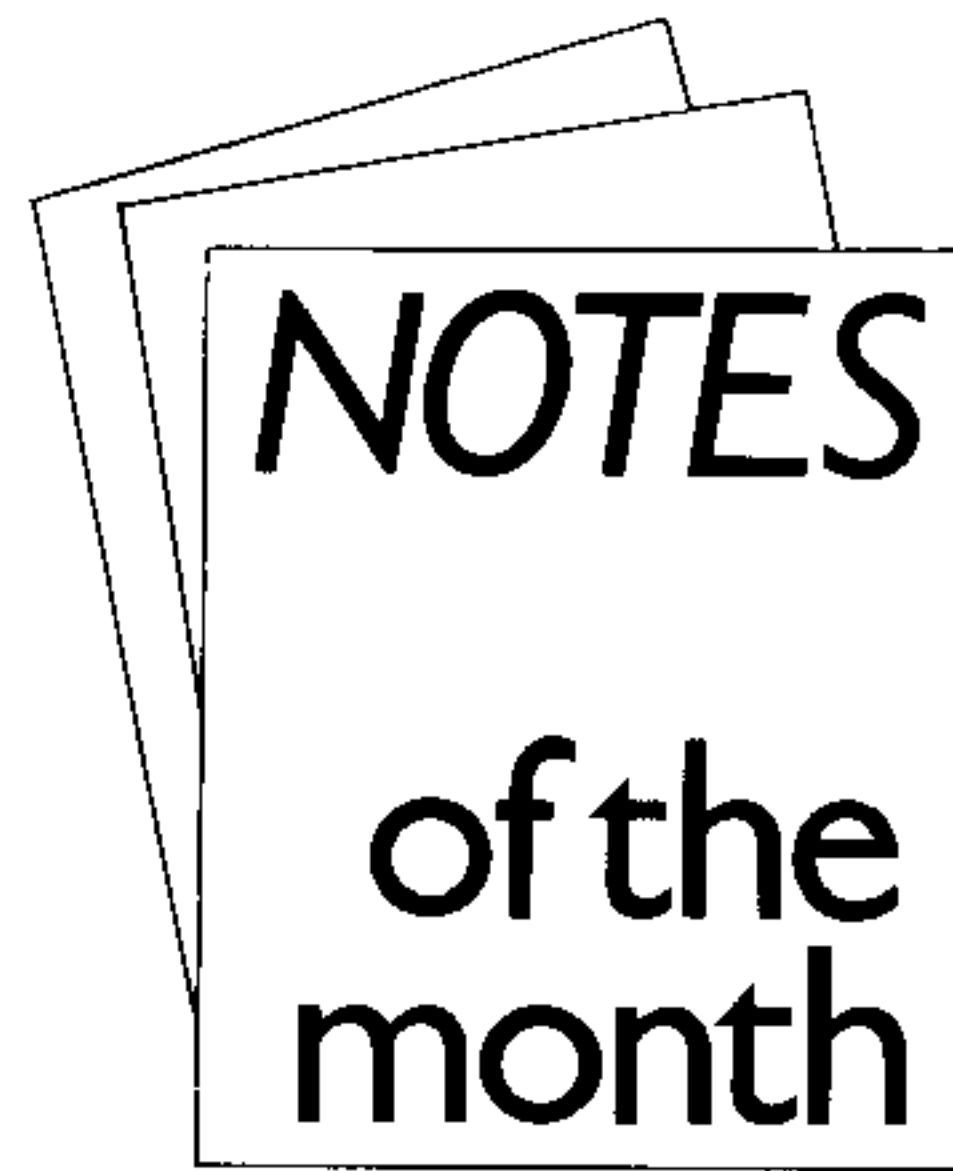
And the campaign at the Polytechnic of North London to get rid of nazi organiser Patrick Harrington continued (see notes of the month *SWR* 71). By the end of the term two students were in jail for defying court orders. Along the way the students' union lost a careerist local executive, and more significantly the polytechnic director,

Rising protests

It is not easy to foresee the events of the term ahead. Student protests are very volatile events: they rise very quickly and can disappear as quickly again. But the second term is traditionally the most militant, and it seems that many recognised the Joseph climb down for what it was—a gesture to quieten his own back benches. For the vast majority of students further financial hardship, and greater dependence on parental generosity still stare them in the face.

The NUS conference in December—never the most militant of events—showed a significant minority voting for all-out direct action. Even the NUS leadership refused to call the Joseph climbdown a victory.

However the same leadership are also



refusing to give a real lead to the campaign. They are calling for a rent strike. Although such a strike should be supported it is clearly not the best tactic as it can only involve a minority of students (those living in college halls of residence), and it tends to leave the participants passive and isolated.

The best way to respond to the Tory attacks would be to build national occupations, in the way that students did when they last took action on this scale—in protest at teacher training cuts and overseas students fees in the mid seventies.

Unfortunately the mass of students—even when ready to take action over grants—are still tied to the methods advocated by the NUS leadership. That means they still believe that peaceful protest rather than direct action can win. Socialists have to accept that is at present the case, and work within those protests while at the same time pointing out their limitations. In the course of the next term, a small number of those students pulled into activity can also be pulled towards revolutionary politics as well. ■

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What do
we mean
by..

The General Strike

THE IDEA of the general strike is nearly as old as the working class movement.

It was first elaborated in the 1830s, in Britain, by William Benbow, who was associated with the 'physical force' wing of Chartism. He propagated the call for a 'national holiday'—a cessation of work by the whole working class which, he held, would achieve a quick victory for the workers' movement. And the first experience of anything like a real general strike came soon afterwards, with the 'Plug Riots' which swept Lancashire and Yorkshire in 1842.

There was no other experience of a general strike for half a century, until the Belgian general strike for the suffrage in 1894.

But the question of the general strike has come to the fore in virtually every major upsurge of the class struggle in the twentieth century. So there were general strikes in St Petersburg in October 1905, in Belfast in 1907, and in Spain in 1917. The 'year of revolution', 1919, saw a rash of general strikes—in Central Germany, Berlin, and Bavaria, in Seattle, Vancouver and Winnipeg, in Barcelona, in Belfast.

Further general strikes followed in Germany in 1920, Berlin in August 1923, Hong Kong and Shanghai in the mid 1920s, Britain in 1926, France in 1936, German occupied northern Italy in 1944, in East Germany in 1953, Hungary in 1956, Belgium in 1961, France in 1968.

The first Marxist discussion

The contrast between the nineteenth century and the twentieth century is not accidental. The general strike is a form typical of class struggle in large scale modern industry.

It comes to the fore when the development of the class struggle has reached the point where action in one industry has an immediate impact upon every other industry and upon the state. The class struggle in such a situation can no longer be confined to individual combats with this or that employer, but has to confront the generalised power of the employing class. And that means the general strike comes to the fore with the transition from the period of 'free competition' capitalism to that of monopoly capitalism and state capitalism.

That is why the first serious Marxist discussion of the mass strike is Rosa Luxemburg's brilliant pamphlet, *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions*, written in 1906.

Until then Marxists had tended to see mass strike activity as little more than a form of training which would teach workers the

merits of political action.

So Engels, for instance, was absolutely scathing in his criticism of the Bakuninists, for raising the slogan of the general strike in Spain in the early 1870s. He said they were calling upon the workers to sit with folded arms, while the key question was one of direct, insurrectionary activity to establish a radical republic.

In the early 1890s Engels returned to the theme. He criticised Jules Guesde, the French Marxist, for adopting the general strike slogan, and he repeated his arguments a couple of years later in a letter to Kautsky, the leader of the German socialist movement. He insisted that the general strike was a panacea proposed by people who were not prepared to confront the immediate tasks facing the working class. Instead of talking about concrete action that was necessary, they simply spread the illusion that all you had to do was wait until the whole working class was persuaded to stop work simultaneously. Then the class enemy would collapse without struggle.

Engels' arguments were not drawn out of thin air. They were a distillation of the historical experience so far, from someone who had witnessed at first hand the struggle of the British working class in the 1840s and the revolutionary upheaval of 1848. This experience taught him that the most vital thing at every great upsurge of the workers' movement was to know how to move from humdrum, day to day economic agitation to confronting the question of state power.

In this, his arguments were not all that different to Lenin's in 1902 and 1903 when he insisted the central divide within the workers' movement was between those who saw the all-Russian insurrection as the goal, and those who avoided this central political issue.

But in some of Engels' later writings a trend can be found which became all dominating in the Marxist movement of the 1890s and early 1900s in Western Europe and North America. This was to see political action as meaning electoral activity. The 'orthodox' Marxist parties—the SPD in Germany, the Guesdists in France, the SDF in Britain, the PSI in Italy, the PSOE in Spain—all saw politics as comprising of a mixture of Marxist propaganda and electioneering, virtually ignoring struggles in the workplaces.

The Russian revolution of 1905 showed in practice how the struggles of large scale industry flow over to become directly political struggles. Economic struggles by individual sections of workers gave new confidence to

other sections of workers, until people felt confident enough to raise political demands. And mass, general strike action over these political demands in turn gave still more sections of workers the confidence to fight over economic demands. The economic became political and the political economic. And at the head of the economic-political struggle arose a new form of organisation, the soviet or workers' council, which showed how the question of power could be posed in a new way (although no one saw its full significance for another 12 years).

Rosa Luxemburg's pamphlet was the first attempt to generalise these lessons from eastern Europe to western Europe. The discussion it provoked within the German workers' movement prefigured the great split which was to take place throughout the world workers' movement in the the course of World War One—between those who stood for using the existing institutions of capitalist society to carry through reform and those who stood for fusing industrial and revolutionary political struggle to overthrow existing institutions. (Rosa herself, however, did not see the need in 1906 to draw organisational conclusions from the division over this question, as compared with Lenin who did see the need for such a division in Russia, but not elsewhere, over the question of preparing for the insurrection.)

A specific demand

This split found organisational expression on a world scale with the formation of the Communist International, as an 'International of revolutionary action' in 1919. The theses, resolutions and manifestos of its first five congresses, from 1919 to 1922, are marked throughout by an understanding how economic and political forms of struggle fuse in a revolutionary upsurge of the class.

However, both Rosa Luxemburg and the leaders of the Communist International in its earlier years followed in Engels' footsteps in one important respect. They did not raise the slogan of the general strike at all times and under all circumstances. Rather they regarded it as a specific demand to be raised at particular, concrete points in the struggle.

So, for instance, Rosa Luxemburg could write in a letter from Warsaw in January 1906:

'Everywhere there is a mood of uncertainty and waiting. The cause of all this is the simple fact that the general strike, used alone, has played out its role. Now, only a direct, all-encompassing movement in the streets can bring about a solution...'

Ten days later another letter spelt out what she meant: 'The coming phase of the struggle will be that of armed *rencontres*'—the sort of insurrection that was already being attempted by the Bolsheviks in Moscow.

The same understanding of the role of the mass strike and refusal to fetishise the particular slogan of the general strike characterised the early Communist International. So there is hardly a mention of the slogan of the 'general strike' in its

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TRADE UNION CONGRESS DECIDE TO SUPPORT MINERS EXECUTIVE COUNCIL DIRECT ALL TRAM AND BUS MEMBERS NOT TO COMMENCE WORK TUESDAY MORNING NEXT MAKE ARRANGEMENTS ACCORDINGLY LETTER FOLLOWS ALL INSTRUCTIONS WILL BE ISSUED OVER MY NAME

BEVIN TRANSUNION

The message from above: telegram announcing the general strike of May 1926

documents.

Drawing on the experience of these early years, Trotsky, writing in September 1934, insisted, 'the world experience of the struggle during the last 40 years has been fundamentally in confirmation of what Engels had to say about the general strike'.

Trotsky then went on to say that the effectiveness of a general strike depended on concrete circumstances. If the government was weak, it might 'take fright at the outset' of the strike and 'make only such concessions as will not touch the basis of its rule'.

But:

'If the army is sufficiently reliable and the government feels sure of itself, if a political strike is promulgated from above, and if at the same time it is calculated not for decisive battles, but to "frighten the enemy", then it can easily turn into a mere adventure and reveal its utter impotence'.

Trotsky describes how such bureaucratic mass strikes are organised:

'The parliamentarians and the trade unionists perceive at a given moment the need to provide an outlet for the accumulated ire of the masses, or they are simply compelled to jump in step with a movement that has flared over their heads. In such cases, they come scurrying through the backstairs of the government and obtain permission to head the general strike, with the obligation to conclude it as soon as possible...'

Finally, Trotsky quoting Engels, says there is 'the general strike that leads to insurrection'. But he adds, 'a strike of this sort can result either in complete victory or complete defeat'. The most important factor in determining this is whether there exists 'the correct revolutionary leadership, clear understanding of conditions and methods of the general strike and its transitions to open revolutionary struggle'.

If the struggle reaches such a stage it raises

the question of power. And unless there is a leadership capable of correctly posing the question of power—of leading an assault by the working class on the institutions of the state—then the general strike backfires and the class suffers decisive defeat.

So the slogan of the general strike fits a certain point in the workers' struggle. But it is wrong to raise it as a panacea before that point is reached. That merely avoids confronting the real needs of the movement. And once the point is reached where the slogan of the general strike is correct, you have then to be ready to supplement it with other slogans that begin to cope with the question of power—demands about how the strike is organised (strike committees, workers' councils), with how the strike defends itself (flying pickets, mass pickets, workers' defence guards) and with how it takes the offensive against the state (organising within the army and the police).

There have always been those inside the working class movement who have treated the slogan of the general strike differently. Thus at the time Rosa Luxemburg wrote her *Mass Strike* pamphlet, Georges Sorel, a French intellectual who sympathised with the apolitical revolutionary syndicalists, wrote his *In Defence of Violence*.

In it he argued that the main slogan of revolutionaries at every moment had to be the 'general strike', because this was a 'myth' which educated workers about their own strength and revolutionary potential. For him, the general strike was *the* revolution. But it could easily be ruined if it was identified with any political aim—so he actually denounced the concrete general strikes that had occurred, like that of Belgium over the franchise and that of Petersburg in 1905.

Such ideas continued to have a following even after the Russian revolution of 1917 had shown how workers could take power. For instance, one of the characteristics of the ultra-left opposition inside the German

Communist Party in 1919 was, according to the party leader of the time, Paul Levi, to see 'the revolution as a purely economic process', rejecting 'political means of struggle as harmful' and seeing 'the general strike as the alpha and omega of revolution'.

But what was said by ultra left, semi-anarchist elements from one side, could also be said by left and not so left Social Democrats as well. In 1920, when right wing militarists attempted a coup in Germany, the country's leading trade union bureaucrat, Legien, was prepared to call a general strike to save the necks of himself and his fellow Social Democrat leaders. But it was a purely 'peaceful' general strike which could not achieve its demand for a purging of the armed forces because only in some parts of Germany were revolutionaries able to take the initiative in turning the strike into armed action to disarm that army.

In the 1930s the slogan of the general strike against war was taken up by the Independent Labour Party. It had broken with the Labour Party, but refused to turn seriously to a revolutionary perspective. A revolutionary perspective would have meant seeing any war as raising the opportunity for an intensification of revolutionary action. The ILP leaders, however, were not prepared to abandon their essentially parliamentary perspective and raised the slogan of the general strike as a way of avoiding commitment to such action.

When the slogan fits

Today the slogan of the general strike likewise comes from two apparently opposed directions. On the one hand it is raised by people like Livingstone and Benn who have not broken with the idea that what matters is parliamentary action reinforced by extra-parliamentary activity. On the other it comes from sects who refuse to look the reality of the class struggle in Britain today in the face.

Revolutionary socialists should argue that the slogan does not fit at the moment because of the way the Labour Party leadership and the TUC general council have sabotaged the movement in solidarity with the miners. But we also have to go on to say something else: if the slogan did fit (and it will do one day) then it would be necessary to raise alongside it slogans about rank and file control and about confrontation with the state.

We are vehemently opposed to people like Kinnock and Willis who oppose general strikes under all circumstances. But that does not mean we fall into the trap of seeing the slogan as a panacea which fits all situations.

That trap means in present circumstances failing to emphasise the immediate concrete steps that can be taken to build solidarity with the miners and to expose traitors like Kinnock and Willis. And it would mean, if the struggle rose to the level of real general strike action, failing to raise the further slogans that alone could lead to victory.

We have to follow Engels, Rosa Luxemburg and Trotsky in avoiding that trap. ■

Chris Harman

Towards a new unity?

THERE is no doubt that the miners' strike has seen the growth of a good relationship between the women's movement and the class struggle. Women in mining communities have shown the way by organising on pickets and strike committees as well as in kitchens and welfare rooms.

Women elsewhere have responded by collecting money, food and toys, getting support in factories and offices, taking part in miners' support groups and visiting mining areas. Socialists and feminists have been in-

involved in a common cause longer and more successfully than at any time since the abortion campaigns of the mid-1970s.

This is as it should be, for socialists. The cause of women's liberation has never been advanced further than when it was linked to the struggles of workers—in the Paris Commune, the Russian Revolution and the Spanish Revolution, for example, even though all these were short-circuited by counter-revolutions.

The majority of women—working class

women—do not advance by equal rights, consciousness-raising or the personal politics of changing your lifestyle, but by involvement in mass struggles together with working class men and anyone else who is willing to stand on their side. Organising around the miners' strike gives socialists a chance to argue for this and to show that it works.

To do this, we have to be aware that feminist politics are still not the same as socialist politics. While working as hard as we can to ensure a victory for the men and women of the mining communities, we should not overestimate the changes. But that the changes have been remarkable is easily shown by a comparison with the state of things only ten months ago, when the miners' strike began.

At the beginning of 1984, feminism and actual workers' struggles seemed to have drifted further apart than at any time since the late 1960's. Though there were plenty of feminists 'in the movement', they had lost their roots in the women's struggles at work—Ford's, Trico's, Grunwicks and the wave of equal pay strikes before 1975—which had kept class issues at the forefront from 1968 onwards.

Feminists largely ignored or minimised the importance of the working women's struggles that were still going on in the early 1980s, such as the Liverpool typists' strike and the Lee Jeans occupation, and some leading feminists confessed that their Marxist past was becoming an 'embarrassment'.

Feminist writers often assumed that working class men, less accommodating than middle class partners with time to spare and a knowledge of the right phrases, were 'more sexist', or believed them to be mainly responsible for rape and pornography. The main aim of women in the trade union movement seemed to be to get more women's feet on the career ladder rather than to fight for jobs or pay.

The pacifism and separatism which set in around Greenham Common—at first a most valuable protest and one widely respected in the working class—dismissed class struggle as male aggressiveness.

In the month before the miners' strike began, Beatrix Campbell's *Wigan Pier Revisited* caricatured miners as the most sexist section of male society. The latest feminist anthology (*Sweeping Statements*) devoted only thirty out of three hundred pages to women at work, and those included an article on trade unionism which concluded that 'men are the enemy'. In the first few weeks of the strike, an unlucky feminist journalist (in the *Guardian*, where else?) had the lack of foresight to praise working miners' wives in Nottinghamshire for organising against the pickets.

But 1984 turned out to be the year in which many women in practice came out of separatism and abandoned or modified their hostility to working class men in struggle, and many more got involved in politics for the first time.

That does not mean, however, that the view that men are the main enemy has disappeared from the women's movement—far from it. Most women with a background in



National miners' wives demonstration in Barnsley in May

the women's movement see the meaning of the strike differently from the way we do as socialists.

The achievement of women in the mining communities, in organising around the present strike, is not mainly due to feminism. For at least 150 years, women in miners' families have organised in support of strikes. In 1926, women were active in supporting the miners in their six-month battle after the end of the General Strike. In 1972 women appeared on some picket lines.

But women's involvement in this strike has been on a large scale—few mining communities can have remained unaffected—and at a higher level. There has been joint decision-making as well as 'women's activities'. Some of this can be laid down to the presence of feminists in the labour movement, especially their demanding that the miners' leaders recognise the importance of the women's organisation and their right to participate in pickets and committees.

But the length of the strike has also made a difference. If it had all been over by mid-May we would have noticed the role of women far less. So has the fact that the strike is about the future of whole communities, and the early attempts of the media to whip up demonstrations by working miners' wives in Nottinghamshire.

Working class women

The miners' wives did not organise because they were feminists or had 'feminist consciousness' in the way those words are usually meant. They are very much conscious of *being women* and of breaking out of their previous way of life—having their men mind children and make meals while they go to meetings or travel to picket lines. But there are many things feminists take for granted that come as a surprise and sometimes a problem to these working class women.

For example, what is a sexist slogan? Groups of miners chanting 'show us your tits' at passing women is fairly obviously insulting to women and puts them off giving support. But singing 'Maggie Thatcher's got one, Ian McGregor is one, Ta ra ra ra.' is not recognised as sexist by most miners' wives—at least not to judge by the numbers of them chanting it merrily on demonstrations. Some miners' wives have regarded women who question this as a bit peculiar. It expresses hatred and contempt for bosses male and female, and for them that's all there is to it.

Or take the question of women's exclusion from work in the pits. It is almost a byword in feminist history that male miners in 1842 allied with the bosses to 'oppress women' by banning them from work underground. (I think this is seriously mistaken, as I argued in SR66.)

In meetings on the miners' strike feminists repeatedly ask: why aren't the miners' wives demanding the right to work down the pits? But the vast majority of miners' wives and daughters don't want to work underground (nor, for that matter, do the feminists who ask—they want other women to.) They don't see it as an issue in the present circumstances,

when the top priority is to defend the jobs that are under threat. To fight for more jobs in other industries to be made available in mining areas—without closing down pits!—would do more for these women's right to work.

Then there are the feminists who keep coming out with: 'Why do you talk about miners' wives all the time?' It's true that not all the women connected with the miners' strike are wives. We could add 'and girlfriends'—and mothers and daughters?—but that's not the point.

In the women's movement, calling yourself a wife, or some man's woman no matter what the relationship—just isn't done, even when to recognise the fact that most women for at least part of their lives are wives would be more realistic. It is important to remember that there are sometimes good reasons for making a fuss about this: I was once introducing myself to someone when a friend butted in with, 'She's really X's wife, of course!'

But in the miners' strike thousands of women are fighting and organising for the first time *because* they are wives, and in the class struggle that position is an honourable one. Workers' wives are *part of the working class* whether they are workers in their own right or not (and in most mining areas there isn't much choice as to whether to work or not).

Socialists have often neglected this very point by insisting that women can only fight as workers: miners' wives have shown that they are wrong. Feminists have neglected it by assuming that a married woman's only struggle 'as a wife' is a struggle against her husband or the institution of marriage: again, miners' wives have proved them wrong.

Few feminists are short-sighted enough to try to introduce the 'struggle against men' into the middle of the present miners' dispute. But many do see the present struggle as merely the first stage in the raising of miners' wives' consciousness rather than as an end in itself. The next stage will come when the strike is over. There are bound to be problems about this.

Not the problem of antagonising the men, but of antagonising the women too. Women in mining communities are learning to stand up for themselves by the experience of struggle and the support they are now receiving from others, and it is in this situ-

ation that they are most open to changing their ideas. It is quite possible that they will be less open to change when the strike is over. Few will see the end of the strike as the opening of a new phase of conflict with men.

On the other hand, there is a temptation for socialists to take it for granted that the unity of men and women in the miners' strike is complete, and that all problems are solved by going on about the marvellous role of 'wives, mothers and class fighters'.

There is still some outrageous sexism among miners, and some antagonism towards women.

Socialists shouldn't capitulate to this, but argue from the part that women are playing to the general case for women's liberation. Nor should we dismiss points raised by feminists, such as the right to work underground, as 'lunatic' or ridiculous, but discuss *why* they are misplaced.

Unity and solidarity

When the strike is over, there will probably be some pressure to 'return to normal' in the mining communities, but this needn't mean that couples simply fall into squabbling over who minds the kids or goes to meetings. Women in some areas have been suggesting that what they need is some permanent recognition by the miners' union: 'We've been involved in meetings and committees during this strike, and we don't want to be shut out again once it's all over.' Many of the women have jobs of their own to be defended, and will call on the miners for some return of solidarity. There are other issues in mining communities—housing, transport, council cuts, and so on—which can be fought together. There are many ways women can go on fighting without turning it into a battle of the sexes.

But for the moment, the priority is unity and solidarity with all striking miners' families. Hardship and demoralisation can turn relationships into a private battle more likely to end in break-up and bitterness than in any positive change. That is why money, turkeys and toys are important. That is why knowing that other workers are going out of their way to give support matters. People's ideas change through struggle, and the more successful struggles the better. For women as well as for men, we need a victory for the miners. ■

Norah Carlin

Women's liberation —two traditions

Class struggle and women's
liberation—1640 to the present day

Tony Cliff

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CLASS STRUGGLE &
WOMEN'S LIBERATION
1640 to the present day



BITING ON THE BALLOT?

More than four years after the first of the Thatcher Government's anti-union laws entered the statute book what really has been their effect? PETE GOODWIN explains.

We had better start our answer by reminding ourselves just what the anti-union laws are. They have come in three packages, each one associated with a different Tory employment secretary: Jim Prior's 1980 Employment Act, Norman Tebbit's 1982 Employment Act and Tom King's 1984 Trade Union Act.

The 1980 Employment Act rendered most secondary and sympathy action 'unlawful'. It restricted 'lawful' picketing more or less to where you work. It made 'political' strikes 'unlawful', it made it easier for scabs who refuse to join a closed shop to sue if they were dismissed—and it provided government money for union postal ballots.

The 1982 Employment Act toughened up the definitions of 'secondary' and 'political' action so as to make them more restrictive. It rendered unions liable to up to £250,000 of damages. And it made it necessary to have ballots on closed shops for them to retain any sort of legal protection after November 1984.

The 1984 Trade Union Act removed legal immunity from unions calling industrial action unless they had a secret ballot (this provision came into force in September 1984). It forces all unions which want to have a political fund (or affiliating to the Labour Party or other types of political action) to conduct a secret ballot on this before March 1986. And it requires unions to elect their executive committees directly by secret ballot.

The Tories who introduced these three Acts have learned a considerable amount from their previous unfortunate experience of anti-union legislation. Edward Heath's 1971 Industrial Relations Act. This time they introduced their legislation piecemeal. They did not provide any special courts or register which unions could easily boycott but instead used the ordinary civil courts. The onus for taking action against unions was always on the individual employer or scab rather than on the government itself.

But there was one important element of continuity. The prime aim of the Thatcher government's legislation, like that of Heath's (and indeed like Harold Wilson's 1969 proposals, in *In Place of Strife*) has not been either to directly punish strikers or to smash unions. Its prime purpose has been to try to get the union leaders to be more cautious and to discipline their members.

From the start the TUC and its affiliated

unions were committed to opposing the Tory laws, refusing any discussion on them and boycotting anything to do with them (the most important of which was government money for secret ballots). This policy of opposition was formalised at the TUC special conference of union executives at Wembley in April 1982.

Some right-wing unions were unhappy about not taking government money for postal ballots. The EETPU has always made clear that it would like to take the money, but until recently has not risked breaking with TUC policy over this. The executive of the AUEW (Engineering Section) also wanted to take the money and put a proposal to this effect to the union's 1981 National Committee.

Here, however, they came unstuck. Their right wing supporters on the National Committee were split on the issue and the proposal was defeated. So until towards the end of last year the TUC's front of formal opposition to Tory legislation remained solid.

But behind that front things were from the start far weaker. First, the TUC's opposition was completely passive. This time there was nothing like the sort of campaign which was run against the Heath government's legislation in 1970 and 1971 either at the official or unofficial level.

Secondly, when it came to the actual use of the law the unions on the sharp end proved in general as spineless in practice as they were intransigent in theory. By the end of 1981 a number of companies had taken out or threatened to take out injunctions against picketing or secondary action.

In January 1981 the Newspaper Society threatened to take out an injunction against SOGAT for blacking newspapers during the *Camden Journal* dispute. SOGAT president Bill Keys called off the blacking. In a number of other cases similar threats produced similar results. They played an important part in the defeat of the Ansell's brewery and Lawrence Scott engineering strikes. The number of actual cases brought in 1981 therefore underestimated the fairly immediate effect that Prior's Act had.

But where injunctions were actually taken out then they did not provoke a defiant stand by the union leaders. For example, when Chloride took out an injunction in May 1981 to stop women I&GWU members picketing a depot in

Romford the union instructed the women to call off the picket. Reviewing the early working of the Tory laws in this magazine in March 1982, just before the TUC Wembley conference Dave Beecham concluded:

'The Employment Act 1980 was applied subtly, by stealth and was primarily aimed at union leaders to police the rank and file. It has largely succeeded in its objectives.'

It also needs to be stressed that Broad Left-led unions were just as prone to cave in to threatened or actual injunctions as right wing ones.

It is scarcely surprising that with that degree of practical acceptance of the Employment Acts by even the Broad Left unions some of the right wing ones became more confident in proposing a toning down of the TUC's formal boycott of the government's legislation.

That led to the 'new realism' of 1983, whose one practical result was talks between the government and the TUC to try to stitch together a deal on union political funds. The Tory ban on unions at GCHQ in early 1984 brought the 'new realism' and any further talks to an end.

In between, of course, came the big set-piece confrontation with the NGA over the *Stockport Messenger* and the almost as important injunction by Mercury against the Post Office Engineering Union (POEU).

For the Broad Left-led POEU the campaign against privatisation was top priority and the blacking of Mercury was a key part of this campaign. Yet when the union was faced with an injunction to stop the blacking four of the Broad Left executive members voted with the right to climb down. And with that the union's campaign against privatisation was effectively and ignominiously ended.

On the other hand the union that did fight and pushed the laws to their biggest test so far was not a Broad Left one. The NGA leaders made a stand because the issue seemed crucial to the existence of their union. Even so, they were not willing to take the risk of an all out strike or of appealing over the heads of other unions leaders for support from their rank and file.

They rested content to wage a verbal campaign after the defeat against the right wing TUC majority that betrayed them. The same also goes for the Broad Left union leaders. They too have bitterly denounced these union leaders who left the NGA in the lurch, but at the time they were unwilling to independently call for action from their own members.

There has been another more important consequence of the NGA defeat alongside verbal hostility of left to right. The right wing unions have shifted to increasing unilateral acceptance of the Tory laws and on at least some issues they have in practice been followed by the left. Three fronts are worth singling out: acceptance of money for ballots, closed shop ballots and, most recently, strike ballots.

The EETPU has always wanted to accept money for ballots. It would never have taken much pushing to get it to accept unilaterally. In November last year that push came when the

government announced that any retrospective claims for money would have to be made within a certain date. The EETPU executive then decided unanimously to apply for the government money.

They are being joined in their defiance of TUC policy by the AUEW. The engineering union's executive had taken advantage of the technicality of a recent amalgamation to claim that they are no longer bound by their 1981 National Committee decision not to take government money. They are now in the process of balloting the AUEW membership on the issue, with the executive strongly urging acceptance.

There seems no prospect whatever of either the EETPU or the AUEW being disciplined by the TUC for breaking ranks. And it looks as if a number of other major unions will fairly rapidly follow them. David Basnett of the GMBATU (General and Municipal Workers) is calling for a 'major review' of TUC policy of opposition, and ASTMS has also now openly declared that it wants to take the ballot money. Even at the level of rhetoric, this particular plank of TUC opposition to the anti-union laws seems very close to total collapse.

The situation is a bit better on the closed shop ballots, but here too there are dangerous signs. Although the provisions of the 1982 Employment Act on closed shop ballot only came into force on 1 November 1984, a number of firms held ballots on the closed shop before this date. It was less than expected as most managements seem to be rather cautious about upsetting the closed shop. But where the ballots did take place in general they received the co-operation of workplace union organisation. The first closed shop ballot was held in May last year at Steetley Brick in North Staffordshire, with the co-operation of T&GWU stewards; 94 per cent of those voting were in favour of retaining the closed shop.

That seems to have been the pattern since. Workplace union representatives from a number of unions have co-operated with the ballot in the (generally correct) belief that they would secure a sufficient majority for the closed shop.

Practically all unions at a national level are still formally opposed to participating in the ballots, but they do not appear to have been particularly vigorous in trying to convince their members. It looks as if in a number of cases they (or at least their local officials) were quite happy to go along with workplace union co-operation with the closed shop ballots.

Things have moved more dramatically on the question of strike ballots. The law on this came into force on 26 September 1984. In October Ilford took out an injunction against the GMBATU against an overtime ban at its Moberley, Cheshire, plant which had been called without a ballot. The GMBATU duly balloted their members (and got a 77 per cent vote for the overtime ban). The GMBATU also found itself issued with an injunction by Safeway over a strike at its Warrington distribution depot. There the GMBATU had already had a ballot; the injunction was about the technicalities.

So even before the Austin/Rover strike major

employers had shown a surprising eagerness to use the new law, and at least one major union had shown that faced with that it was quite prepared to break with TUC policy

Austin Rover showed just how far the rot had gone. The immediate effect of the company's injunction was that, in the words of one Longbridge shop steward, 'All the union officials ran for cover from the start. Even the TGWU were playing it cagey to begin with.'

The T&GWU did recover its nerve sufficiently to declare the strike official, defy the courts and incur a £200,000 fine for contempt, although its defiance was fairly passive. Most of the other unions simply behaved with varying degrees of treachery. The EETPU and the AUEW were, of course, to the fore in dissociating themselves from the strike (in the EETPU's case ordering their members back to work pending a ballot, in the AUEW's case stressing how they thought the company's offer should have been accepted).

But other supposedly less right-wing unions behaved little different. For example neither the Metal Mechanics nor Broad Left-led TASS Craft Sector (formerly the Sheet Metal Workers) supported the strike. Both bowed down before the law.

It was this refusal of most unions to make the strike official that broke it. That was the key excuse that people used as they crossed the picket lines.

The Austin/Rover debacle, like the NGA defeat a year before, has produced another outbreak of bitterness between Broad Left and right wing union leaders. T&GWU leader Ron Todd in particular, has been vociferous in denouncing those who had 'worn the red badge of courage' at Wembley in 1982 but had capitulated 'as soon as the kitchen door swings open and they start to feel the heat of the kitchen.'

But as we have seen the T&GWU's own record of opposition is far from unblemished. And at the same time as Todd gets bitter at right wing unions, within his own union powerful right-wing regional officials are urging a dropping of all round non-cooperation.

The overall balance sheet of the effects of the Tory anti-union laws drawn up immediately after Austin/Rover has to record that employers are increasingly willing to use them, that all along there has been an important degree of union co-operation in practice with the laws, that now the right wing of the movement is moving towards open co-operation and that, despite the rhetoric, the left shows signs of following in their wake. On all those scores Tom King is quite right in his talk of a 'quiet revolution in attitudes' in industrial relations.

However that is not the whole story. For, however important the Tory victories on their anti-union laws are, they are still far from complete. The law is for them still a very uncertain weapon.

It always needs something else to make it work, some other crucial weakness in the labour

movement. At the most general level the reason why Thatcher's government has been so much more successful with its anti-union laws than Heath's a decade earlier is not simply that its laws are more cleverly drafted (though they are).

Far more important is the fact that ten years on, unemployment is three times higher and the level of confidence on the shop floor that much lower.

That makes workers far more reliant on their union officials and therefore all the more likely to cave in when the union officials use the law as an excuse. So the reason why the law was successful at Austin/Rover was not simply the craven cowardice of most of the union officials, but also the underlying weakness that most Austin/Rover workers relied on their strike being made official and were unwilling to carry it on if it were not.

Where union officials have stood firm, where the movement is on the up, and above all where there is some rank and file initiative then the Tory anti-union laws have not proved all-conquering. Three examples are worth quoting.

In October 1983, about the same time as Mercury was taking the POEU to court and Eddie Shah the NGA, Shell got injunctions against pickets from two striking refineries. The pickets simply ignored the injunctions and stepped up their picketing. Shell dropped the case and has not resorted to the law since.

In May 1984 the NCB took out injunctions against the Yorkshire area of the NUM to stop secondary picketing. The injunctions were ignored and the NCB backed off, feeling that to pursue the matter further would only aggravate the situation. It is only as the miners' strike itself has become more defensive that the legal offensive against the NUM has been restarted.

The last example concerns the closed shop. One of the most significant attempts so far to use the new law to undermine the closed shop has come at Reuters. This was consciously used by management as the weak spot of the vitally important closed shop in Fleet Street. Reuters NGA and SOGAT 82 chapels organised an active boycott of the ballot, collecting ballot papers in themselves and in the end management were only able to get in 231 out of a potential 854 ballot papers. For the moment that has set back the management offensive on the closed shop.

These three examples, and others, do show that it is still possible to defy the law and get away with it. They also show that the ideological offensive that goes alongside the Tory laws has only had limited successes.

Even at Austin/Rover it was the strike being unofficial that was the decisive issue, not a mass spontaneous demand for a ballot. And on two occasions mass meetings of EETPU members refused their union's instructions to return to work.

The Tories have won some very important battles on their anti-union laws. Anyone who doesn't recognise that or thinks that it can never happen to them, is indulging in dangerous illusions. But the guerilla war goes on. Successful resistance is still possible. Don't let our leaders pretend otherwise.

1905

There were three waves of strikes in 1905: in January, October and November. The January strike was sparked off by a very small event. Four workers in the massive Putilov engineering factory in St Petersburg, employing 12,000 workers were sacked. What appeared as the tiniest conflict brought forward an avalanche.

The Putilov workers went on strike against the victimisation of the four on 3 January. The workers were members of an organisation called the Assembly of Russian Factory and Workshop Workers. This was a police trade union. In St Petersburg the union was led by Father Gapon, a prison chaplain, and a protégé of the head of police, Colonel Zubatov.

After 3 January all branches of the Assembly held mass meetings throughout Petersburg. Workers proceeded from the individual incident at the Putilov factory to general issues facing the Russian workers. Under the influence of the euphoria generated by these mass meetings, Gapon suggested adding to the original demand for the reinstatement of the four sacked workers and the removal of the foreman responsible, a list of other demands: an eight-hour day, increase in the daily wage, improvement of sanitary facilities and the granting of free medical aid.

Gapon thought it would be a good idea to have the workers turn to the Tsar for support. The police department concurred with this. A few benevolent words from the throne, accompanied by some small measures to ameliorate workers' conditions, would be enough, they thought, to stop the movement from going to extremes, and would reinforce the role of the Tsar as the workers' friend. The idea of a petition and a solemn procession was born. The petition would humbly beg the Tsar for redress of the workers' grievances.

While the police were making plans, the Petersburg Social Democrats (socialists) were active. After a slow start they intervened in the movement and achieved a measure of success. They sent speakers to the district meetings of the Assembly, and succeeded in introducing resolutions and amendments into the original text of the petition.

The result was a petition very different from the one originally envisaged by the leaders of the Assembly. A whole string of political demands were included: freedom of assembly for the workers, land for the peasants, freedom of speech and the press, the separation of Church

and state, an end to the Russo-Japanese war, and the convocation of the Constituent Assembly.

The Putilov strike which began on 3 January, became by the 7th a general strike of the whole of St Petersburg involving some 150,000 workers. On Sunday 9 January, 200,000 Petersburg workers marched in an enormous but peaceful procession to the Tsar's Winter Palace, headed by Father Gapon.

The crowd was carrying pictures of the Tsar, holy icons and church banners. A tiny group of Bolsheviks were marching at the end of the procession with a red banner. The Mensheviks were also present with a similar number of supporters. When the procession came to the Winter Palace the Tsar refused to receive the petitions. The troops guarding the Winter Palace were ordered to fire into the crowd. More than a thousand people were killed and as many as two thousand wounded.

Workers learned from bitter experience that icons and pictures of the Tsar are less potent than revolvers and guns. Writing a month after the event, Lenin stated: '9 January 1905 fully revealed the vast reserve of revolutionary energy possessed by the proletariat.' But then he added that it revealed 'as well...the utter inadequacy of Social Democratic organisation'.

Petersburg was in the grip of a total strike. And the general strike spread from the capital to many cities hundreds or even thousands of miles away. The economic demands of workers led to political demands, economic struggle led to political struggle and vice versa. The two were not separated.

Finally, on 6 August, the Tsar made a concession. But instead of giving the long promised National Assembly, nothing was given but a consultative body—the Duma—with no power to legislate. The Duma was at the mercy of the Tsar. Out of the 1,400,000 Petersburg citizens only 13,000 had the vote. This roused the popular passion to fever heat, and led to the second great wave of strikes in October, in which the demands were overwhelmingly political.

At the same time the demand for the eight-hour day was central. The strike started in Moscow and from there it spread to Petersburg. The Petersburg soviet was established. By 13 October the number of strikers throughout Russia exceeded one million. Practically all the railway lines were stopped. The post stopped, schools were closed, water and gas supplies ceased, the country, the cities and the communi-

The 1905 Russian Revolution was the 'great dress rehearsal for 1917'. The revolutionary movement threw out new ideas and new forms of organisation. TONY CLIFF looks at the different aspects of the movement which began 80 years ago this month and the lessons for today.

cations between them were practically at a standstill. Poland was completely paralysed by the strike, as was Finland.

On 17 October the Tsar signed a proclamation giving a constitution to the Russian people. This manifesto pledged civil liberty with inviolability of the person, freedom of speech and association. It promised facilities for spreading electoral rights throughout the nation, leaving the details to the new Duma. Finally it agreed that no law would be enforceable without the approval of the state.

The workers were not satisfied. The Tsar's proclamation whetted workers' appetite for more. The revolutionaries demanded the dismissal of General Trepov, head of the police and Cossacks in Petersburg, the removal of the troops twenty miles from the city, a general amnesty and the formation of a national citizen's militia. They also demanded a political amnesty.

They declared that while there was freedom of meeting, the meetings were still surrounded by troops. While there was freedom of the press, the censorship remained. While there was freedom of learning the universities were occupied by troops. The inviolability of the person was given, but the gaols were filled with political prisoners. A constitution was given but the autocracy remained.

A third wave of strikes followed in November. The heart of these were economic demands. The unifying demand for the eight-hour day now dominated the strike. There was a total strike in Petersburg. On 3 November the whole town was practically shut down.

Outside St Petersburg there was a different picture. In the provinces the strike call was not answered, and in Petersburg itself the employers reacted by mass lockouts affecting tens of thousands of workers. By the beginning of December the Tsar felt strong enough to take massive repressive measures. The whole Executive Committee of Petersburg trade unions was arrested, the National Railroad Union was dissolved, new anti-strike regulations were promulgated.

On 7 December a strike broke out in Moscow in protest against these repressive measures. It spread to St Petersburg where about 125,000 people came out on strike. This was the spring-board for an armed insurrection in Moscow. Alas, after a week of struggle the insurrection was bloodily crushed by the Tsarist army.

Mass strikes pose the question of state power. Which class is going to rule, the capitalists or the working class? This is why in Russia it brought forward a new institution, the soviet or workers' council.

The soviet, to start with, is simply a strike committee, but unlike the normal strike committee which covers an individual workplace, the soviet covers numerous workplaces. In time the soviet challenges the government of the day. Therefore the soviet is the form of organisation of workers fighting for power, and, as Lenin pointed out very early in the life of the soviets, it is the form of organisation of workers in power.

The soviet was created first in Petersburg in October 1905 and it spread subsequently to a number of other cities. Their establishment meant that two governments coexisted side by side: the official government of the Tsar, and the unofficial government of the workers. Such dual power could not go on for any length of time and after a couple of months it was the Tsarist government that managed to annihilate the soviets.

Mass strikes in themselves, even when organised by soviets, cannot get rid of the rule of the capitalists. They can win concessions from the capitalists, but they cannot make the capitalists give up their economic and political power. The capitalists would rather lose their profits than their property. The strike can win bread, it cannot win the bakery. The capitalists can survive much longer in a strike than the workers because they have much more fat to live on.

In the final analysis the capitalists can be removed from power only by force. As Marx put it: 'Violence is the midwife of any new society.' The insurrection is necessary for the victory of the mass strike and the soviet. Hence the December insurrection in Moscow was a step forward in the march of the revolution.

The act of insurrection cannot be carried out by the soviets. The soviet organises all workers, both advanced and backward. That is the strength of the soviet—that it is all-inclusive. Ultimately, the act of insurrection demands much more decisiveness. The insurrection needs a resolute leadership to plan the action and to time it. As Lenin put it: 'Insurrection is an art, and an art cannot be assumed to be known by every worker.' So it was



the Bolshevik party which organised the December 1905 insurrection in Moscow, and later the October 1917 insurrection in Petersburg.

The decisive struggle of the revolution took place in the towns. But these were followed by widespread uprisings of the rural population. From the spring of 1905 to the autumn of 1906 peasant struggle developed throughout the countryside. Peasants seized landowners' land, ransacked their estates, took their grain and cattle. Without a peasant uprising, in a country like Russia where the industrial proletariat was a very small minority, a victorious revolution was not possible.

In 1905 the peasant uprising following the struggle of the proletariat in the cities was not widespread enough or strong enough, to overthrow Tsarism. The Tsar managed to use peasants in uniform to suppress the Moscow insurrection. The 1905 revolution showed clearly the relation between the proletariat and the peasantry. It also showed the relation between the proletariat and the liberal bourgeoisie.

When the revolution started in January the liberal bourgeoisie which was very weak in backward Russia was quite ecstatically for it. But the revolutionary ardour of the leaders cooled off as the revolution advanced, drawing millions of workers and peasants into political and social struggle. If at the beginning, in January, the bourgeoisie supported the strike enthusiastically, in November, when the struggling workers were demanding the eight-hour day, and thus threatening the employers' pocket, the bourgeoisie reacted immediately, not only by lockouts, but also by opposition to all the revolutionary struggle. The bourgeoisie turned out to be much more afraid of the revolutionary workers than of counter-revolutionary Tsarism.

While Lenin in 1903 led the Bolsheviks to split from the Mensheviks inside Russian Social Democracy, the line of demarcation was not initially very clear. It was only in the heat of the 1905 revolution that both factions were formed into clear entities.

The Mensheviks saw the revolution as one to overthrow autocracy and establish bourgeois democracy. This revolution would be led by the

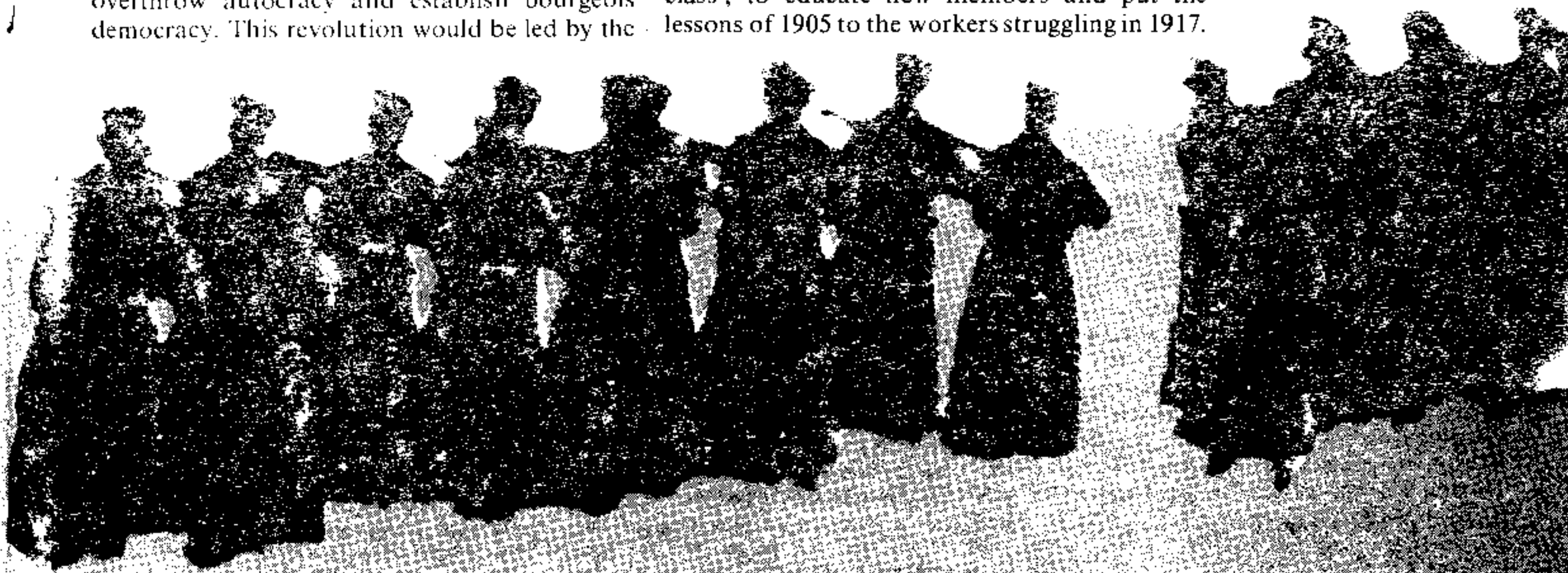
bourgeoisie, and so they called on workers to collaborate with the bourgeoisie. This led one of their leaders, Plekhanov to say of the December uprising, 'It was wrong to take up arms. We must value the support of the non-proletarian opposition parties and not repel them by tactless action.' Lenin's attitude was exactly the opposite—the insurrection was a step forward but not well enough organised.

Whereas the Bolsheviks saw in the peasant a revolutionary force that in alliance and under the leadership of the proletariat could overthrow Tsarism, the Mensheviks saw them as basically a conservative force. And the Mensheviks, although quicker to support the soviet initially, never saw the soviet as a form of organisation for the struggle of workers' power and the form of organisation of workers' power, as the Bolsheviks came to do.

1905 shaped and sharpened the ideas of Bolshevism regarding the need for a proletariat independent from and in opposition to the bourgeoisie, which was bound to become more and more counter-revolutionary. The proletariat must lead the peasantry. The form of organisation of the workers and peasants in struggle for power and in power is the form of the soviet. The revolutionary party has to fight for leadership in the soviets and has to organise the insurrection itself. 1905 was also the year that made it possible for Trotsky to develop his theory of the Permanent Revolution.

1905 delivered a mortal blow to the shapelessness of the masses. In January 1905 most workers thought the Tsar could be spoken to as a decent person. Bloody Sunday opened the eyes of millions. In October the same workers believed that to shake a fist at the Tsar would be enough to force him to grant concessions. The general strike in October proved to them that this was not so. The use of arms was the next step.

1905 had all the ingredients which were to reappear in 1917 and lead to a successful revolution. Without the experience and lessons learnt in 1905 it is doubtful if the uprisings in 1917 would have led to the establishment of workers' power. But for the experience to be remembered and the lessons carried forward it needed a revolutionary party to act as 'the memory of the class', to educate new members and put the lessons of 1905 to the workers struggling in 1917.



What about the workers?

THE debate over rate capping will be an important one over the coming months. Here, three council workers reply to the article on rate capping by Gareth Jenkins in our December Issue.

IMAGINE an industry employing nearly 2 million workers. It has suffered years of low wage settlements, attacks on jobs and conditions and cuts in the level of services. These workers now face up to 100,000 redundancies and wholesale attacks on their conditions.

Next consider what the party's response should be to this. As revolutionary socialists, both inside and outside the industry, we have to develop a strategy which helps us to best relate to the class and lead a fightback within it. In doing this we clearly have to look at the strengths and weaknesses of both sides, at the possibilities of mobilising solidarity action and any alliances that can be made with other forces.

Our starting point in approaching this task will obviously determine the conclusions we reach. It is important to restate that for us organising workers on the job is central because for many other political tendencies, who are also opposed to rate-capping, this is not so. The traditions of the Labour left lead them to see workers taking action as being secondary to bureaucratic and legal manoeuvres and 'mobilising public support'.

In the article on rate-capping last month by Gareth Jenkins, however, the approach concentrated not on organisation and activity amongst the workforce but on what the Labour left is doing and how best to intervene in their debate.

Not only does this miss the main point but there is a grave danger that it may lead us to believe some of the dubious things that the Labour left are saying about themselves. Part of their image is that there exists across the 16 rate-capped authorities a body of councillors with a determination to resist the government's attacks, and a preparedness to break the law. The problem is that our experience gives us little confidence in them. While we can formally state 'We'll support you so long as you resist, and oppose you if you implement cuts', unless we start from a clearly defined position, based on our experience and the centrality of workers organising to take action we are in danger of deluding ourselves and confusing the workforce.

Our experience

Socialist Worker has documented various disputes involving Labour rate-capped councils taking on their workers (Sheffield on new technology, St Helens on reorganisation), or acting tough in response to a dispute (Southwark calling in the SPG during the residential dispute, Islington holding out against its low paid nursery workers and Camden in the Homeless

Persons Section strike). All these councils, and many others, face severe financial restrictions, claim to be socialist and end up taking on their workforces.

While Labour councillors start off with sincere intentions, in practice they inevitably, because of their situation, end up acting little different from employers in general. In Camden's HPS strike the council refused to negotiate whilst the strike continued, sent letters to strikers' homes, organised scabbing and sent out misleading reports to staff and press. They ended up blaming the strikers for the death of a family in a council hostel fire and gave the homeless families such an unsympathetic response they've occupied the council chamber indefinitely.

In general all the Labour rate-capped councils have been pledged to a 'no cuts' position for several years, but this hasn't stopped them agreeing cuts packages and supporting a management routine which has led to countless disputes on issues like workloads, vacancies, accommodation standards, low pay for NALGO members, health and safety, productivity drives and worsening conditions for manual workers.

Hackney council, which is being heralded by some as the stronghold of the 'hard Labour left', agreed a £2.5m cut in its staffing budget this year.

In Camden's boiler section, for example, management are 'allowed' to try on unilaterally changing working practices and agreements, threaten the use of contractors against industrial action and put aside health and safety agreements. In practice it is always extremely difficult to determine what the councillors are directly involved in or when they turn a blind eye. The result is that when a Labour councillor came to a boiler section meeting, on a tour around the workforce, to talk about unity against rate-capping he got a hostile response based on our daily experience of confrontation on the job.

Strategy and tactics

Most council workers believe that the Labour councils will put up a show of defying the government but that at the end of the day they will back away from breaking the law and negotiate a compromise, at our expense. For the councillors the fight back depends primarily on manoeuvre (both legal and financial) and on winning support from the public. Union organisation and industrial action is a lever that may be used to win concessions.

For us the question of building strong shop floor organisation, a rank and file network of stewards across the threatened councils (eg London Bridge) and developing a preparedness and confidence amongst the workforce to take action must be central.

This isn't just a question of emphasis—it leads us to talk about the need to go on the

offensive and to take action now against every attack. The Labour councillors think in terms of a set piece legal confrontation which may end up in bankruptcy, resulting in the workforce being laid off (a totally passive and demoralising position for the workforce we have to lead and relate to).

This is not to say that we should ignore alliances with the Labour left and Labour councils. Indeed it will be important to unite within campaigns to explain the effects of rate capping to other workers and the users of the services. But this 'united front' work ought to be aimed at winning support for those workers taking action rather than seen as an end in itself.

In practice this means that the Socialist Workers Party, working both inside the council workplaces, and from the outside where we have no base, has to build its relationship with the workforce and find ways of preparing it for the battles to come.

Thus we will have to produce an accurate analysis of how the struggle is likely to develop, build up sectional organisation and combativity, build on past experiences (like the need to fight *all* attacks regardless of who makes them) and win the arguments for a united response across all boroughs and all unions. (This is currently being posed as a call for 'all out strike' by all boroughs as soon as the first local authority is attacked.)

A key point to stress here is that workers have the power to stop the Tories. Our work in organising solidarity for the miners gives us good opportunities to get the message across.

At the level of 'agitational propaganda' we should argue that since the Tories are intent on forcing through rate capping there's no point in waiting to be attacked and that we should go on the offensive now. While we are not going to win mass meeting votes for an immediate stoppage, this kind of agitation gives us a focus and poses a clear alternative to the dangers of watching and waiting. Most importantly it enables us to build a bigger and bigger minority who will work with us in preparing for strike action in the months up to April.

In this context the argument which preoccupies the Labour left about whether to go for 'No Rate Increases' or a 'Deficit Budget' is secondary. The problem is that both place the workforce in a passive position watching a battle between the government and local councils. The initiative is firmly in their hands—not ours.

We have to understand the implications of each strategy in order to predict how events will develop and in order to sharpen our demands and criticism of the Labour councils. But the criteria which should determine whether we support a particular option is how it will serve to cause an immediate confrontation with the government and, most importantly, how it helps us to mobilise industrial action across the job.

The problem with both not fixing a rate and deficit budgeting is that neither is guaranteed to force a confrontation and both lend themselves to being played out to encourage a negotiated settlement. The

danger is that Labour councils will try to put off a confrontation for as long as possible. No one will want to go first, and in the process of eking out their budgets they'll try to force through cuts. The difficulty of combating 'creeping cuts' of this kind has plagued militants in the public sector for years—it is the hardest of all jobs.

What we ideally want is a tactic which puts all the Labour councils in the same position at the same time and, more importantly, which puts all council workers in the same position (there is a difference). As a general policy we should support the three 'Nos': No cuts, No redundancies, No rate increases.

If, as we argue, neither 'No rate fixing' nor 'deficit budgeting' guarantees a confrontation with the government, what should we be arguing for rate capped authorities to do?

We suggest two additional demands which seem to sharpen the conflict and would force

the Labour left to defy the law immediately. These are firstly the withholding of interest charges; and secondly the refusal to pay precepts (monies to the police, GLC and ILEA).

Our overall perspective should be to concentrate on organising amongst the workforce while working with, when possible, Labour councils based on a clear understanding of our differences. This means organising on the job and through stewards committees and participating in broad based 'campaign committees'. This should include organising initiatives amongst the workforce aimed at mobilising support from users and other workers. (In Camden we're producing leaflets for council workers to distribute and sending delegations from section meetings to other sections and tenants associations.)

Successful 'united front' work isn't based

on burying differences but uniting on a clear common interest from a position of independence. Without the independence it's not a united front but a dog on a lead. The best defence against sectarianism, (which can easily surface—particularly in this situation) is rooting and testing our ideas in the class by arguing them out on the job day by day.

The debate about 'deficit budgeting' versus 'Not fixing a rate' is not one which will be carried out in the offices and depots by council workers but in the committee rooms by handfuls of Labour councillors. ■

Alan Walters, John Mann, Pete Ainsley

We welcome contributions and letters on this and any other subjects in the Review (typed if possible). Send to Socialist Worker Review, PO Box 82, London E2.



Will the US invade? Tank on military alert in Managua street

Show some solidarity

AT A TIME when US provocations and aggressions against Nicaragua are being stepped up, it might be thought that Joanna Rollo's article in your November issue ('Nicaragua: The People's Revolution?') would be devoted above all to exposure and denunciation of the US undeclared war.

But it turns out to be an exposure and denunciation of...the Sandinistas. And Joanna's article has so little in common with reality that it could have been written on the plane to Managua. A few examples suffice:

1) 'This [the duty of all socialists to defend Nicaragua] is not because Nicaragua is a socialist country, as many of its supporters claim.' To my knowledge none of Nicaragua's supporters have made this claim.

What most of us would claim is that the country is in transition to socialism, under the most arduous conditions that can be imagined, but at a pace which the Bolsheviks and the Castro government would themselves have chosen if the imperialist aggression had not forced them to accelerate. Both of them have advised a slower but less disruptive pace in Nicaragua.

2) 'The condition for that [West European] aid was the cessation of the limited expropriations that had been carried out... It was a condition with which the Sandinistas complied.' Not true. Since 1979, when the expropriations are supposed to have ceased, the Nicaraguan government has passed three laws against capitalist economic sabotage. Quite a few expropriations have

been carried out under all of them.

3) 'Real wages are estimated to have fallen by 50 percent since 1979.' By whom, when, where? By *La Prensa*? By the *coordinadora*, the bourgeois parties who boycotted the elections? By Radio 15 de Septiembre, the contras' radio station in Honduras? Was it Joanna's decision and that of her sources, to keep them anonymous?

4) 'The right to criticise and publicly question the government's policy was also removed under the state of emergency.' But the state of emergency wasn't a law passed by the Sandinistas. It's a reality imposed by Yankee aggression. As for 'criticisms and public questioning of the government's policy'—well, here are a few criticisms issued by various opponents of the Sandinistas, publicly, during the election campaign:

Independent Liberal Party: 'Nicaragua has become a country impoverished and invaded by thousands of Cubans, hundreds of Russians...brought in to persecute and repress Nicaraguans.'

Conservative Democratic Party: 'Forward Against the Front' (an unbelievably provocative slogan, as it's also used by Radio 15 de Septiembre). This party pledges to 'exterminate the devastating Marxist-Leninist cancer that is threatening Nicaragua'.

People's Social Christian Party: 'Why MIG airplanes? [in response to Humberto Ortega's statement that Nicaragua had the right to obtain some to defend itself]. It would be better to buy tractors, and toys for our children.'

People's Action Movement: 'It [the FSLN] won't lose its power [to imperialism] in a war, it will hand it over at the negotiating table.'

Pretty scurrilous stuff, but hardly more so than Joanna's claim that you can't criticise the government.

5) 'Externally, they have followed a similar policy—the subordination of solidarity with other working classes to the needs of their own state.' Joanna doesn't say for which working class she wants to obtain

Nicaraguan assistance, in what form, or how Nicaragua could provide it. The nearest example that comes to mind, maybe the one Joanna is thinking of, is El Salvador, where the FMLN is doing rather well without assistance which would have to be sent across Honduras (a US armed camp) or the Gulf of Foweca (crawling with US ships).

6) 'Rationing has now been introduced,



Food queue in Managua

For the workers and peasants of Nicaragua that means further sacrifice.' For the workers and peasants, no. This is the only way to prevent large-scale capitalists hoarding. It's the bourgeoisie which is infuriated at the measure.

The Nicaraguan people are under siege by the Yankee empire. When they extend their hospitality to foreign journalists, especially those claiming to be on their side, they are entitled to honest and accurate coverage of their struggle. But what do they get? Joanna misrepresents the views of the supporters of the Nicaraguan revolution—certainly the views of the Sandinistas. She makes all the expropriations since 1979 'disappear', together with all the laws under which they

were carried out. She puts forward the most pessimistic statistics I've ever heard about the real wages of Nicaraguans, without naming the source. She buries the political debate that has been taking place during the election campaign and which is still going on.

She makes demands of Nicaragua's resources that it cannot fulfil. And finally, she blames rationing rather than the CIA's 'secret' war for the sacrifices which the Nicaraguan people must make. The Nicaraguan people can be thankful that all Reagan's enemies aren't like *Socialist Worker Review*. If they were, he would have no need for friends. ■

Mike Webber

But look at the facts

LET us look first of all at the factual issues that Mike Webber raises.

He denies falling living standards. Yet he must know that the Sandinistas have no doubts that Joanna is right. At the third National Assembly of the Sandinista trade unions held in Managua in September 1984, for instance, the official statement declared: 'From 1981 to 1983 working conditions and social services underwent important growth, which is now being pushed backwards due to aggression'. It talked of the 'rise in the prices of basic and non-basic products, hitting at the wages of workers'.

Yet, even in the 'better' years of 1981-83 wages have fallen. In January 1984 for example Jaime Wheelock, Sandinista agriculture minister, was saying that inflation had cut the real wages of workers by 30-40 percent between December 1981 and July 1983 'as far as the basic shopping basket is concerned'.

The same is true for his quite cavalier treatment of the effect of current Sandinista policies on the surrounding region—above all in El Salvador. Nicaragua, in return for unfulfilled promises of the cessation of American attacks, agreed to end all support for the FMLN guerrillas in El Salvador, and proceeded to kick out their representatives from Managua.

This shift in the Sandinistas' policy was decisive in shifting the balance in the FMLN away from the revolutionary pole of attraction that had existed within it.

Rather more puzzling is Mike Webber's discussion of democracy in Nicaragua. The facts of the matter are quite straightforward; the regime has guaranteed the freedom of the right—their paper *La Prensa* gets the newsprint and supplies it needs, making the kind of treasonable pro-Contra statements that he himself quotes. For critics of the regime on the left, things are much less clear; certainly no-one on the left gets the kind of carte blanche treatment handed out to *La Prensa*.

The fact that the right has freedoms that workers criticising Sandinista policies from the left are at least partially deprived of reflects the forces currently at work in

Nicaragua. Sixty percent of the economy is still in the hands of private capital. In the last two years there has been no move to reduce the power and influence of those who own and control this capital, on the contrary they have been offered guarantees against such moves. This is the material basis of the political freedoms that the bosses enjoy and which the Sandinistas (and Mike Webber too?) defend.

The lack of an alternative to this state of affairs—above all, the lack of any form of workers' democracy—is not an accident either. On the contrary, it too has just as deep material roots.

If the only alternatives are more money for the workers or more money for fighting off the counter-revolutionaries, it is quite right that revolutionaries should argue for the latter. If the counter-revolutionaries succeed it would be a huge defeat for the Nicaraguan working class and a major set-back for the class struggle internationally.

The tragedy is that these correct appeals to redouble the fight against the Contras have gone along with moves which at every point have weakened the struggle on other fronts. Because the working class in Nicaragua does not own and control the economy, every act of belt-tightening lines the pockets of the capitalists who own industry.

In the past many socialists adopted similar uncritical attitudes to revolutions that took place in China and other third world countries. Tens of thousands of Maoists were then faced with the problem: all the aspects that they had earlier dismissed as 'capitalist roadism' were later to be adopted by China after the fall of the Gang of Four, yet—the social structure remained the same—no discernible counter-revolution had taken place. This made nonsense of their claim that China was genuinely a workers' state. Unfortunately, all too many drew the conclusion that it made nonsense of any struggle for socialism. Just the same could follow for those who think in the same way about Nicaragua today, like Mike Webber. ■

Peter Binns

When friends fall out

THE June European elections dealt a catastrophic blow to the French Communist Party. Barely ahead of the fascists it gained 11.28 percent of the vote, compared with the 20.5 percent gained in the last European elections of 1979. Some have thought (or hoped) this marked the beginning of the end of the party which has traditionally represented the most militant section of the French working class.

Logically it should have done. Three years as junior partner in the Socialist administration had subjected the CP to enormous strains. Its new-found respectability had not succeeded in shaking off the suspicion that it was the enemy within, despite its loyalty to the government's increasingly right wing stance.

At the same time, forcing austerity down the throats of French workers had alienated its traditional support. Gaining no new friends and losing its old ones seemed the inevitable fate of the CP. It also seemed that the CP would hang onto office come what may, because its reformist parliamentary politics dictated no other course.

Yet it did give up office and did so entirely voluntarily. It is clear that when Mitterrand reshuffled his cabinet in July he was quite prepared to offer the CP fresh ministerial portfolios. It was the CP which ended the union of the left, a strategy it has painstakingly pursued for over a decade.

The question is why? One explanation is that the new government is simply too right wing for the CP to stomach any longer. That has some truth.

Continuation of austerity

The new prime minister, Laurent Fabius, is very much a man of the right wing of the Socialist Party, a moderniser and technocrat. In appointing him, the intention was—and is—to give the administration a new image in order to win support from the centre ground for further restructuring of French industry (at the expense of French workers, of course).

Yet the politics of the new government are only a continuation of the austerity programme of the previous Prime Minister, and the CP had been quite prepared to tolerate that. Marchais, the CP leader, had previously attempted to justify the Party's line by distancing it from particular austerity measures while declaring its general solidarity with the government.

But what the election results proved was that this tortuous double act could not save it from deep unpopularity. It could not ride two horses at once.

A fierce debate, more public than ever before, erupted inside the leadership. Those closest to the CP ministers wanted to push the Party rightwards and drop the last fossilised vestiges of a Marxist past.

Out would go any embarrassing reminders of class struggle—such as the demand for the

'dictatorship of the proletariat' in the party programme—to prove the CP's unequivocal commitment to running the bourgeois state machine. There was also muttering about replacing Marchais as leader because his image cost votes.

At one stage it looked as if the 'reformers' were winning. But in reality their strategy had one basic fault: what would be the point of a second reformist party that in all essentials could not be distinguished from its larger cousin, the Socialist Party?

The traditionalists in the leadership started from the very obvious fact that association with the Socialist government was harming the party's identity. If that base disintegrated further then the CP could no longer even count on the threat of industrial action to win itself a negotiating place within bourgeois politics.

Continued participation in the govern-



George Marchais: still in the driving seat despite worries that his 'image cost votes'

ment could serve no useful purpose. Even the 'reformers' were forced to accept that, and it was one of their number who announced the CP decision to quit.

By pulling out the CP has regained its freedom to criticise and manoeuvre. It can now repair the damage done to its credibility among working class militants. It can also pick up on the discontent that will inevitably emerge as a result of further austerity measures by the government.

Is this turn to the left anything more than a verbal turn? It might appear not to be. The CP is proposing a new union of the left, a new popular majority. The terms are sufficiently vague for it to seem different from the one that has just ended in such obvious failure. But it is clearly the same kind of electoralist politics as before.

However, appearances are deceptive. For the CP also realises that the priority is to put real pressure on the Socialist Party in the form of industrial action, in order to realise its long-term aims. In the CP-led CGT union it has the perfect instrument.

Even during the summer holidays the CGT began to take the initiative. It organised activity against the government's petrol price rises. In September it organised strike action against Renault's plans to stop a fifth week's holiday and impose cuts in bonus.

No longer is the CGT dragging its heels. It has gone onto the offensive. It is refusing to use the excuse that the majority of workers are hesitant to move into action (a hesitancy which is largely the result of its performance over the last two years). It is prepared to organise the minority who are willing to fight.

Communist Party vanguardism

This 'vanguardism' has caught sections of the revolutionary left on the hop. Believing on past performance that the CGT bureaucracy confines itself to gestural politics, they have been in danger of abstaining on these initiatives.

The net result is that CGT militants are regaining the confidence to lead struggles in the workplace—struggles that will certainly develop as the Socialist government resorts to a greater and greater crackdown on jobs and conditions.

In the pipeline is a rapid escalation in unemployment (the CGT prophesied in September that unemployment would rise from 2.3 million within seven months). A Government commissioned report, which they have since tried to back away from, says that over all 74,000 jobs must go in Renault. Similar cuts would have to be made in Peugeot. Only through such swingeing job losses can the car industry regain profitability and resist import penetration, it is claimed.

As for the coal industry, the managing director, taking the lead from his friend Ian MacGregor, has stated that 30,000 jobs out of 51,000 must go over the next five years.

Also in the pipeline is further deterioration of purchasing power. In addition to rises in petrol prices and taxes, telephone charges are set to rise by 25 percent by the beginning of 1985. There is an assumption

too, that wages will not rise in real terms for teachers and the public sector. Little wonder, then, that the unilateral imposition on the public sector of a 2 percent pay rise in conditions where inflation is running at 7 percent, made the CGT's call for a one day strike in late October gather wide support.

Of course, there are limits to the CGT bureaucracy's militancy. When Renault management backtracked in response to industrial action in September the CGT was quick to end the strike with only a few concessions to show.

But generally speaking those limits are a long way off. It probably reckons that the left is in no position to stop the right wing parties winning the 1986 legislative elections. So it might as well concentrate on rebuilding its base and let the Socialist Party carry the blame for defeat on its own.

More importantly, though, the real reason why the limits of the CGT's combativity are a long way off has to do with the state of the working class movement. The pounding it has received from the bosses, and the treachery from its own leadership, have sapped the confidence of workers in their own powers to fight back.

The exceptions have been primarily among immigrant workers in the car industry, who have been less constrained by bureaucratic traditions. But their fight has been isolated in particular plants, with little generalisation beyond.

For that reason, any struggle that develops out of the CGT's initiatives is unlikely to go beyond what the union decides. Confidence in rank and file organisation has not yet returned. When and if it does, we can expect the bureaucratic apparatus to clamp down. For the politics of the CP exclude the revolutionary perspective of workers running their own affairs, even if for the moment the CP's language is one of unremitting class struggle.

Thus the CP will prepare for fresh defeats. Only if revolutionaries prove just as eager as CP militants to push initiatives for mass action will there exist any opportunity to prove, at least to some workers, that they, and they only, are the consistent fighters. ■

Gareth Jenkins

Workers resist Khomeini

THE Western press has a schizophrenic attitude towards Iran. While the Khomeini regime is usually seen as consisting of 'Islamic fanatics' who threaten Western interests in the Middle East, Iran is also pictured as a stable country in which the mullahs now have the backing of the majority of the population. There has been little or no reporting of the current widespread discontent with the regime or the steadily growing opposition of Iran's workers.

A series of strikes and demonstrations has shown that despite four years of intense repression the Iranian working class has not been cowed. For the first time since Khomeini crushed the workers' committees that played an important role in organising against the Shah, there is evidence of new forms of factory organisation developing. Iranian workers are edging back onto the political stage.

The regime's general unpopularity has much to do with its economic difficulties. In 1982 Iran's economic performance improved dramatically. War damage to the Gulf oil installations was made good and oil exports increased to 2.7 million barrels of oil per day.

The economy received a boost and an ambitious \$170 million development plan was announced. Then the world oil glut suddenly reduced revenue. Within a year the boom was over, debts mounted fast and by June 1984 overdue short-term payments amounted to some \$6 billion.

The fall in oil revenue coincided with a huge rise in imports. From late 1982 the regime began to recognise the interests of factory owners and traders and those who urged the need for capitalist development.

Some of Khomeini's injunctions were relaxed and the Revolutionary Guards—a combination of Islamic police force and militia—instructed to keep out of business and the private life of Iran's capitalists.

Islamic bodies like the *anjomani islami*—the Islamic associations which replaced workers' committees established during the revolution—were told to abandon the management role they had adopted in factories and offices.

Businessmen were given a free rein. Many took their chance, benefitting from the absence of the foreign companies that had prospered under the Shah, and made record profits. But much of their activity was in importing—in the 12 months to March 1984 a record \$22 billion of goods flooded in from abroad. This had two effects—it put tremendous pressure on a country running a war costing some \$250 million a month, and produced a massive wave of corruption.

Foreign trade passed out of the government's control into the hands of a growing layer of middlemen and hoarders. The regime was forced to act and in February last year blocked the import of 'non-essential' goods. It then introduced a bill which attempted to nationalise aspects of foreign trade—an attempt to control the beast it had created.

But the regime has not been able to resolve a basic difficulty—the corrupt and inefficient system it has encouraged involves too many of its own supporters. The thriving black market provides handsome returns for bazaaris and even mullahs and top ayatollahs.

Falling living standards

There is deep resentment over a rapid recent fall in living standards. After months of serious shortages staple foods like bread, rice and potatoes are again available—but at black market prices. The situation is attributed to the activity of the hoarders and middlemen, with officials helpless to intervene or get involved themselves.

There is also special bitterness over rents. Landlords in Tehran have been demanding deposits of 50,000 toman (£2,500) for small flats in working class areas and monthly rents of over £350. With unskilled workers averaging £125 per month, skilled workers £300 per month and even white collar workers and professionals some £500 per month, large numbers of families are being forced to house three generations under one roof. With unemployment high, many families are desperate.

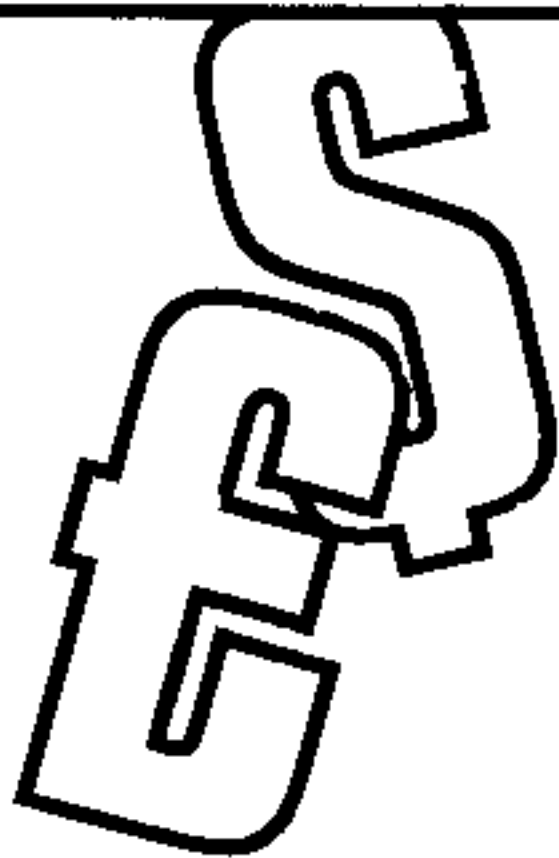
Meanwhile the most active supporters of the regime have become more privileged. Some of the petty bourgeoisie, the urban poor and lumpen elements who provided an important element of Khomeini's support in the vital years after the fall of the Shah, have prospered. They have been incorporated into the Revolutionary Guards, Komitehs (local Islamic councils) *baseej* (mobilisation of irregulars for the war), *jihad* (reconstruction crusade) and *anjomani islami*.

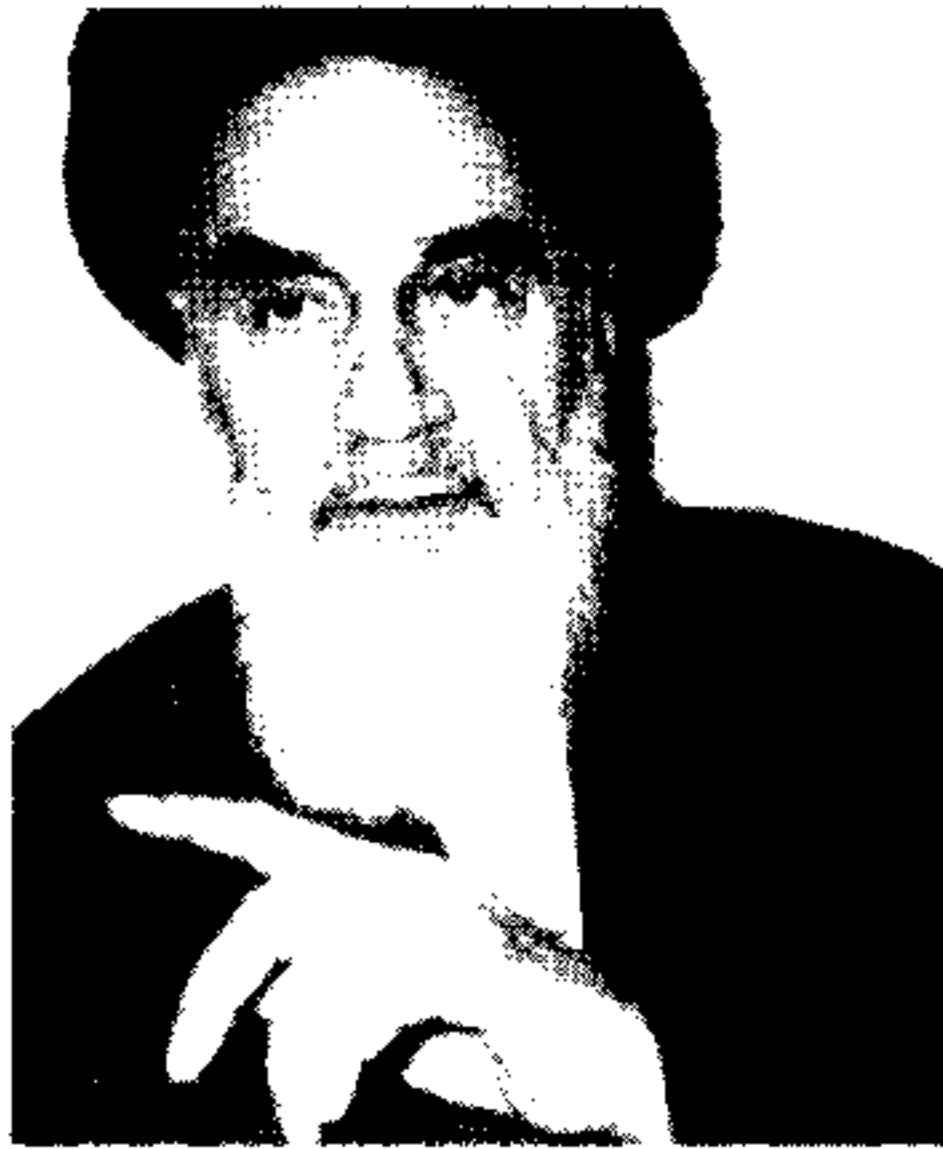
These institutions make up a new state apparatus closely controlled by the ruling

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Khomeini: who takes over when he goes?

mullahs through the nationwide network of mosques. Their personnel have benefitted through corruption, the provision of government houses, cars and domestic goods and the sale of their special government allowances on the black market.

This layer—the ideological prop of the regime—has been secured materially and now has a real interest in its survival. Together with sections of the bourgeoisie, and the bazaaris, this layer now makes up the real class base of the Khomeini regime.

Among the ruling mullahs one major power battle seems to be over, while another is under way. Power currently lies with the 'technocrat' group of parliament, speaker Rafsanjani and Prime Minister Mousavi. It supports free market economics with a government role in planning and development—not unlike the model of most western systems.

The group routed the rival 'Iman's Line' faction, which, together with the pro-Moscow Tudeh Party, argued for a 'statist' strategy of nationalisation of foreign trade, land reform and centralised government. The 'technocrats' also succeeded in smashing the extreme fundamentalists of the *Hojatleh* faction, who argued for unfettered capitalism.

Technocrats' difficulties

Khomeini has been supporting the technocrats. He backed their efforts to keep the Revolutionary Guards out of central government policy making, and in the creation of special ministries to control the guards and the *jihād*. However, the technocrats have so far failed to neutralise the power of the Council of Guardians—a group of leading religious figures answerable only to Khomeini, which has strong connections with the bazaar. And the *baseej* or volunteer militia, which can still mobilise large numbers of urban and rural poor under the leadership of local mullahs, remains a volatile force which the technocrats have failed to capture.

The technocrat group faces a further serious difficulty. While it can currently use general support for the regime among the activists of the guards, the komitehs and other sections of the state apparatus, it has not

won a following among the bourgeoisie. Iranian factory owners and traders have been moving behind the *Nehzat Azadi* (Freedom Movement) of Mehdi Bazargan, formerly the National Front.

Bazargan has published several books, which the regime has allowed into circulation. In them, he openly criticises the 'backward elements of Islam'. He praises the 'advantages of capitalism' and claims that 'the Ayatollah's great mistake is to give nationalism a secondary role.'

Bazargan seems to have won the support of many Iranian capitalists, while the land-owners and the bazaar are committed to the Council of Guardians, which is opposed to further changes like land reform and the extension of state control.

Within the technocrat group there is fierce personal rivalry. This is partly a reflection of the group's own insecurity, its lack of a really solid class base. Currently individual members of the group are busy building their own followings by dispensing positions and privilege, hoping to secure their hold on the levers of power to prepare for the battles that will inevitably follow Khomeini's death.

It is not yet clear whether the balance of forces within the group will cause them to fight one another or to unite against other bourgeois forces, or the popular uprising that some Iranian leftists confidently expect after the Ayatollah's death.

One thing that unites the mullahs and most of the bourgeoisie is concern over the steadily increasing confidence of Iranian workers. After the revolution the regime smashed the workplace councils that had been established during the revolution and through the strike wave which followed. The *anjomani islami* operated as direct agents of the regime and enthusiastic supporters of management. While the government has instructed them to tone down their activities, they have also been facing great worker opposition.

Forms of resistance vary from opposition to pay cuts to refusing work discipline, disobeying factory regulations and go-slows and outright strikes. There have been attacks on management and members of the Islamic councils, now widely termed the 'yellow councils'. There have been many sackings and the arrest, imprisonment and torture of militants. In some cases activists have been shot on the factory floor.

Workers in the state tobacco monopoly have been on strike for over a year. The strike began in December 1983, when workers were told that they were to work eight hours a day at pre-revolution wage rates or 12 hours for extra wages. They answered, 'We will neither work eight hours for the Shah's rate, nor 12 hours for the mullah's rate.' Many were arrested and tortured and some are still in prison.

Workers at the Tehran plants of Coca-Cola and Canada Dry have also been engaged in lengthy disputes. In each case management attempted to introduce flexible job descriptions and to deduct a proportion of wages for funding the war effort. Revolutionary guards were called to the factories and fighting followed in which a number of workers were killed.

Similar strikes have taken place in other

factories. In all cases the Islamic councils intervene in support of management. In an important development workers have been electing their own representatives to by-pass the 'yellow councils'—an indication that they at last feel strong enough to defy management and the regime.

Workers' opposition has also been expressed in more unconventional ways. Twice in the last three months there have been demonstrations at the Amjadieh Football Ground in Tehran. After fighting between football fans—apparently faked to spread confusion among Revolutionary guards—the tens of thousands in the stadium broke into chants of 'Death to Khomeini, Death to the Islamic Republic'. The demonstrations were a profound shock to the regime, coming not from the student circles that produced opposition to Khomeini in the years after the revolution, but from young workers.

Daily clashes in the streets are the result of attacks on women by Revolutionary Guards patrolling to ensure that 'Islamic dress' is worn according to the regime's regulations. In many cases passers-by have joined in the defence of women under attack and small street battles have developed.

Lack of organisation

There is clearly no lack of fighting spirit among workers, but they lack any organisation which can co-ordinate their activities and spread their experiences. There are as yet no signs of trade union organisation, while the organisations of the left remain sceptical of the value of working class struggle.

Years of repression sapped the energy of many socialists, but many were also affected by the political bankruptcy of the guerrilla tradition that still dominates the Iranian left. Organisations like the Fedayeen and Mujahideen enjoyed the backing of hundreds of thousands of young activists in the years after the revolution. Rather than trying to build on the wave of workers' struggles then taking place, they followed the sorry Stalinist strategy of building 'all-class alliances'. The Tudeh (communist) Party tried every means of inserting itself into the regime.

When the mullahs turned on the working class and the left these organisations were powerless. The Mujahideen and factions of the Fedayeen responded by instigating armed attacks, isolating their members still further from the workplaces. Other Fedayeen members and the Tudeh made frantic efforts to square their politics with that of Khomeini, until they too faced purges, imprisonment and execution.

Now workers' resistance is redeveloping. The instability of the regime and its continuing economic problems mean that workers have an opportunity to build embryonic organisations in the workplaces. To connect with this new and more solid form of resistance the Iranian left must go back to first principles. The attempt to build an Iranian workers' party must begin in an effort to connect with today's struggles in the factories. ■

Mariam Pouya and Phil Marshall

WORK PLACE NOTES

Andy Zebrowski talked to members of the Felixstowe Port Committee about organising on ships.

THE FELIXSTOWE Port Committee organises some 430 seamen. We are probably the best organised port in Britain and quite likely in Europe.

It was set up some ten years ago. Because of our tight organisation we now have much better conditions. People used to have five trips on to every one off. By 1975 we won the one to one. That means for every week you work you now get one off. We work on four ships owned by Townsend-Thoresen—two passenger boats and two freighters that run between Felixstowe and Zeebrugge in Belgium.

The committee meets monthly. The key to our organisation is to spread the involvement and responsibilities as widely as possible. Each ship has three departments—engine room, catering, and deck. Each department has a rep who is covered by someone else if he is not rostered on that trip. There can be more than one of these deputies. They are elected at the yearly ship-board meeting, usually by volunteering themselves. We have forced management to recognise the reps. One of them is the convenor on each ship. The committee itself has a chairman, two deputies, a treasurer, an assistant treasurer and four organisers (who are also reps). All of them work on the boats.

Weekly meetings

The organisers help to run the port organisation. For instance if we need a picket tonight the organisers would steam in and get it sorted out. This worked very well during the health workers' dispute in 1982 when we had to support different Days of Action. Another good example was GCHQ Day when the deputy chairman and the organisers got around on the ships and had them stopped.

We have used the telephone to get in touch with ships' reps directly. But we prefer direct contact so that you can put things over face to face. At the monthly port committee meetings the reps from each department can come and hammer out any grievances from the lads they represent.

There are weekly meetings on all the ships. We have a rule that there has to be more than half the men present. It's normally over two-thirds. We've never actually had to scrap a meeting. We have report-backs from the port committee to discuss shipboard business such as disciplinaries and national issues like the wage claim. Top of the agenda since March has been the miners' strike.

The meetings are often stormy. No one's afraid to have his say. We've always insisted that it's our forum. Every mandate of the port committee comes from the shipboard

meetings. Management know full well that we are not bluffing. If we say we won't recommend something they know it won't get carried.

When Dave Sanders, our secretary, was arrested in Brimlington we really moved like lightning. He was nicked at about 2.30. By half past three one of our delegation phoned down, and the four o'clock boat was stopped. The lads were protesting at the arrest and demanding his release. We stopped two boats but let one take 800 passengers with no freight. We wanted to show that we weren't hitting at ordinary Joes like ourselves and we made sure we got full pay. Dave was held for 23 hours and he was the first person to have no bail conditions in that area since the strike began.

The support for the miners has been fantastic. We arranged a round trip for some Kent miners and held an immediate bucket collection that raised £200. Six weeks later we adopted the North Derbyshire area. We



have been paying our money to the Women's Action Group based in Chesterfield. There are weekly collections on the boats with a minimum of £1. Some lads put in a tenner.

So far we've raised something like £14,000. Again, we've tried to involve as many people as possible. We had 20 down at Wivenhoe to picket the scab foreign coal with miners at the start of the strike. Eight were down at Brimlington when Dave was arrested. By now about 30 blokes must have been to the pit areas.

The men have been coming up with fund raising ideas. A lot of them were on the deep-sea liners at one time and have used their experiences there to provide fund raising ideas. For example we have a quiz where each member of a team has to pay 50 pence if they get a question wrong. We hold blind auctions. You don't know whether you're bidding for an old sock or a bottle of perfume. Because of the regular activity the men are getting more and more into the strike.

We have tried to spread our organisation to other ports. Some seamen from

Southampton came here in the mid-seventies. We helped them set up their own committee. There is also a National Joint Ports Committee made up of chairmen from various port committees which we are currently trying to revive. It has been very useful to us in Felixstowe in the last couple of years.

At Easter 1983 we had a two-week strike because our wages were falling below the National Maritime Board claim. We had to take 50 lads down to Maritime House to get the strike made official. We won in the end because the chairmen from the other port committees realised that they had to back us so that we could all keep up a united front.

The main weakness

The 'bare bums' dispute in May last year saw the Joint Port Committee meeting again. Dover in particular realised that we had to be supported. The strike was over the sacking of three blokes who had been horsing around in their own mess room. Some schoolgirls heard the commotion and looked in. The press tried to make them sound like perverts. But the crews were incensed because they saw it as an attack on what we do in our own spare time. We struck for three weeks and got the three reinstated.

A couple of days before going back we decided to take the offensive. We got a medical severance agreement out of the company, so that now if you are unfit for work you at least get more money out of it.

During that dispute we refused to come off the ships. We had meetings every day to run the strike and to organise cooking and cleaning. We had Portakabins in the port area which were manned from eight in the morning to nine at night with people doing typing and photocopying. We sent lads to Dover and Heysham to hand out leaflets on board and tell other seamen about the dispute. Ipswich SWP produced a collection sheet and helped us to get financial support locally.

The main weakness for us is the lack of any real contact with the dockers in the port. In the first dock strike we had decided not to touch cargo transferred from other ports. The Felixstowe dockers were out anyway so we didn't have to act on it. In the second strike we were instructed not to handle anything crossing the picket lines. Our dockers weren't on strike and no picket lines were set up so we could do nothing.

This year legislation will come in which will make medicals compulsory every two years for all those over 40 and every five years for the rest. There is no need for such strict testing. We are never more than two and half hours from shore. It's absurd that a man of 50 should be expected to be as fit as a young lad. We are arguing at shipboard meetings at the moment for a boycott of all medicals. When the legislation comes in we will have another look at the problem.

Our attitude to flags of convenience is that we don't care what flag we sail under as long as our wages and conditions are maintained. This puts the emphasis where it should be. Our management haven't tried any of the tricks that have been played at other ports, because they know our members are with us. ■

Satirist of a sick society

JONATHAN SWIFT is best remembered for *Gulliver's Travels*, published in 1726. However, *Gulliver's Travels* is just one example—perhaps the most celebrated—of the long satirical war Swift waged against the crimes and follies perpetrated by his rich and powerful contemporaries.

The power of his pen made him many enemies and few friends. His one triumph, which forced the withdrawal of debased coinage in Ireland, did not endear him to the authorities, though it won him popular fame.

But Swift was no rebel. He was a Tory who held firmly to the traditions of the Church of England and of Ireland (he was Dean of St Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin).

How do you explain this contradiction between Swift the satirist and Swift the Tory? We have to remember what kind of society he lived in. It was one in which 'a commercially-minded aristocracy and an aristocratic mercantile class' was coming to dominate under the leadership of Whig politicians. Government was based on the lucrative practice of selling titles, contracts, pensions, patents and positions, all of which was backed up by the legal system.

To be a Tory was certainly to be a reactionary (in the strict sense of the word). But it was also—as in Swift's case—a way of looking at the new society with an unjaundiced eye.

Take this splendid satirical example from *Gulliver's Travels*. In Book II, Gulliver finds himself in Brobdingnag, the land of giants. Asked by the King to describe Britain, Gulliver 'celebrates the praises of my own dear country in a style equal to its merits and felicity', explaining parliament, the legal system, the treasury, the national debt, the pastimes of the nobility and the history of his country in a manner which would have pleased any Whig.

Literally towering above all narrow national prejudice, the King provides a devastating summary:

'My little friend; you have clearly proved that ignorance, idleness, and vice are the proper ingredients for qualifying a legislator. That laws are best explained, interpreted, and applied by those whose interest and abilities lie in perverting, confounding and eluding them...

'It doth not appear from all you have said...that priests are advanced for their piety or learning, soldiers for their conduct or valour, judges for their integrity, senators for the love of their country, or counsellors for their wisdom...

'I cannot but conclude the bulk of your natives to be the most pernicious race of little odious vermin that Nature ever suffered to crawl upon the surface of the earth.'

And in Book IV, in which horses (Houyhnhnms) are rational and humans (Yahoos) no more than animals, Swift continues the attack:

'Judges are persons appointed to decide all controversies of property, as well as for the trial of criminals, and picked out from the most dexterous lawyers who are grown old or lazy, and having been biased all their lives against truth and equity, lie under such a fatal necessity of favouring fraud, perjury, and oppression, that I have known several of them refuse a large bribe from the side where justice lay, rather than injure the Faculty [ie profession—GJ] by doing anything unbecoming their nature or their office.'

But it was Ireland's condition that inspired Swift's most savage piece of satire, *A Modest Proposal for Preventing the Children of poor People in Ireland from being a Burden*

'Superb though Swift's satire is, what is to replace the things he attacks?'

to their Parents or Country; and for making them beneficial to the Public, written in 1729.

The modest proposal is nothing less than a scheme for fattening up a quarter of all Irish children under the age of two and then bringing them to market to be sold for food. In the words of the satirical advertisement (probably drafted by Swift himself) 'they will be dainty bite for landlords, who, as they have already devoured most of the parents, seem to have best right to eat up the children.'

A Modest Proposal was Swift's most sustained satire on the new 'science' of

economic improvement and its utter divorce from human need.

But the piece ends on an even more horrifying note:

'I desire those politicians who dislike my overture...that they will first ask the parents of these mortals, whether they would not, at this day, think it a great happiness to have been sold for food at a year old, in the manner I prescribe; and thereby have avoided such a perpetual scene of misfortunes, as they have since gone through, by the oppression of landlords, the impossibility of paying rent, without money or trade, the want of common sustenance, with neither house nor clothes to cover them from the inclemencies of the weather, and the most inevitable prospect of entailing the like or greater miseries, upon their breed for ever.'

In other words, even this revoltingly rational exploitation of human flesh is preferable to the actual conditions of the Irish peasantry.

Superb though Swift's satire is, what is to replace the things he attacks? The existence of a class (the working class created by industrial capitalism) that could deliver humanity from oppression and exploitation necessarily lay in the future.

It is this that makes him so pessimistic and despairing about changing human conduct. True rational behaviour—one conducive to co-operation, social solidarity, fellow feeling and selfless conduct—he cannot locate anywhere within human society. In the end he can only locate it *outside* among, for example, the Houyhnhnms of the last book of *Gulliver's Travels*. Hence the sweeping disgust, particularly disgust at the human *body*, in Swift's satire.

None of this should deter us from reading Swift. He remains one of the greatest writers to have exposed the hypocrisy of capitalist rule. As for the despair, we can be grateful that since his time a truly progressive class has arisen which can once and for all end the barbarity that Swift could only denounce. ■

Gareth Jenkins

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TODAY, few people on the left regard Russia as a workers' paradise. Even fewer would look with much favour on the East Europe regimes. Those who regarded Mao's China as socialist have been thrown into turmoil with the advent of 'coca cola communism' there.

But the belief in the west that these countries are 'socialist' still hangs round the necks of the left. In any arguments with opponents of socialism, the horrors of Stalin's Russia are thrown at us. To understand the nature of these regimes is still a vital task for socialists.

For nearly 70 years the Russian Revolution has been the key point of reference for those socialists wanting to carry out fundamental change in society. For the vast bulk of the time those ideas have been associated with Stalin and those who rule over the system he created.

In the years following the Second World War 'official' communism seemed at the height of its power. The 'socialist camp' included not only Russia and Eastern Europe but China and a number of other Asian states.

But in the course of the 1950s the monolith began to crack.

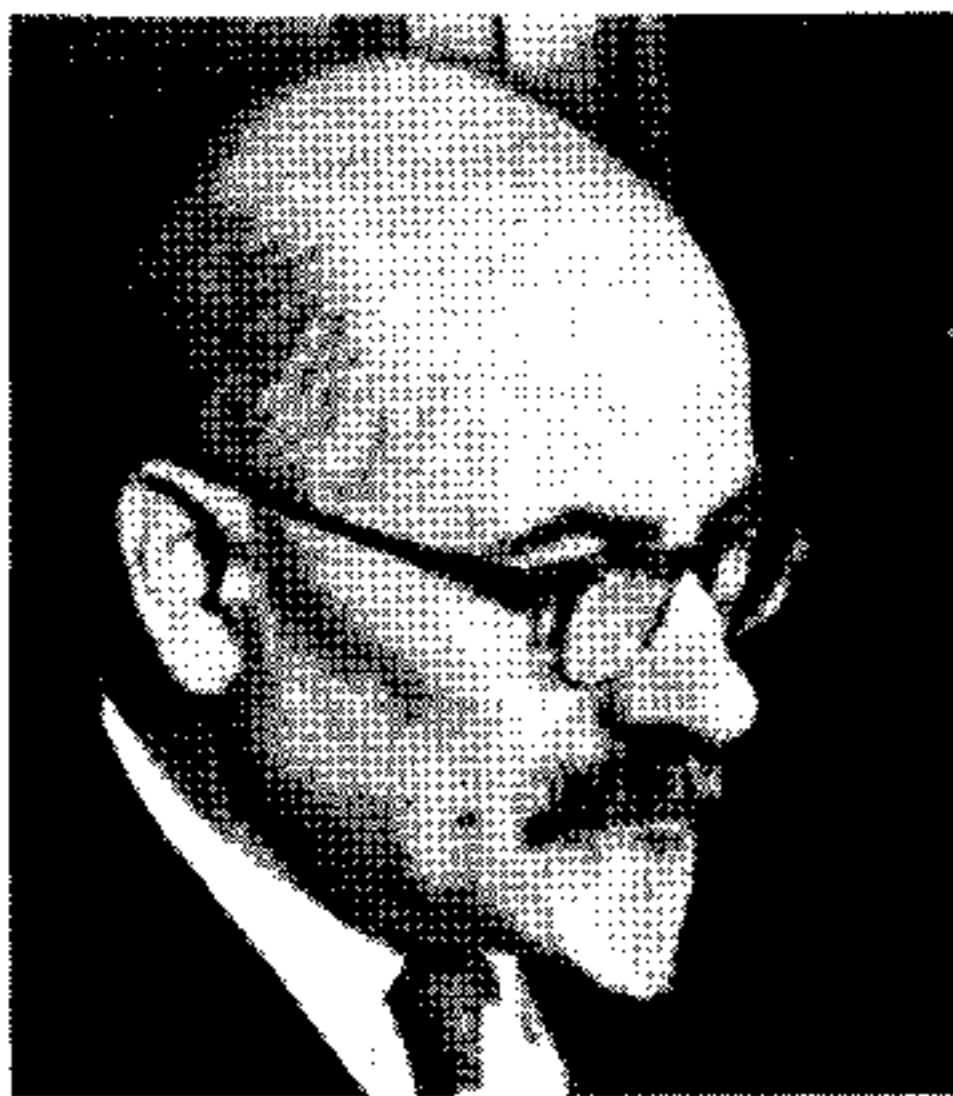
In 1948 Tito's Yugoslavia broke ranks after refusing to implement Stalin's instructions on how to administer the country. 1953 saw not only Stalin's death but a workers uprising in East Berlin.

The new Russian leader Khrushchev scrambled to power over those more closely associated with the late dictator. To consolidate his power he openly attacked Stalin's crimes at the 1956 congress of the Communist Party. Later that year the Hungarian Revolution proved nothing fundamental had changed. Faced with the prospect of real workers' power Khrushchev sent in the tanks.

As hundreds of thousands left the western Communist Parties in the aftermath of the defeated Hungarian revolution, Stalinism seemed to have suffered a deadly blow. But in the early 1960s the ideas of Stalinism went through something of a revival.

Mao's China launched a blistering attack on Russia, countering their 'correct' communist road to the ideas of detente associated with the Kremlin. To many China offered a 'purer' form of socialism.

The main challenge to Western capitalism seemed to come from the 'communist' regimes in the East. Mao's cultural revolution and in particular the opposition of the Vietnamese to the USA attracted widespread support. Large Maoist organisations grew in Europe and North America. Much of what



Isaac Deutscher

came to be known as the New Left—the students and intellectuals radicalised by opposition to the bomb and the Vietnam war—were drawn to these ideas.

Even among those claiming to follow the ideas of Stalin's chief opponent Leon Trotsky there was a belief that Vietnam and China, or even those like Khrushchev who called for reforms in Russia, represented a real break with Stalinism.

Reform in Russia

On the New Left a key figure was Isaac Deutscher. He was Trotsky's biographer who had been involved in the Trotskyist movement of the 1930s, though even then developed some differences with Trotsky's analysis.

Central to Deutscher's ideas was the belief that Russia and similar societies could reform themselves to create genuine socialism. In doing so he drew on Trotsky's writings, especially the idea that at the core of their economies the Stalinist states had a key socialist element—state control of the means of production.

Marxism, Wars and Revolutions shows how Deutscher applied these ideas during the 1950s until his death in 1967.

In it he comes out against the workers who rose in East Berlin in 1953. Deutscher explains that the uprising was counter-revolutionary, having a 'negative effect' on the 'adherents of gradual democratisation' in post-Stalin Russia.

Deutscher hoped Khrushchev's economic reforms would herald a fundamental change within Russia—a change to socialism, brought about not by the workers, but by a section of the ruling bureaucracy. This idea took a knock after Hungary, but until his death Deutscher believed the process would reassert itself because of the inner 'socialist' character of the economy.

In the early 1960s his attention focussed on China and Vietnam. Mao, he claimed, contained a 'streak of radicalism' and

'positive Leninism'.

In 1965 writing about both China and Russia (now under Brezhnev's rule) Deutscher wrote:

'The social systems of these countries are more intelligent and more progressive than their leaders. The social systems will force the leaders into internationalism ... And when this happens the development of these countries will not only catch up with classical Marxism but it will probably surpass it.'

This is simply a repetition of key Stalinist ideas. The world is seen as split into two camps. One must take sides between Washington or Moscow (plus Peking despite 'temporary' differences). Any notion of class struggle is missing.

Secondly 'socialism' is seen as triumphing when existing 'socialist' states prove their superiority over the west.

The emphasis is all on the leaders of these states. And indeed Deutscher believed change would come from within the ruling Communist Parties. So why then bother developing workers' struggles? Even more why bother building a revolutionary party?

From reading *The Stalinist Legacy* it becomes clear just how much those who claim to uphold Trotsky's ideas today share with Deutscher.

The tragedy is that their ideas—often the only alternatives to the different varieties of Stalinism and Maoism—seemed to mirror many of those theories. That meant they were unable to fully seize on the crisis of Stalinist ideas.

At the root of the problem was a central weakness of Trotsky's own position on Russia. In 1938 he described Stalin's regime in these words:

'The Soviet Union emerged from the October Revolution as a workers' state. State ownership of the means of production, a necessary prerequisite to socialist development, opened up the possibility of rapid growth of the productive forces. But the apparatus of the workers' state underwent a complete degeneration at the same time: it was transformed from a weapon of the working class into a weapon of bureaucratic violence against the working class ...'

Trotsky held that Russia was a workers' state—though 'degenerated'. Not because the workers held power but simply because the state owned the means of production. Indeed he could and did compare Stalin's Russia with Hitler's Germany and details the loss of Russian workers' rights to organise or show the slightest means of opposition.

So Russia was a workers' state without workers' power. Yet in his fight with Stalin it was Trotsky who defended the ideas of workers' self-emancipation—of Soviet power, of advance through international revolution, of the rebuilding of a revolutionary workers' party and a revolution to overthrow the bureaucratic dictatorship.

The two sets of ideas were in contradiction. Trotsky himself was at pains to stress Russia was 'exceptional' and Stalinist rule merely temporary. He expected it wouldn't survive World War Two. It would be destroyed either by the western powers or a new wave of world revolution.

What he didn't envisage was Stalinism emerging strengthened after 1945. So how did those who claimed to uphold his political legacy cope with this change? *The Stalinist Legacy* contains much evidence to suggest they didn't, and still can't, meet the problem.

What becomes evident is how much the ideas of the editor, Tariq Ali, and key contributors like the Belgian economist Ernest Mandel, mirror those of Deutscher.

At root all agree that a 'socialist element' continues to exist in the heart of the Stalinist societies, overcoming all other features.

Considerable stress is laid on the development of 'reform' currents within the bureaucracies.

In the 1960s Mandel and his followers backed Mao against Khrushchev hoping the cultural revolution heralded a more sweeping change. The Vietnamese Communist Party was for him, a revolutionary party in the tradition of Lenin and Trotsky.

State capitalism

Why is all this worth examination? Because at stake is the fundamental basis of socialism. In the *Communist Manifesto*, socialism is described as 'the self-conscious independent movement of the immense majority, in the interests of the immense majority'. Socialism is the act of the working class or nothing at all.

On that count how can Russia, China or similar societies be socialist? There is an alternative view which is skimmed over in *The Stalinist Legacy*. It is that these societies are in fundamentals no different from western capitalism. What exists in the West is state monopoly capitalism where in Russia and China what exists is bureaucratic state capitalism.

Such ideas have been put forward by Tony Cliff, Mike Kidron and Chris Harman. They stand full square behind the ideas of workers' self-emancipation. But *The Stalinist Legacy* glances over these views by lumping them in together with opponents of socialist revolution like Karl Kautsky and Max Schachtman.

State capitalism is a scientific term in the



Ernest Mandel

Marxist tradition. Unlike those who claim Russia is socialist or a workers' state it doesn't start from the existence of some external feature—state planning or the nationalisation of the means of production.

Instead it stresses the crucial inner dynamic which state capitalist societies share with other capitalist economies. That dynamic is the drive to accumulate.

Lenin and the Bolshevik economist, Bukharin, pointed out that capitalist competition, initially between private companies, became more and more competition between monopolies. These monopolies were interconnected with their

Hungary 1956: Destroying the Stalinist legacy by revolution. Workers demolish a statue of Stalin in Budapest



individual nation states. The 'highest form of competition' would be between state capitalist economies. This is increasingly the case today.

Every change in the productive process in the west forces changes in the east, thus the Russian's drive to introduce new technology.

But another element of competition dominates the economy—the need to maintain arms expenditure in order to preserve Russia's empire from encroachment from the west.

Every Cruise missile at Greenham has to be matched by an SS 20 in Czechoslovakia. Every new US battle tank must be matched. And this is in an economy which still lags behind the west.

Stalin said in 1929:

'The environment in which we are placed ... at home and abroad ... compels us to adopt a rapid rate of growth of our industry ... We are 50 years behind the advanced countries. We must make good this lag in ten years. Either we do it or they crush us.'

Those words heralded a real counter-revolution in Russia. Behind the slogan 'socialism in one country' lay the construction of state capitalism. The peasantry was forcibly dispossessed, workers' rights removed, their independent organisations removed while the old Bolsheviks were eliminated. Behind the police state lay a method of accumulation even more brutal as those of Britain's industrial revolution.

Reformist bureaucrats

Russia's industrial revolution created a modern industrial economy. Within the confines of Russia in the 1930s it was possible to build state capitalism behind protective borders. Today the rulers of China, the Khmer Rouge in Kampuchea and the New Jewel Movement in Grenada find that the level of competition has increased enormously as a more complex world market expands further. Their attempts end in tragedy.

This central dynamic explains why the enormous bureaucracy of planners, politicians and generals can operate within a common class interest which mirrors that of western capitalists. Despite the differences they will not break away in the interests of the workers they rule.

Those like Mandel who deny this can't see that the fundamental contradiction in these societies still remains between workers and their rulers. That is why the views represented in *The Stalinist Legacy* stress—and indeed include—those of reformist bureaucrats in Eastern Europe.

And there aren't 'two camps' in the world today between which socialists must choose. Both empires mirror each other. *The Stalinist Legacy* claims to represent the opposition viewpoint to Stalinism. In fact, like Deutscher, it represents at best a partial break. The tragedy is that a revolutionary like Trotsky who fought all his adult life for workers' power, should be associated with such views. He deserves much better.

Chris Bambery

Women at war

Only the Rivers Run Free. Northern Ireland: the Women's War.

Eileen Fairweather, Roisin McDonough and Melanie McFadyean

Pluto Press, £5.95

'WITH things so bad we had to be active, and with that we've found a whole new identity for ourselves. No longer was the woman just a piece of property; your man's missus, your children's mother. As we've come more and more to the forefront we've discovered our own strength and power.'

No. It's not a quote from a miner's wife. Those words were spoken by a member of the Republican Relatives Action Committee and appear in *Only the Rivers Run Free. Northern Ireland: the Women's War*.

The book consists of interviews with Northern Irish women—mainly Catholic. Women whose lives cannot but have been affected by the war there. One gets the impression that the authors (three feminists) were, at times, disappointed with the women they spoke to. Because few, if any, of the women recognised 'the sex war also going on'. In fact most of them identify as much with their menfolk as with other women.

Fight in community

The experience of the women involved in the struggle against British imperialism in Northern Ireland, like the experience of the women involved in the miners' strike, bears out everything we marxists say about the road to women's liberation.

Both these groups of women have become conscious of, and begun to fight against, their oppression as women. But this didn't happen through feminist consciousness raising sessions of women-only meetings.

They began to fight for the interests of their whole community, women and men. In the course of that fight it became obvious that they didn't *have* to be barefoot and pregnant in the kitchen. And the men saw that it was in *their* interests to have the women standing shoulder-to-shoulder with them in the fight even if it did mean they'd have to wash their own dirty socks!

Only the Rivers Run Free is a very readable book—it's a bit like listening to people talking. Most of us know the statistics—that 50% of Northern Irish houses are officially classified as 'unfit for human habitation', that rates of infant and maternal mortality, physical and mental handicap and poverty-related illness are among the highest in Europe. But often we don't realise what that can mean day-to-

day for those living in the working class Catholic ghettos of the North. There are other cities in Ireland, in Britain, in Europe where working class people suffer intolerable levels of poverty. But the Catholic areas of Belfast and Derry are the only places where army patrols regularly, and at will, kick down people's doors and wreck their homes and drag them from their beds to insult and try to humiliate them.

The authors of *Only the Rivers Run Free* tell us in the introduction that they 'intrude to provide fact and analysis'. Facts are provided. But the analysis seems to be based on that particularly Catholic, Republican view that if people suffer enough, show enough endur-

ance, they will win the day.

In this book the suffering, and the courage and determination, of the republican women and men of Northern Ireland fighting to smash British imperialism shines through. For fifteen years now they've been exhibiting fierce bravery against massive odds.

Unfortunately, courage, determination and bravery are not enough to defeat the British military machine and its Loyalist backing. The only force that has the power to beat the Brits, and to win Protestant workers from their defence of imperialism, is the working class.

Only a strong working class movement in the South, poised to smash the state and replace it with

workers' power, can hope to convince Protestant workers that it is in their interests to break with Loyalism.

After all, the extra crumbs they get from the Orange state are nothing to the bakery that a united working class movement could win.

There is no hint of class politics in this book. Class is just one more division in society rather than *the* division. Sex, nationality and religion, the authors consider to be of equal importance.

This is more than a quibble. The lack of a class perspective leaves the reader hopeless. It gives the impression that the misery of life for the Nationalist community in the North is a cross that must be borne.

This will make a good present for friends interested in Ireland, but give them a copy of Trotsky on *Permanent Revolution* as well. ■

Goretti Horgan

Kilts and coronations

The Invention of Tradition

Ed: Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger

CUP £7.95

THIS IS one of the more interesting history texts I have read by bourgeois historians. Although some sections get bogged down in useless information, for the most part it contains interesting information coupled with a reasonable level of analysis.

It is advisable to by-pass the introduction which only confuses the casual reader. Distinguishing custom from tradition is not exactly thrilling reading.

The first chapter is written by Hugh Trevor Roper who shows how 'Highland tradition' was largely invented. There is a certain irony involved when Roper, the historian who was fooled by the Hitler forgeries, describes how experts on Scotland were taken in by an amazing con. An 'epic' written in the 18th century was supposed to show the noble and magnificent background of the Scottish Highlanders. In fact the man who was hailed as the 'Celtic Homer' had stolen Irish ballads when visiting Ireland, put them together as an 'epic' and transferred the whole scenario from Ireland to Scotland.

We also discover the origin of the kilt, which Prince Charles and other male Royals proudly wear whilst at Balmoral. Its ancestor was a scrap of cloth worn like a skirt by the peasants and bandits because they could not afford trousers.

The chapter on Scotland is easily the most entertaining section in the book. There is however, a chapter on the British monarchy which contains important and interesting information for socialists.

David Cannodine does not base



his writing on a class analysis of society. He does however, give a good background whilst trying to explain the changing role of the British monarchy in the last 150 years. He uses the occasion of Royal ceremonies to illustrate how the monarchy has been used in different ways to fit the changing needs of British capitalism.

During the nineteenth century Royal ceremonies were regarded as completely unimportant and were almost festivals of incompetence. Cannodine describes Queen Victoria's coronation in 1838 as an example. It was completely unrehearsed; the clergy lost their place in the order of service, the choir was tiny and the Archbishop of Canterbury tried to put the ring on a finger that was too big. On top of this, two of the train-bearers talked throughout the whole service. Such a spectacle would be inconceivable were Prince Charles to be crowned tomorrow.

This chapter contains numerous

examples showing what a shambles most Royal ceremonies were in the nineteenth century.

Underlying this was the rapid expansion of British capitalism making Britain *the* most powerful country in the world. British imperialism was at its most powerful. The British ruling class were supremely confident in their unchallenged power both internationally and over the young British working class.

The monarch was also still an important part of ruling class politics. William IV, in a reign of only seven years, dismissed three ministries and dissolved parliament twice for political purposes. This would also be an inconceivable occurrence today.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century there was a dramatic change in Royal ceremonies. They became splendid, public and popular. Cannodine shows clearly how the monarchy was used to try

and unite society and avoid class struggle. By this time Britain had become a predominately urban, industrial mass society with class loyalties and conflicts. There was an enormous growth of trade unionism and growing industrial unrest in the years immediately before the war. The Archbishop of Canterbury, however, was able to comment after Queen Victoria's golden jubilee 'days afterwards, everyone feels that the socialist movement has had a check'.

Rival powers

As is the case today, the media played an important role in promoting the monarch as head of the 'nation'.

Unfortunately Cannodine assigns a secondary role to the fact that British capitalism was being challenged by new rival world powers. Fierce imperialist competition was driving Europe towards war. The idea of a monarchy became very important as a factor in creating a nationalist population. Ceremonies were a crucial part of this process. It was in 1904 that the state opening of parliament was revived as a full dress ceremonial occasion.

Following the Russian Revolution in 1917 Europe entered a revolutionary period. The British general strike of 1926 has often been referred to as 'Britain's aborted revolution'. In this situation the British ruling class used all the ideological weapons at its disposal. During this period of class conflict and into the depression the monarch was used to maintain that Britain was still the proud owner of a flourishing empire.

Cannodine does not stress sufficiently the way the monarchy is used as a powerful ideological weapon by the ruling class. This is partly because, as he states, he will not analyse its development since the coronation of Elizabeth II in 1953.

Today it is almost impossible to find a copy of the *Sun* or the *Mirror* which does not have coverage of the Royal Family. The propaganda stresses such things as the stability of family life and the joys of motherhood. The way Prince Andrew was portrayed as a royal hero during the Falklands war was also quite sickening.

The book as a whole also suffers from the drawback that is revealed in Cannodine's chapter. That is the authors' inability to analyse recent history. For revolutionary socialists history is important only when related to the tasks facing us today. It also helps us analyse the society we have to work in today. We have to take history seriously but avoid falling into the trap of historians for whom it is little more than intellectual exercise. ■

Lesley Hoggart

The sickness of the system

What is to be done about illness and Health?

Jeannette Mitchell
Penguin Books £2.95

The NHS—A Picture of Health?

Steve Hille
Lawrence & Wishart £3.95

TOWARDS the end of a book written with obvious passion. Jeannette Mitchell quotes without comment the nineteenth-century words of an all too likely sounding Dr Colfin: 'I believe the working classes are the only classes who deserve any good done to them.'

Marx wrote of the utopian socialists, 'In the formation of their plans they are conscious of caring chiefly for the interests of the working class as being the most suffering class.'

In doing so of course they miss the point that it is not as victims but as potential fighters that working people have the collective power to change the world.

Mitchell presents that suffering exceedingly well. She firmly proves that inequalities in health are class based, and rigorously demolishes one myth after another about what ails us and why, and how we can expect to be cured for when something does. Illness does not strike at random, and the modern scourges—cancer, heart disease, diabetes—are no more those of the rich than were the infectious diseases. TB, diphtheria or smallpox.

All today's medicine can do, that yesterday's could not, is tell us more accurately what is killing us. Diagnosis is high technology and high technology is big business.

But our chances, say, of surviving most cancers have improved little, while the likelihood of developing the disease continues to rise. We have no greater chance of surviving a heart attack in hospital than on the street. And for our everyday troubles—rheumatism, arthritis, chronic bronchitis, ulcers, colitis—there exist no cures.

Priorities

Medical intervention can relieve pain and discomfort, stitch us up following accidents and perform routine operations, especially if we are young and healthy anyway. Most hospital beds however, are taken by the elderly, by the incurable, by those requiring care since they cannot be cured.

Yet the NHS is organised and resources allocated on the assumption that diagnosis and clinical intervention are the primary activities to which all others must be subordinated. And the hospitals within which this 'battle' takes place are run on factory lines, where the key-words are rationalisation,



productivity and 'throughput'. Here, a death is as good as a discharge.

Mitchell patiently explains how and why this should be so. The 'feckless' of earlier years may now be the 'deprived'. But the difference in health between them (us) and the affluent is attributed by government policy, and despite the class pattern of ill health made transparent by the Black Report of 1980, to differences in 'behaviour'.

To combat our ignorance of what is good for us we are offered 'Health Education'. A pamphlet for the elderly at risk from hypothermia cheerily advises, 'Ask visitors if it seems cold to them in your house and take their advice.' So now you know and it's your own fault if you freeze to death.

Having brought us so far however, the author hedges desperately, offering not 'a revolutionary prescription' but... 'a framework for discussing what building on our existing strengths might mean...an agenda, a list of questions.' And a list of questions is what we get, along with a good deal of nonsense about individual consciousness raising, the 'struggle from the bed', the need for health-workers to challenge and 'subvert' prevailing attitudes.

The one quote she offers from a hospital steward talking of the role of unions in organising and struggling, ends 'God bless our great trade union movement'.

Which is a pity, for the book has many strengths especially when allowing workers to describe their lives and experiences of illness: 'Daily, daily, daily you lose the worth of yourself,' says one. 'The quality of our lives is that we are in some pain or other,' Mitchell concludes. 'Can the pain be turned outwards?' which is kind of where we begin.

Steve Hille is a G.P. and, he would argue, a 'marxist'. His book sets out to explain the history of the health service, ending in yet another question, 'How can professionalism be changed?', which is what we might expect—of a doctor.

He examines the economic and social forces leading to early developments in medicine and health care, their influence on the foundation of the NHS, and on the unions and professional organisations within it. His chronological account leads to a confusing amount of chopping and changing in subject matter.

The book does throw up one or two gems. Take this from the Royal College of Surgeons in 1958:

'There has always been a nucleus in medical schools of students from cultured homes...Medicine would lose immeasurably if the proportion of such students were to be reduced in favour of the precocious children who qualify for subsidies from Local Authorities and the state purely

on examination results.'

Or the 1947 report into nurse training which described, '...oppressive discipline, poor food and low pay': my, how times have changed.

Unlike Mitchell, Iliffe describes in detail struggles both for higher pay and against cuts and closures. He is right in pointing out the limitations of many of the campaigns of the '70s but wrongly concludes failures, where they occurred, were due to a concentration on saving jobs.

Similarly, having described the healthworkers' struggle of 1982 up to the magnificent strike and demonstration of 22 September that year he deduces that victory '...required a political intervention, not an industrial one' 'A Labour (Party) campaign for the NHS...would have been a much more serious threat.'

This is rubbish. Of course Labour should show themselves to be unequivocally fighting for the NHS: the fact that they could not *and* be believed had much to do with their subsequent election defeat.

Critique

To be fair, Iliffe's book belongs to 1983, to the era of 'new realism' way back before the miners' strike. Depending on the strike's outcome sections of the left may attach new relevance to the kind of conclusions he draws. These are: the need for the election of a 'reforming government' with an expansionary economic policy; 'retraining', the 'development of alternative products and industries...changing methods of work...regulatory mechanisms...participatory democracy...' and so on.

And upon what does all this depend? On the development of 'collectivist ideas...within professional groups and professional attitudes within Trade Unions...'; on 'a more realistic approach to Thatcherism.'

This is not a book I would dream of prescribing. The side effects are too grim. Perceiving socialism as 'central economic and social planning' Iliffe suggests that '...only by denying that the USSR is socialist can we maintain the myth that socialism will solve our current problems.'

In contrast, Jeannette Mitchell's book contains the authentic voice of working class experience, a critique of the Health Service firmly anchored amid the lives of those who use it, their houses and workplaces, their poverty and individual powerlessness.

Read it for an introduction to the inequalities of health and for a picture of how the NHS operates, but be sure to follow it with Jonathan Neale's *Memoirs of a Callous Picket*. ■

Ian Taylor

Challenging the fiction

More than the Parts—Biology and Politics

Ed Lynda Birke and Jonathan Silvertown

Pluto Press £7.95

MODERN science in many ways has taken the place of religion in our society. It is seen as the completely impartial, ultimate truth, and all its works are good. The contributors to this excellent book are all workers in biological science, and they give a very different picture. The articles are interesting and easy to read (unlike some similar works)—pity about the price.

The title of the book comes from their criticism of the reductionist nature of much of modern biology. Reductionism means looking at organisms, especially humans, as if they are machines. Explanations of the way the machine works—or of any malfunction in the machine—can be found in the performance of the various cog-wheels and gears. Likewise human behaviour can be understood simply by looking at genes and hormone levels.

The book starts by looking at the way scientists attempt to modify human behaviour and health with brain surgery, drugs and hormones following these assumptions. This kind of biology can produce really horrific ideas. Inner city riots are seen not as a result of the way society is organised, but as a malfunction in individual brains. The solution is therefore brain surgery for ghetto leaders.

The book stresses the way reductionists ignore the interaction of all organisms with their environment, which for humans usually means society. A broader view of biology suggests it may be better to alter the environment rather than the person.

Tied in with the reductionist view of biology is the influence of society on scientific ideas. Time and again the authors show how reductionist ideas reflect the needs and assumptions of capitalist society. Far from being totally objective, biologists frequently expect to find our unequal, violent and competitive society reflected in nature, and their work is clearly biased. Having found what they set out to find, the circle is completed as this is used in turn to justify our society.

It is quite incredible the way scientists who would hesitate to make assumptions about lions on the basis of what they discovered about tigers will equate the behaviour of chickens with humans. The idea that we are directed by our animal past to be aggressive, territorial and competitive is an old one.

More sophisticated socio-biological ideas today are supposed

to prove that our genes explain all (capitalist) human behaviour from the oppression of women to teenage-parent conflict.

The way in which biological ideas are used is further developed in two articles. One looks at the concept of over-population to explain Third World problems—a concept resting ultimately on the population dynamics of flour beetles. While not denying the dangers of over-population, the authors show how the evidence points to social causes of poverty such as imperialism rather than inevitable biological processes.

Another article on technology in agriculture challenges the assumption that technology is also neutral. For example, it shows how a particular technology was introduced into tomato growing with the intention of weakening the organ-

isation of the agricultural workers—and that this technology is not necessarily the most efficient.

It is particularly interesting to read how these scientists have put their knowledge at the disposal of the trade union concerned, and of the Nicaraguan government to help foster independence from the US.

The authors of this book are saying that it is impossible to form and apply biological ideas in isolation from the society you live in. Capitalist values and assumptions will tend to influence a scientist's research, and capitalist needs will determine its application. We have to recognise that in order to develop a science serving the interests of the majority rather than an elite. As the authors recognise, that will involve changing society as a whole. ■

Margaret Willis

Stories of the 30s

May Day

John Summerfield

Lawrence and Wishart £3.95

Last Cage Down

Harold Heslop

Lawrence and Wishart £4.50

THE term 'socialist realism' conjures up images of long-winded homages to Stalin, crass and sentimental workerism, and the worst kind of hack loyalty to the 'party line'.

Neither of the books reviewed here are entirely free of those faults. Both were written in the mid-1930s by dedicated members of the Communist Party. They bear all the scars of the CP's disastrous 'Third Period' ultra-leftism.

Nevertheless, it would be an equal sectarian folly not to welcome the reprinting of these two socialist classics after nearly 50 years of undeserved obscurity. The issues that they seek to confront are of tremendous relevance to our own struggles today.

Last Cage Down is the story of a mining community's fight against 'rationalisation' in their colliery. For Tate, the mine owners' agent, 'rationalisation' means introducing machinery into the pit and making more profit. For the miners it means working under a blue shale roof which is certain to collapse, causing death and injury.

Heslop portrays the spectrum of miners' responses to their predicament, ranging from Joe Frost, the communist who knows they must build their own rank and file organisation, through Jim Cameron, the Lodge Secretary who sees the class conflict purely as a fight between himself and Tate, to John

Cameron, who believes that management 'knows what it is doing'.

The bankruptcy of the trade union bureaucracy is continually emphasised. Railton, the area official, can't see what all the fuss is about and does everything in his power to dampen down the conflict. Joe Frost, unfortunately, thinks it is enough to just denounce the bureaucracy and class collaboration in general.

In the novel, the miners didn't listen to him with much enthusiasm. In the real world, the Miners' Federation membership fell from 806,000 in 1926 to 588,000 in 1939.

The CP's sectarian aloofness from workers with reformist ideas could not prevent the creation of phoney company unions, the victimisation of the best militants and a period of terrible pit disasters like the one in the book.

Socialists should forgive Heslop his tortuous didactic pronouncements and occasional lapses into Intourist travelogue. We should take this novel of class struggle in the Durham coalfield, with its wonderful passages of descriptive writing, into our hearts.

Today, with the same coalfield in revolt against a new generation of Tates, we cannot afford to neglect this book. Its message is the same as ours: 'Peace can never come to the collieries of England until the capitalist class is crushed into the earth.'

May Day is described by its author, John Summerfield, as 'early 30s communist romanticism'. The book does indeed reflect all the unthinking super-optimism of the

Third Period. The workers of London, particularly the workers of one East End factory, are shown to be radicalised by the sheer intolerable awfulness of their conditions.

Everyone is sucked into the surge of enthusiasm generated by the CP's calls for an unofficial May Day demonstration.

Summerfield's description of the squalor and misery of working class life in London is enormously vivid. Alienation is experienced as a thousand degradations, as violence, hunger, homelessness, exhaustion and domestic drudgery. In contrast, the boss class in the novel also experience alienation, but only as trivial and inconsequential irritations.

The constant juxtaposition of the two experiences, virtually page by page, highlights the ludicrous and artificial character of one class's 'sufferings' compared to the desperate and genuine experiences of the other.

All the same, Summerfield's May Day never arrived. The nearest thing to it was the Busmen's unofficial rank and file strike for shorter hours in 1937, which also coincided with May Day. That was smashed through lack of solidarity and its leaders victimised. Those defeats were precisely what the CP failed to come to terms with.

Although *May Day* is a utopian fantasy, it nevertheless throbs with working class city life. Summerfield's depiction of sexual alienation and loneliness—if a bit sexist—is intensely written. The horrors of working class life are not ducked. And for a 'socialist realist' novel, the expressionist radicalism of *May Day* towers over many of its middle class rivals. Well worth reading; both of them. ■

Jon Gamble

Paradise lost

Strangers in Paradise: The Hollywood Emigres 1933-1950

John Russell Taylor

Faber and Faber £8.25

IN HIS introduction John Russell Taylor admits he'd set himself a much bigger task than he had at first anticipated. On reading *Strangers in Paradise* it becomes obvious that thorough though Taylor has been in his research the book only gives the broadest outline of a very entertaining and enlightening subject indeed. The fate of the political refugees who fled from the rise of fascism in Central Europe in the 1930s is worth a book in itself.

In a chapter perceptively entitled *The New Weimar*, Taylor unfolds the amazing story of how those intellectuals and artists who fled the tyranny of Hitler fell foul of a tyranny of a quite different sort in America. So what if Schoenberg was supposedly one of the greatest composers in Europe, could he write a 15 minute film score in five weeks?

The only success that mattered in Hollywood was the sort that made money. In the 30s and 40s, as now, controversial political and social themes were not popular with film producers or the general public. If film makers wanted to survive and make pictures they had to adapt themselves to the prevailing climate.

But the story of the emigrés isn't just one of cultured political Europeans suffering at the hands of philistine Hollywood producers. Hollywood may have been committed to providing escapism for the masses. But such was the sheer

variety and quantity of talent employed by the major film studios that every so often a genuinely radical or subversive film would get past the front office and find its way to critical and commercial success. Perhaps it took the detached eye of an emigré to observe the darker side of America in the 30s. Certainly it's hard to think of anyone other than Fritz Lang making the powerful anti-lynching film *Fury* in 1936.

Fury was a big success but it was to be nearly 20 years before Lang made another film for the same studio. In fact the very success of Lang in making powerful socially committed films like *Fury*, *You Only Live Once* and *Hangmen Also Die* was to find him out of favour when the Cold War brought a new political climate to Hollywood.

Even a film maker as supposedly safe, commercial and mainstream as Alfred Hitchcock was caught up in the strange political turn of fortune of Hollywood. In 1940 his film *Foreign Correspondent* was denounced by the Senate Committee on Hollywood neutrality as being too openly anti-Nazi, because it contained a scene of London being blitzed. This argument was dropped when America entered the war following Pearl Harbour but after the war when Russia became

the new enemy the film was perceived by some right wingers as being an example of premature anti-fascism.

All these stories provide an excellent reminder to the reader that America was far from being the enthusiastic champion of democracy that many would have you believe, most notably the current president. Every film maker in Hollywood worked with an eye towards the prevailing political climate both inside and outside the studio. What is striking throughout the book is just how restricted the film makers were. For a few years during the second world war anti-fascist films were in vogue. They were considered useful to the war effort, and for a time film makers with left wing sympathies suddenly found their services in demand.

Even Bertolt Brecht found employment, working with Fritz Lang on a film about the Czech underground resistance called *Hangmen Also Die*. It was a very short-lived vogue. Those who participated in it, far from finding the establishment grateful after the war, became the victims of the suspicions and hostility of the Un-American Activities Committee. Like those original inhabitants in paradise the emigrés came across a serpent, only in their case the serpent also played the role of God. It both corrupted and expelled those that came to live in the garden. ■

Pete Court

A shabby story

The true adventures of the Rolling Stones

Granta 12: A paperback magazine of new writing

Stanley Booth

Penguin £3.50

THIS publication is the child of a Cambridge literary magazine. That should mean it is very dull — but it isn't. It consists of journalism on a range of topics and a collection of short stories. The title article attracted me because it is about my teenage idols, the Rolling Stones. It describes their American tour of 1969 which culminated in the horrific Altamont concert. Interspersed are flashbacks throughout the sixties — the drugs, the arrests, the death of Brian Jones. It's written in the sort of journalism which tells sufficient scandals and personal details for you to believe it is telling the whole truth. Which of course it isn't. Nonetheless, it does convey the pampered, spoilt but empty life the Stones and bands like them must lead.

The best article in the collection is *The Guardian and Sarah Tisdall* by David Cate. This is a systematic description of how shabbily the

Guardian behaved throughout the whole Tisdall affair. Cate shows how they kept, then handed over marked documents, and so began Sarah Tisdall's road to conviction and jail. His writing and investigations provoked the *Guardian's* editor Peter Preston to write:

'Long ago I made a private vow never to sue in the rough business of journalism ... But if you would like to sue me on my considered view that (in this instance) you are a devious, sloppy and malevolent operator with a rare disregard for fact and a rare talent for obsessed distortion then that would be a different matter'.

For a sloppy operator Cate does remarkably well at exposing facts that the *Guardian's* reports omitted. Peter Preston is rumoured to be writing a reply. He will have difficulty in making it as convincing as Cate's article.

Clearly the editor, Bill Buford, and Penguin are trying to turn *Granta* into a vehicle for some of the best contemporary writing around. Judging by this issue they are at least partially succeeding. ■

Lindsey German



The war France could not win

THE RECENT Channel Four history of the Algerian war must have aroused the interests of many socialists. For those too young to remember the conflict it will have been an exciting introduction to a struggle that has seemed to belong to the dim and distant past.

Unfortunately however the series, despite some excellent old newsreels and film footage, did not explain the real roots of the conflict very well, and tended to be biased in favour of the French Generals. At times it seemed to suggest that the whole conflict was dictated by the personal whims of De Gaulle, rather than the interests of the French ruling class. Yet it was a major struggle which deserves serious explanation.

The war of national liberation in Algeria broke out thirty years ago and was one of the biggest and most significant anti-imperialist struggles following the Second World War.

The armed uprising of November, 1954, was carried out by a breakaway group from the Algerian Nationalist Movement (MNA). The MNA was led by Messali Hadj, who had roots in the French working-class movement as well as in Algeria, and the presence of 200,000 Algerian workers in France during the war was an important aspect of the struggle.

The localised outbreak of November 1954 led to nation-wide resistance to French rule, and to the birth of the National Liberation Front (FLN) which led the struggle to the end of the war in 1962. The nationalist movement remained split, both in Algeria and in France, but the split was over armed struggle and leadership: there was no clear division between socialists and nationalists, nor any direct link with European socialists to begin with.

The Communist line

Until the Algerian war, socialism and nationalism were widely regarded as not only separate but incompatible causes. The Communist Parties in both France and Algeria took a hard anti-nationalist line until outpaced by the armed struggle. Many communists in Algeria became involved in that struggle, but the official line of the CP was affected by their desire not to alienate too much of their support among the colonist working class, the *pieds noirs*. The French CP dragged its feet even more, attempting to stay on the side of French 'national interests'.

French socialists were held back

by the fact that until 1958 it was mainly socialist governments who ran the show. François Mitterrand was the Minister of the Interior responsible for law and order in Algeria in 1954, since it was ruled as part of France. Like all other French politicians of the day, Mitterrand defended 'the integrity of France from Dunkirk to Tamanrasset'. Indeed, on one occasion he promised to 'enforce the laws of France from Flanders to the Congo'.

This law enforcement meant the militarisation of Algeria, with half a million troops poured into the country, many of them French conscripts.

It meant torture in the police stations of Paris, as well as in the barracks of Algiers, and the savagery of the Paris police was to reach its height in 1961, when they drowned 250 Algerian immigrants in the Seine after a peaceful demonstration.

Fighting conscription

Many socialists and communists became involved in resistance to the war in France, however. The first and biggest wave was the spontaneous protests of young conscripts recalled to the army in 1955 and 1956. Whole contingents refused to board trains, and pulled the communication cords every few yards when forced into them.

In Rouen, there were all-night riots of workers outside the barracks in solidarity with conscripts resisting inside. In Grenoble, rioters poured concrete into the railway points to stop the troop trains leaving.

Many socialists and communists took part, but against party policies, and there was no attempt to organise solidarity strikes. The movement fizzled out and the conscripts came to accept, and often to be brutalized by their 'service' in Algeria.

The organised resistance which followed was largely a movement of intellectuals, including teachers and students. It had two aspects: the public committees of protest, especially against torture; and the clandestine movement which provided collection points for money raised among Algerian immigrants, safe houses for nationalist organisers, transport across frontiers and even guns.

The public protest culminated in the 'Manifesto of 121' of 1960, which defended the right of French soldiers to refuse orders in the war. The clandestine movement was largely broken by the police in 1961, when France reeled at the news that

scores of French men and women had actually aided Algerians in armed struggle.

The politics of both public and clandestine resistance ranged from Trotskyist grouplets to Catholic worker priests (officially disbanded by the Pope in 1954). The bankruptcy of the socialist parties and the Communist Party's disapproval of resistance meant that this movement became the seedbed of the new left.

In the history of left-wing socialism in France, the Algerian war bridges the gap between the anti-Nazi Resistance and the upsurge of 1968. In the history of parliamentary socialism, it took a quarter of a century to repair the self-inflicted damage to the socialists.

For the socialists clung to power, as members of various government coalitions, until it was wrenched from them by General de Gaulle's *coup d'état* in 1958. De Gaulle came to power on the backs of the *pieds noirs*, but also of the right-wing generals who called the political as well as the military shots in Algeria.

De Gaulle was a disappointment to the generals. They wanted a military dictator; instead, de Gaulle set up the Fifth Republic and had himself elected president. They wanted a saviour for French Algeria; instead, de Gaulle was prepared to abandon the nonsense of Algeria as 'an integral part of France' and work for a negotiated settlement.

For the war in Algeria was one that France could not win, despite the massive military presence, systematic torture and murder, and thousands of miles of fortified frontier to keep out reinforcements from Morocco and Tunisia. The generals could not smash the resistance of the Algerian people, which broke out in huge civilian demonstrations in the cities in 1961 just when the generals were convinced that they had 'won' the war.

The generals never forgave de Gaulle. They attempted a *coup* of their own in 1961, but failed largely because the soldiers would not follow them. They then set up the Secret Army Organisation (OAS), whose aim became to murder as many Algerians, and to destroy as many schools, hospitals and public buildings as they could before French withdrawal from Algeria.

The OAS caused much more death and destruction in months than Algerian terrorists had done in

years of war, and terrified the mass of the European colonists, the *pieds noirs* working class, into a panic mass exodus on the eve of independence. Meanwhile, peace was made, with the French retaining a large economic interest in Algeria, especially in the oil and gas of the Sahara.

The experience led many European socialists to rethink their attitudes to nationalist revolutions in what came to be known as the 'Third World'. Many saw such revolutions as the way forward, and abandoned hope in working class revolution in the imperialist countries. It was the French working class in 1968 that began to change the picture once again. Yet the war had left other legacies, among them racism on the left of French parliamentary politics. This is still seen today, in the Communist Party's readiness to capitulate to racist propaganda against Algerian immigrants, and in the fact that a 'socialist' politician like Gaston Deferre could, in the 1983 municipal elections in Marseilles (an area of *pieds noirs* settlement) make immigration controls his main electoral platform. ■

Norah Carlin

