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defeat**

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of the month

Patterns of defeat

1926 and Now

THE defeat of the miners is the biggest setback the British working class has suffered since 1926. We need to be very clear about that. Whatever may have been salvaged in terms of dignity and organisation, the best troops of the working class have been beaten.

A refusal to recognise the reality of defeat and to act appropriately upon it can only lead to the best elements becoming isolated and smashed.

Even more dangerous, however, are the opposite illusions—the belief that the miners were beaten before they started, that the working class is helpless in the face of the Tory offensive, that any form of industrial action is a mistake.

Comparisons can be made with the situation after the end of the miners' lockout at the end of November 1926. There are similarities. But the differences need to be recognised as well. Spelling out both is crucial.

So, what were the consequences of defeat in 1926? In the run-up to the General Strike, although the working class was not on the offensive, there remained the basic conviction among the mass of workers that they could fight and win if the conditions were right and the leadership was forthcoming.

That explained the great response to the TUC's initial call for the General Strike, with more workers out on the last day than on the first. It was the betrayal by the TUC after nine days, and then the defeat of the miners, that finally broke confidence in union militancy.

Basic union organisation was smashed in industry after industry. The number of workers organised in unions fell sharply. It had been 8,300,000 in 1920; by 1933 it was down to 4,400,000. The 1927 and 1928 strike figures were the lowest since records began.

The leaders of what remained of the movement swung sharply to the right.

The TUC leadership drew the lessons that class confrontation was certain to lead to defeat and instead tried to get talks about class collaboration going with the more 'progressive' employers. These efforts bore fruit in the 'Mond-Turner Talks' of 1928,

which enshrined the role of the the bureaucracy as an aid to management and smooth production. The lefts of 1926, like the builders' leader, Hicks, went along with this just as much as did the hardest of the right.

This shift to the right affected the miners' union as much as any other. A J Cook, the hero of 1926, was isolated within his own executive. The union's president, Herbert Smith—famous for his intransigent 'nowt for nowt' in 1926—endorsed the Mond-Turner talks. The previously militant South Wales miners' federation dropped the Communist Arthur Horner as its representative on the national executive, and a couple of years later he was expelled by his lodge, Maerdy, from the union.

At the Labour Party conference, the miners swung their bloc vote behind moves to disaffiliate scores of left-wing Labour Parties that refused to expel Communists. The miners' leaders were the praetorian guard of the Labour right for the next generation.

The Labour vote picked up after 1926—but it was a vote for right wing Labour, which paved the way for the disastrous 1929-31 government.

The employers, too, seized the setback to

A chronology of the strike

1 MARCH 1984 National Coal Board announce closure of Cortonwood. Miners at the pit walk out followed by the rest of the Yorkshire coalfield.

6 MARCH Yorkshire NUM call indefinite strike to start a week later.

7 MARCH Scottish NUM call strike.

8 MARCH NUM Executive sanctions strikes, but eight right

wingers advocate scabbing and call for ballot.

10 MARCH Durham and Kent join strike.

11 MARCH South Wales miners vote two to one to stay at work but honour picket lines.

12 MARCH Yorkshire miners send flying pickets to Notts. Local officials offer to help members scab at Harworth but most of the afternoon shift stop out. Yorkshire area vice-president Sammy Thompson calls for an end to pickets.

13 MARCH Strength of picketing forces change in Yorkshire area position. Jack Taylor wants pickets to wait for Notts ballot result.

14 MARCH National Reporting

Centre drafts in 10,000 police to Notts in largest anti-union operation since the General Strike. Kent miners stopped at Dartford Tunnel. Scottish miners picket Cockenzie power station. Drivers are turned back but area agent Jimmy Young tells pickets that the action threatens funds. 200 miners win blacking at Edinburgh Docks. MacGregor brings injunction against Yorkshire NUM, under 1980 Employment Act, to stop flying pickets. It is ignored.

15 MARCH Picketing forces Notts leaders to call strike. Yorkshire picket David Jones killed at Ollerton.

16 MARCH Notts vote against strike.

17 MARCH Midland North-East and North-West coalfields vote against strike.

19 MARCH Derby area NUM overrules no-strike ballot.

22 MARCH Power union leaders encourage members to cross picket lines. Train drivers in South Wales sent home after refusing to cross. Three hundred miners battle with police and close Haymarket in Edinburgh.

23 MARCH Durham miners turn men away at Agecroft.

25 MARCH Agecroft vote to strike for a week. Lancashire effectively stopped for the first time. Officials cobble up deal to prevent picketing.

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make advances. The Tories launched crippling new legislation designed to strangle trade union action in the years following the strike.

More generally, there was a wholesale retreat from industrial action. Two and three years later mass strikes by textile workers in Lancashire against speed-up took place. But there were no more official national strikes in any major industry for 29 years, despite some picking up of strike activity as a result of industrial recovery in such thirties' growth areas as cars and aircraft.

The bureaucracy had used the intervening period to tighten their grip over the rank and file and to try to stifle any independent initiative.

Busmen's strike

Typical was the action by London busmen in 1935. There a strong independent rank and file organisation grew up around a paper called *Busmen's Punch* which led unofficial action against the employers. Their strike was broken, but by Bevin, the T&G leader, who consciously organised to finish them as an independent force. He said quite openly that he would rather the employers won than the busmen.

It took the NUM nearly half a century to get around to its next national strike in 1972.

That record of retreat and demoralisation is a gloomy one. And we can see features of

that period already emerging in the wake of the present defeat.

The employers have managed to institute ballots as a familiar part of the industrial scene. Even where injunctions are not pending the bureaucracies have been shuffling through the rule book with the union's lawyers in order to see how they will comply.

The old 'new realism', which seemed buried by the GCHQ debacle, has been revived. The right wing has a very large stick to beat any residual lefts with: 'the new realism is an alternative to the dead end of confrontation and defeat.' Talks with Tories will be what they want.

Not that the 'left' will put up much resistance. Even before the miners' strike, they were not exactly a very impressive group, and the actual course of the struggle has shown any number of them up as mere windbags ready to talk big about solidarity but unprepared to do the work needed to organise it seriously. Even those who stand out against the lurch to the right will do so without confidence and will be easy meat for the right.

Much more common, though, is going to be the born-again compromiser. The lesson that many of the left leaders will learn from the last twelve months is that they had better move to the right pretty quickly. And moving to the right will be more than a question of just voting differently at the TUC. It will also mean keeping an even tighter grip on the rank and file.

Why things aren't the same

Those, then, are the similarities between 1926 and now. But what of the very real differences?

Because, by its very nature, the General Strike involved the movement *as a whole*, the movement *as a whole* suffered the tremen-

dous impact of being called out and sent back without result.

The last act of treachery by the TUC in the General Strike was to send the strikers back to work without securing an agreement on victimisation. In industry after industry—the railways for example—the employers seized the chance to weed out every militant they could.

This general purge of militants across the whole spectrum of industry meant that the organisation embodied in those militants was also destroyed.

This time round the situation is very different. The victimisation inside the coal industry will be very severe. But outside it will be very limited (unlike after 1926).

The movement is not smashed in the same way as it was then. Even as the miners' strike comes to an end the teachers' action is continuing and even gathering momentum. There are still large sections of workers who have yet to fight.

For example, although the prospects of a union offensive against rate-capping have been further diminished, we should not rule out of court all kinds of sharp, defensive battles against local authorities, including Labour controlled ones, over conditions. Unionisation inside the Town Halls is intact.



26 MARCH Scargill tells TUC to keep out of dispute.

27 MARCH Picketing at power station stepped up. Eight area leaders urge scabbing and again call for ballot.

29 MARCH Complete ban on movement of coal promised by rail transport and steel unions although no campaigning among the rank and file. Miners at Cotgrave, South Notts, strike—told it's unofficial.

30 MARCH Bill Sirs, steel workers' leader, abruptly comes to his senses. The key thing now is production of steel.

3 APRIL Tories get involved publicly. Tory minister Peter Walker calls for ballot. NUR instruct members to black.

South Yorkshire Labour Party decide to monitor police brutality. Monitors told to remain neutral, not to join in the picketing.

5 APRIL Notts vote three to one to scab.

10 APRIL Commons debate, Kinnock embarrassed. Two lorry firms take legal action against NUM over picketing of Port Talbot. They are encouraged by the South Wales leaders' decision to agree truce with police. Meanwhile scab imported coal floods in.

11 APRIL NACODS vote narrowly to strike over closures but not with the necessary two thirds majority.

13 APRIL Kinnock speaks out at

last—to back a national ballot.

19 APRIL Special delegate conference votes against ballot. National Strike Committee set up to co-ordinate picketing and blacking.

23 APRIL NUM rule change. Required majority for strike action cut from 55 percent to a simple majority. Police rampage hospitalises NUM executive member Bill Stubbs.

24 APRIL Scargill rejects MacGregor's ploy to reschedule pit closure programme.

25 APRIL Labour NEC suggests a 50p-per-member levy—by and large a dead letter. Taylor does deal with the ISTC and allows 30,000 tons of steel to be produced at Scunthorpe—far

more than the amount needed to keep the furnaces alight, which was the original plan. The national strike committee orders a clampdown. South Wales leaders pressurise coke workers at Nantgarw to allow 10,000 tons into Llanwern steelworks (which produces body panels for Ford, BL and Volvo). Miners picket Wivenhoe docks on the East coast.

28 APRIL Scargill tells Cardiff rally that there will be no dispensations for steel production at all. 90,000 tons unloaded at Hunterston for Ravenscraig. Union officials (NUM, ISTC, TGWU, NUS) agree to unload a British ship after blacking a Panamanian

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Weakness and strength

The difference between then and now is related to the reason why the miners didn't win. And that has to do with the sectionalism which so infects the movement as a whole, with groups of workers being concerned only with their own narrowly defined patches of industry.

This sectionalism is reinforced by the trade union bureaucracy, each part of which jealously safeguards its interests on its own patch. Not even those trade union leaders claiming to be in favour of solidarity with the miners are free of the poison of sectionalism.

The most tragic example during the strike was the refusal of the T&G to link the docks' dispute fairly and squarely to the miners' struggle. It was presented as a mere defence of conditions; gave the Tories an opportunity to go onto the political offensive; and provided an excuse to settle.

Sectionalism made it very difficult to win the argument for, say, blacking coal. That in

turn was why the key to miners winning—solidarity action—was never delivered.

But, conversely, the effect of sectionalism also serves to muffle the impact of the defeat: the defeat is seen as having only involved someone else's patch, not one's own. The effects are likely to be contradictory.

Some, including those who have been closely identified with the miners, will draw the conclusion that if the miners are beaten no one else can possibly win and so there is no point in even starting a fight. But others, who have been more passive in their attitudes, may not draw that conclusion. They may well see the justice in their own *particular* claim as something worth fighting for.

The more backward elements in the class will not, of course, become the more class conscious militants because they have been less affected by the miners' defeat. Far from it. The point is, union organisation, although it will be weakened, will not fall apart. Sectionalism will preserve *some* confidence in activity, though it will be a confidence that will look even more to the union structures and bureaucrats. While fights will be more difficult to get off the ground, they will not be unknown or impossible.

For the Tories this means that while they find themselves in a much stronger position than they were twelve months ago they still face a number of very stiff fights. On their plus side there is the fact that they have made the law stick against a major union. Sequestering the assets of the NUM might not have stopped the strike in the way that some of the more naive Tories probably believed. But it certainly made it much more difficult for the NUM leadership, and has put the fear of God, or rather fear for their union cars, into other bureaucrats.

The Tories' problems

The Tories have also succeeded in making protracted and large-scale scabbing a respectable matter for the first time in many years. However, what they have also done is

to make picketing a major part of industrial life as well. Even quite small disputes, or disputes in areas with little tradition of industrial action, now have picket lines, often more active and larger than they would have been without the example of the miners.

So the Tories will have to face some hard fights with groups of workers despite their victory. Far from having no more obstacles to surmount, they face a backlog of urgent and pressing problems.

The problem facing British capitalism is that wages and conditions have still not been forced down to levels at which they are internationally competitive.

According to *The Economist* that means wage cuts of 20 to 25 per cent. Defeating the miners was, of course, the first step on that road, but in order to achieve it a number of other fights had to be postponed, and a number of groups of workers had to be bribed into keeping quiet. Last summer, for example, the leadership of the rail unions accepted a slightly raised pay offer which both sides know was a bribe to keep solidarity at bay.

The bureaucracy cannot do just what it did in the 1920s. It is not a force floating around in the air free of all pressures, nor is it an iron hand gripping the throat of the rank and file. It is a layer which is under contradictory pressures from the ruling class and from its own rank and file. The pressure from the Tories and the employers will of course be severe and it will act to drive the bureaucracy to the right.

At the same time the Tories will be making such great demands that the bureaucrats will worry about their ability to sell the deal to the rank and file. That is the other pressure which will act on the bureaucrats. So they will try to make the best of this or that situation, to convince the Tories that whatever plans they might have for the trade unions as a whole, they should back off from this little section.

An example is provided by the leadership of the NGA. They confronted the law over a year ago and were beaten by a combination of the judges, Eddie Shah, the TUC and their own spinelessness. But the NGA leadership did not shut up shop and give in to every demand the employers made. There remains, particularly on Fleet Street, but also in sections of the provincial press, very real

one.

3 MAY British Steel use heavy lorries to break through pickets.

7 MAY One thousand pickets battle with police to stop scab convoy at Ravenscraig.

8 MAY Scottish TUC Day of Action.

12 MAY McGahey agrees to allow virtually normal steel production at Ravenscraig to protect Scottish industry.

18,000 tons are let in—only 6,000 less than normal.

14 MAY Mansfield demonstration. Forty thousand go on march. Police go in as marchers disperse. Those arrested charged with riot.

15 MAY *Sun* workers refuse to print picture of 'Fuhrer' Scargill.

16 MAY Anne Scargill arrested with 13 other women. The Women's Support Groups have spread to each area of the strike.

16-17 MAY Police attacks on miners' homes in Blidworth, Notts. They are looking for 40 Yorkshire pickets.

21 MAY TUC general secretary Murray refuses to back today's Yorkshire and Humberside Day of Action. Strike action has been called.

22 MAY Hundreds picket Scunthorpe. The Yorkshire leaders' agreement to allow 15,000 tons has been the basis for British Steel to bring in even more.

23 MAY First meeting between

NCB and NUM ends in no deal.

NUM leaders had dropped the demand to abandon the 20 pit closures plan before the talks began. ASLEF and NUR leaders settle for BR's improved offer on the backs of the miners. The increase amounts to 0.5 percent.

25 MAY Lorry convoys start taking coke from Orgreave to Scunthorpe. High court backs scabs again. Miners can't be instructed to honour picket lines. Scab 'working miner' groups emerge with government and business backing.

30 MAY Scargill arrested at Orgreave and charged with obstruction. This is the second



day of the mass picket. Only a few hundred are present as Yorkshire Area leaders send

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sectional organisation and bargaining strength in the hands of the NGA.

This they have used to their own ends. They have not fought the employers with any degree of determination, but they have been using wage negotiations and a successful ballot under the King (trade union) law to threaten those newspaper employers who are still trying to sue the union in the aftermath of Warrington.

That pattern of a reluctance to lead a serious fight against the employers, coupled with a desire to take just enough action to force a slightly better deal, is likely to become common.

The effect of the Tory trade union legislation is double-edged. The threat of being taken to court is one of the pressures which will drive the leadership to the right and will indeed often scare the rank and file into passivity. But if the leadership holds a ballot and secures a substantial majority, then it can use it as a bargaining counter.

The necessity of a ballot is one way the bureaucracy can keep control of a dispute and make sure that no rank and file initiatives develop. If they are then armed with a ballot majority the bureaucracy can use the *threat* of strike action as a weapon in their game of bluff with the employers. That, essentially, was the tactic pioneered by the NACODS leadership last autumn. They used their ballot majority not to prepare to fight but to wring a few pathetic concessions from the NCB.

The other side of the technique, the use of

the ballot and other legal implications of the law in order to police the rank and file, is part of the current strategy of the NUT leadership.

It represents a step towards the 'Americanisation' of trade unionism in Britain, as does the attempt to break the political link with the Labour Party. The control of the bureaucracy over the least aspect of the unions, and the outlawing of unofficial action, has long been the aim of the most intelligent sections of the British ruling class and is the major gain the Tories will have made out of the strike.

Overall, then, the picture is rather different from that following the defeat of 1926. There will continue to be struggles, some of them national in scope, although they are likely to be even more bitter and defensive. There will also be intense struggles inside the unions—as the bureaucracy try to extend their control under the pretext of the need to adjust to the new legal situation.

What of the left?

If the impact of the miners' defeat on trade union struggle is likely to bureaucratise and 'Americanise' it, rather than smash it, the effect on the left will undoubtedly be much deeper, more acute and crisis-prone.

The kind of people we are talking about are those associated with the growth of a vast network of support committees. Although there were only limited examples of solidarity action with the miners, there can hardly have been a left union activist who was not, in one way or another, involved in collecting money or some other activity in support of the miners.

This layer of people took in both the



pickets elsewhere. The other areas only came down for the first day, when 7,000 pickets turned up.

6 JUNE Paul Foot exposes Government involvement in the strike in the *Daily Mirror*

7 JUNE Lobby of Parliament. Some 10,000 miners present. Scargill says, 'I'd dearly love to see every member of the NUM and every trade unionist down at Orgreave.' But he never organises against the sabotage of the Area officials. John Davis, ASLEF Southern Region Sectional Council representative, is hit by police. Picket forms at Hungerford rail bridge. It escalates to a

stoppage at Charing Cross after management refuse to allow a statement to be made over the tannoy. Taylor and the Yorkshire Strike Co-ordinating Committee call off Orgreave pickets.

8 JUNE Talks collapse.
12 JUNE Welsh TUC Day of Action. Ten thousand march in Cardiff.

13 JUNE New talks collapse.
15 JUNE Scab driver kills Joe Green, picketing at Ferry Bridge power station in Scotland. The second miner to be killed.

16 JUNE Yorkshire Gala attended by 20,000. No push for the mass picket at Orgreave. MacGregor interview in *The*

Times marks new Government hard line.

17 JUNE Maltby police station attacked.

18 JUNE Second mass picket at Orgreave. Five thousand miners turn up. Systematic police brutality means that for the first time official figures for injured pickets are double those of police. Scargill hospitalised. NUM leaders back down from building mass pickets. This marks a crucial turning point in the dispute. Two days later more coke taken out than at any time.

20 JUNE Picketing of steelworks begins. Llanwern and Ravenscraig starved of coal

supplies by rail workers.

27 JUNE South East TUC Day of Action. Rail workers strike for 24 hours. Fifty schools take unofficial strike action. Bill Sirs says he will accept scab coal from anywhere.

2 JULY Scabs take control of Notts NUM.

5-6 JULY More talks.

9 JULY Dock strike starts. Run on the pound forces highest interest rate this century. Tories give Liverpool council £8 million to avoid sending in commissioners. Labour council will increase rates by 17 percent. NCB/NUM talks show Government is under pressure. Massive police riot in

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traditional trade union militants and fairly wide layers of the 'new left' in the Labour Party and beyond. Unlike the mass of the working class, these people did generalise and we can expect the defeat of the miners to have a major impact on them.

Given that the expectations of many of the people involved in this work were impossibly optimistic during the strike, it is likely that the reaction will be one of the deepest depression. While the organised groups within the miners' support movement will not fall apart, both they and individuals will be under heavy pressure to move to the right.

The right wing, led by Kinnock and his supporters, will undoubtedly now go on the offensive. They will begin with detailed technical arguments about the failure of the strike. The argument that the NUM should have held a ballot sometime at the start of the strike will be repeated endlessly. We shall need to stress that calling a ballot would have meant an interruption in the momentum of the strike that would have demoralised the best militants in Yorkshire and elsewhere, and that there is absolutely no guarantee that the ballot result would have been for strike action.

In addition, there is evidence (admittedly from unreliable opinion polls) that Notts miners would have scabbed anyway. Those areas and pits which had ballots in favour of the strike were also among the weakest towards the end. We shall also need to point out that what made South Wales such a solid

area was the picketing out of the weaker pits by the stronger ones. Yet the area vote was, in fact, against strike action.

Another argument will be that the failure of solidarity action shows that it is quite impossible for the working class to defeat the Tories by industrial action. They will conclude that not only is talking about strike action a bit of a waste of time, but what people should really do to be effective is to join the Labour Party and elect a Neil Kinnock to solve all problems.

Shift to the right

Against that we can demonstrate that the examples of real solidarity, at Coalville rail depot, at Didcot power station, and so on, are not accidents. They were the consequences of good rank and file trade unionists being prepared to do the work to win the case with their workmates. The problem for the strike as a whole was that while the TUC and the rest of the leadership were quite ready to make speeches supporting the miners, they were not ready to produce one single leaflet or poster to back up the work of the militants who did want to win solidarity.

And it is also worth noting that too many of those who did work day and night to support the miners did not have a clear idea that the key to winning the strike lay in the argument in the workplace. Collecting on the streets was important, as was all the

fund-raising activity, but it did not confront the central problem of winning solidarity at work.

In the aftermath of the strike there will be a wide layer of people who will want to know the answers to these sorts of questions. It is an immediate task facing socialists to make sure that the real lessons of the strike are drawn by as many as possible.

In the medium term, however, there is likely to be a shift to the right among the rank and file of the left, and a re-emergence of some of the arguments about the 'end of the working class' and the rise of 'new movements'. There is no doubt that in the aftermath of defeat, these arguments will have a real appeal to many people, and arguing against them will be very hard work.

However, the fact that there will still be struggles between groups of workers and the bosses will mean that the revolutionary case has real facts to support it, and the fact that the shift of the bureaucracy to the right will lead to some sharp conflicts inside the unions means that there will be an audience of small but significant size.

Indeed, the shift to the right inside the movement is not going to stop at resolutions. There are already those who are saying openly that the time has come to get rid of the 'little Scargills' in the unions and the Labour Party. The right wing will want to establish its control and to make sure that it keeps it by displaying the severed heads of a

THE GREAT STRIKE

THE MINERS' STRIKE OF 1984-5 AND ITS LESSONS

A new book from Socialist Worker to be published in April. Watch this space for further details...

Fitzwilliam, Yorkshire. Police brutality sparks fightback in several villages. Pickets keep NCB safety men out of pits as coal board tries to engineer a back-to-work movement.
10 JULY High Court says NUM conference cannot discuss disciplining members. Scargill ignores ruling.
11 JULY NUM conference passes rule changes in spite of court ruling.
13 JULY North West TUC half day of action. Twenty thousand march in Manchester.
14 JULY Twenty five thousand attend Durham Miners Gala.
16 JULY Two hundred present

at restarted picket of Port Talbot steelworks—thanks to dock strike. Local tugboatmen join strike.
18 JULY Notts scabs get High Court to make NUM conference decision null and void. More talks collapse. Thatcher makes 'enemy within' speech to Tory backbenchers.
20 JULY Government and NCB launch personal attack on Scargill.
21 JULY Dock strike ends in shambles after ten days. Chance to extend the National Dock Labour Scheme wasted.
28 JULY Talks between NUM and TUC.

31 JULY High Court fines South Wales NUM £50,000 for contempt over picketing case. Kinnock says, 'The courts will have their way.' First fine under Tory anti-union laws.
1 AUGUST Martin Flannery expelled from House of Commons for denouncing tame Tory judges. Kinnock refuses to vote against the expulsion. Lawson says cost of strike is 'worthwhile investment for the good of the nation'.
4-5 AUGUST Left TUC leaders' big bang idea to bring dispute to an end by swift concerted support is spiked by Kinnock through the media—probably to

their intense relief.
5 AUGUST Glamorously nicknamed scab, Silver Birch, unmasked as being Chris Butcher, founder member of scab Working Miners Committee.
6 AUGUST Foulstone and Taylor, two scab Yorkshire miners, apply to High Court for a ballot.
10 AUGUST Special NUM conference rejects coal board proposals and increases disciplinary powers.
11 AUGUST Women Against Pit Closures demonstration in London. First meeting of scab National Working Miners

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few of its opponents. Alongside the struggle against the employers there will be all sorts of struggles against the bureaucrats.

Reaching and winning an audience to revolutionary politics will not be an easy task. It will require both a serious orientation on the struggles inside the unions and the willingness to work alongside other people who find themselves forced into opposition by the employers and the bureaucracy. But it will also mean a very firm and consistent restatement of the revolutionary case in circumstances when there might be a temptation to keep quiet about general politics. If that work is done, then gains, however small, can be made.

The road that leads nowhere

SOME OF the left however will see the miners' strike as a vindication of the political strategy they have argued all along. It doesn't seem to matter that these politics have been found wanting during the dispute. The search for 'alliances' will continue.

Marxism Today has argued that the only

way Thatcher will be defeated will be through building a broad alliance. That would include not only the labour movement but the SDP, Liberals, and even Tory 'wets'.

Central to their argument is the belief that the working class alone isn't strong enough to win.

Marxism Today's ideas have an importance which stretches far beyond the Euro-Labour group within the Communist Party. They have been seized on by Neil Kinnock and the soft left in the Labour Party. And in the NUM in South Wales and Scotland the leadership of the strike was in the hands of officials linked to *Marxism Today's* politics.

The Triple Alliance

Before the strike began the Scottish NUM had been central to the formation of the Triple Alliance of coal, steel and rail unions. For three years they had campaigned to keep the giant Ravenscraig steel works open.

Tory backbenchers and Church of Scotland ministers were recruited on a campaign which centred on the need to 'save Scotland's economy'.

The Triple Alliance itself wasn't formed round the need for industrial action nor did it attempt to bring workers together. Instead it existed at a bureaucratic level and was seen as a means of pressurising the Tories.

When the strike began the Scottish NUM was caught in a trap. It wanted to paralyse Ravenscraig but the very arguments it had used earlier were parroted back by the Tories and the steel unions.

Backing down under pressure to 'save' Ravenscraig, Mick McGahey agreed that coal would be supplied to keep the plant going. In South Wales the NUM reached a similar deal.

When in May and June efforts were finally made to halt steel the effort was half-hearted.

The Triple Alliance, rather than being a source of strength, was a key point of weakness.

In South Wales the NUM leadership opposed mass picketing. Instead they counterposed winning wide community support.

The left South Wales research officer, Kim Howells, openly attacked not only militants in South Yorkshire but Arthur Scargill too.

Howells was supported by *Marxism Today*.

In May and June the focus of the strike centred on picketing Orgreave coke works. This 'left wing' argument against mass picketing was seized on by those officials who wanted to sabotage the picketing.

The idea that mass picketing was outmoded meant that in key areas the return to work before and after Christmas wasn't met with an increase in picketing. Lack of activity helped to undermine morale.

Marxism Today and Kim Howells held that scenes of mass picketing would scare away support in the community. But support increased after Orgreave. The *Financial Times* could report at the strike's end that Thatcher welcomed the lack of picket scenes on television in December and January because it fuelled the idea that the strike was ending.

In the end it was Kim Howells and officials like him who organised against Scargill to get the return to work, leaving the victimised miners out on a limb. The whole idea that 'traditional' militancy couldn't win was used to undermine the strike.

In contrast, supporters of *Militant* stood firm against scrapping the strike. Earlier they had backed the campaign to shut steel, after some hesitation.

But the failure of the strike must cast a question mark over *Militant's* strategy, which centres on securing a left leadership in the unions.

Many of the very officials *Militant* praised, including Jack Taylor and Sammy Thompson in Yorkshire, sabotaged Orgreave, and some, like Emyln Williams in South Wales, openly backed the final betrayal of those victimised.

Even among the best lodge officials there was resistance to attempts at increasing involvement through contacting individual strikers or defying last month's injunction on picketing in Yorkshire.

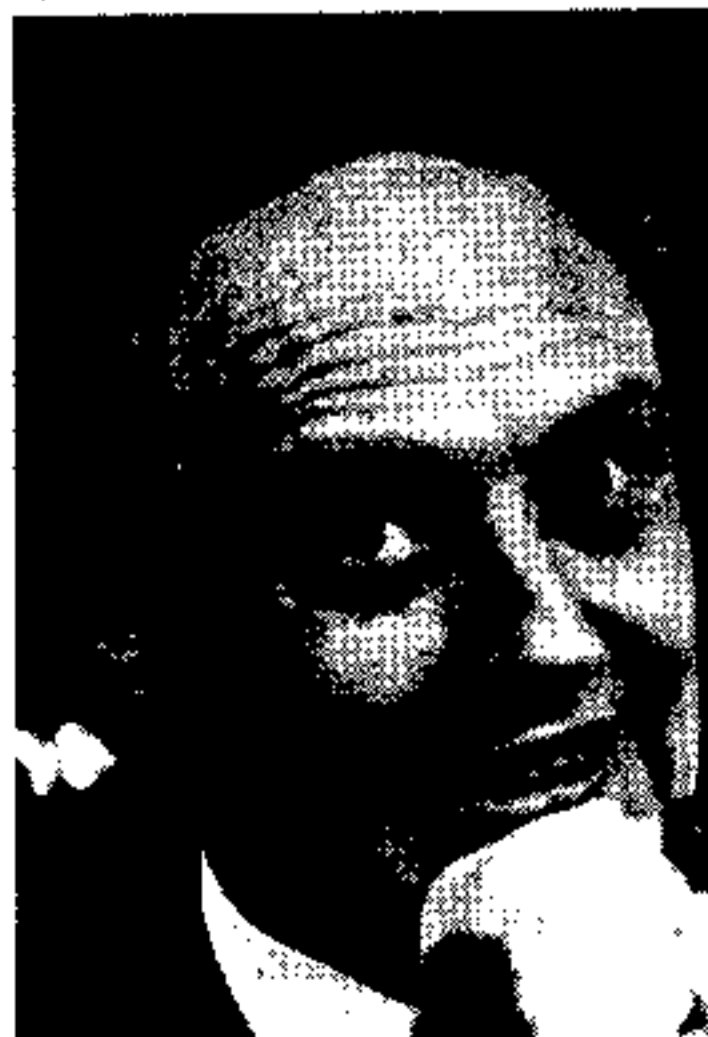
The tragedy of the strike was that in pits like Kellingley or Wearmouth where some of the officials were left wing, the strike began to collapse. That contrasted with those pits which made an effort to increase rank and file involvement.

There are lessons to be learnt from the strike. But not those of the Eurocommunists on the one hand, or the *Militant* on the other. ■

Committee in secret. Nine present.

12 AUGUST Scabs committee meets again at the home of Captain Edward Evans of the Christian revivalist 'Moral Rearmament'. Bell from Saatchi and Saatchi is involved as is Hart, son of a merchant banker. Kinnock, speaking to 60 miners' children from South Wales, condemns pickets' violence.

13 AUGUST Scottish leaders join pickets at Bilston Glen. Six hundred turn up on the Monday. Next day the number is halved. Officials fail to offer accommodation to men from Fife which would have helped them outmanoeuvre police.



15 AUGUST Scottish scabs to sue NUM over bailot.

16 AUGUST Sequestrators steal £700,000 from South Wales NUM.

20 AUGUST Picketing stepped up to halt back-to-work moves at pits. Police violence increases. At Easington 1,000 jeer scab Wilkinson.

21 AUGUST Bloodbath at Silverwood as police take one scab in. Wilkinson doesn't get in at Easington. (He is kept out the next day as well.)

22 AUGUST TUC General Council debates strike for first time.

23 AUGUST Second national dock strike called over unloading of blacked coal by

scabs at Hunterston.

24 AUGUST Three hundred shop stewards meet in Glasgow in a conference to support the miners—very little discussion of blacking.

29 AUGUST Thatcher cancels Far East tour because of strike.

3 SEPTEMBER TUC votes to support miners. This support never materialises.

7 SEPTEMBER NUM leaders agree to tell TUC about forthcoming talks with coal board.

9 SEPTEMBER Talks begin. They last all week taking place in Edinburgh, Selby, Doncaster and London.

12 SEPTEMBER Strike at Manchester Piccadilly as four

Learning from the strike

As the strike drew to a close *Socialist Worker Review* interviewed a group of SWP miners. Here we print extracts from the discussion.

SWR: How do you start to overcome the deep-rooted pessimism that defeat brings?

■ Most of the pickets recognise the dead wood, and the need to get rid of them and replace them with the best militants from the strike. The time to do it is now.

■ The memory of the strike is very important on that score. In three months time that image is going to be a little bit dulled, the arguments that will be floating about will be: 'a year's fight for nothing', 'militancy don't work', and so on and so forth.

So we have to show in the first couple of months that we're sensitive to the issues that crop up due to the conditions that we're going to have to work under. And if we don't do that, we won't be able to hold out against the general arguments against militancy. Arguments like: 'We don't want so and so on the committee because he was one of the bastards that brought us out on strike in the first place. And when 800 as opposed to 300 are talking that way, militants won't be elected. And the softly softly approach of some that have been trying to make a name for themselves during the dispute will appeal more to them. It's going to be difficult to stem the move to the right, even at our pit.

■ You can see it already now, especially as the dispute's come to a close. You've had people who've not been active during the dispute, but doing a lot of talking, saying Thatcher's got an invincible machine and it's going to crush us, and we ought to go back to work, pushing this agreement, the idea that South Wales put forward.

■ The union leaders in our area have been acting like Pontius Pilate, washing their hands, 'It's not our fault, kid,' etc. Although

we know that there's a group of good militants who we can key into who will wait, who we will retain our credibility with, unfortunately the majority will forget. I'll do my best to get on the committee. I stood before; I think other militants will get on. But it's really a matter of what we face when we go back.

■ I think an individual with strong politics could get on. We're here to represent the membership and we offer an alternative to the rest of the lads, doing that kind of work, being that active. Now, whether or not you get on doesn't matter. You still have to ask, is there a base for it, should we be doing things elsewhere? We need to be able to pick up on key issues.

■ Here and there we might be able to get individuals elected on to the branch committee, but any comrade can get dragged to the right by the rest of the committee in the present climate. That's where the Party as a whole comes in, to review the work that's being done in the pit, to see what the problems are, to see if we've got caught in any traps that have come up.

■ Before the strike, well, the average committee man just didn't have any politics. It was a popularity poll.

Much harder to argue

SWR: But surely they did have politics and it was the politics of reformism: leave it to us and we'll do it for you? So looking back at the strike is it true to say that miners have changed their ideas fundamentally?

■ I've had some good arguments and discussions with lads about sexism and specifically about gays over the AIDS issue recently. There was a miner who was an active picket who's gay. I said to another guy who'd been actively involved, 'What's AIDS?'. He said that it was an arse infected disease—and that sparked the discussion off. We spoke about what society does to gays. When I explained

the issues his girlfriend, who was there at the time, started siding with me against him. In the course of the argument his views changed and he's a guy who was a racist. We've had lots of fights about racism.

Look at it as far back as that demo in Mansfield last year when the vast majority of the lads were shouting at the women in the shops, 'get your tits out for the lads' and 'Ian McGregor is one, Maggie Thatcher's got one'. To the credit of the NUM we got a leaflet round a couple of weeks later arguing against sexism—it allowed us to raise the

COMING SOON!

INTERNATIONAL SOCIALISM ★ 26

SPRING 85



Atlanta—capital of Georgia, central point of growth as the American boom moves to the south and west. The boom is analysed by Pete Green's article, 'Contradictions of the American boom'.

Colin Sparks: Labour and imperialism
★ Chris Bambery: Marx and Engels and the unions ★ Sue Cockerill: The municipal road to socialism ★ Norah Carlin: Is the family part of the superstructure? ★ Kieran Allen: James Connolly and the 1916 rebellion

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workers arrested for collecting money. Agecroft and Bold miners join picket. Management and police back down.

15 SEPTEMBER Talks break down. Scargill offers to put dispute before third party. TUC becomes directly involved.

16 SEPTEMBER Second dock strike ends. Leaders cave in as British Steel gets the right to use scab labour to unload as much scab coal as it wants.

20 SEPTEMBER Derby scabs get 'right to work' injunctions.

22-23 SEPTEMBER Broad Left School sponsored by South Wales and Durham attended by 400 miners. Kim Howells, research officer for South Wales, attacks mass picketing.

No real discussion of way forward in strike—opportunity wasted. Scab National Working Miners Committee comes out into the open.

24 SEPTEMBER Police brutality by boiler-suited thugs at Maltby.

28 SEPTEMBER NACODS votes 82.5 percent to strike. Two High Court decisions—no surprises: Derby strike is unlawful and Yorkshire's is unofficial.

29 SEPTEMBER Magnificent solidarity form the *Sun* composing room. They refuse to print because of language like: 'miners, once the salt of the earth, are now the scum of the earth'.

Management had refused a union disclaimer. The *Sun* not printed on the following Monday and Tuesday as printers in machine room demand payment for the Saturday.

1 OCTOBER Scargill rapturously received at Labour Party Conference.

2 OCTOBER Kinnock's speech supporting miners. 'I abominate violence, all violence,' and, 'We cannot scorn legality,' are the catchphrases applauded by the media.

6 OCTOBER Talks at ACAS begin.

7 OCTOBER NCB/NACODS talks.

10 OCTOBER NUM fined £200,000, Scargill fined £1,000 for contempt.

12 OCTOBER Bomb at Tory conference.

15 OCTOBER NUM/NCB talks with ACAS collapse.

19 OCTOBER An 84 percent vote against supporting miners by power workers in the EETPU.

21 OCTOBER Eaton replaces MacGregor as NCB spokesman.

24 OCTOBER NACODS unsurprisingly calls off overmen's strike.

25 OCTOBER High Court orders seizure of NUM assets.

26 OCTOBER South Wales scabs take legal action over loss of earnings during dispute.

arguments on the picket line.

Then we saw the emergence of the women's groups up and down the country. It has changed and there's women who have totally changed throughout the strike—who won't be going back to washing pots and pans. There's a woman in our support group who literally campaigned for the Tories at the last General Election. She now considers herself a socialist. She's unbelievable, she's a different person. She was never politically minded but when she got involved in the activity, on the picket line and collecting, she became political. It's now at the stage where her husband has told her to either leave politics or he's leaving her.

The examples come time and time again that even when people had been passive for months that as soon as they were involved in activity and met people on the left it changed them.

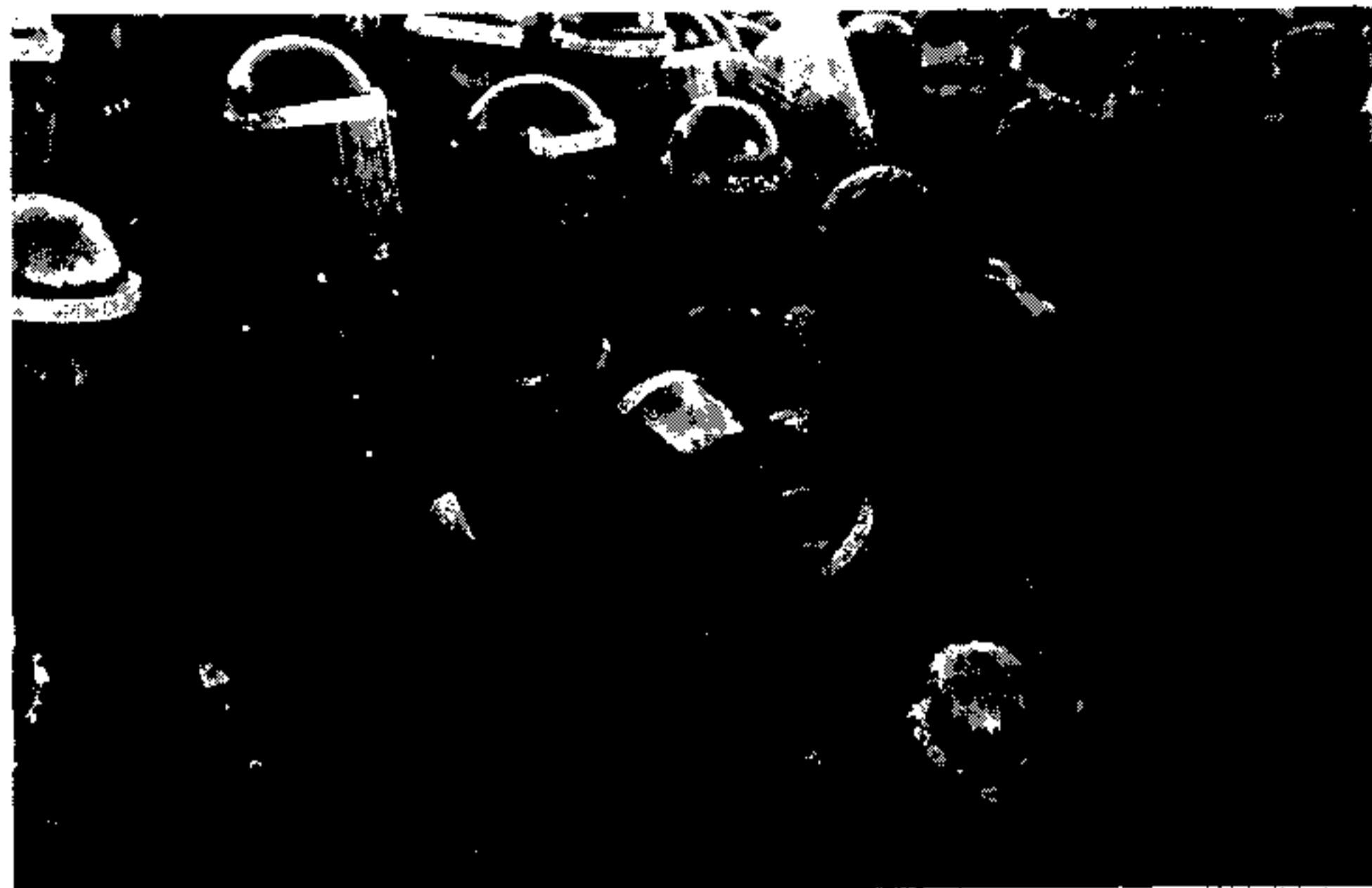
■ There is this guy in our pit who was a consistent right winger—he had right wing friends and one of his mates was in the National Front. At the start of the strike he was asking questions all the time and he literally became a limpet on my shoulder for the first part of the strike.

He went through a lot of politics, on the picket line and he was sent to jail. It all served to show in reality what we meant in theory. He's been up and down but there's no doubt the experience has changed him. He was so reactionary before the strike. He was being interviewed for a film a few weeks ago and was asked about women. He said that he saw women in a different light now—that he'd been on the picket line and been thumped and arrested alongside the women. He now thinks that his wife has got more of a role in life than to cook, clean and look after him.

Ideas change

When it comes to racism people's ideas have really changed. Blacks have been on the line and fought the same as white blokes. Even the black miners' ideas have changed towards whites.

But what's worrying is that in the wake of defeat, people will move backwards. People's activity won't correspond to their ideas and people will start to challenge what they learnt through the dispute. We have to maintain contact with miners who have seen



themselves as socialists. Many have appreciated and experienced politics for the first time. Some even consider themselves just members of the rank and file. They have learnt the lessons of organising together, it's raised their understanding and their level of consciousness.

The strike has taught miners the lessons of self-activity. These lessons may not be learnt again for a long time to come—but this has been a good period. People have learnt about struggle in struggle.

In the wake of the collapse of our organisation, in the wake of defeat, it will be very difficult for them to maintain what they've learnt through the dispute. Because they're not going to be a part of a collective, they'll be underground, at the end of a gate, on a button, they'll feel very isolated and will be able to do very little about it. We have to maintain a relationship with these people. It's different from being a member of the Party, the Party saves you, it educates you and gives you experience.

But all the lessons have been learnt in practice. The drift backwards will not just affect ones and twos—it will be massive. **SWR: Because of the length of the miners' strike did it make it easier to raise generalised politics and to what extent are the progressive ideas that we've seen taking root amongst miners and their supporters here to stay?**

■ On the question of the women's organisation. As long as they were only servicing the dispute that was OK by the bureaucracy, as long as the women did as they were told. But due to the need for money they had to be involved in their own self-activity and that challenged the bureaucracy. They didn't want the women out collecting—but that experience taught women a lot, but the bureaucracy aren't stupid. What they thought is, 'If you can't beat them, join them. allow them their autonomy, allow them to function—we'll take back the purse strings and keep it all nice and quiet.'

This taught women. Even if they accepted the bureaucracy's arguments, they soon learnt that to do anything during the strike meant relying on yourself and not on the bureaucracy. Even that's been uneven, there's been levels of learning within that. Some have been drawing the links, but once again it comes down to the fact that we're just a small Party and we've had to try to get to the best people—and they are a minority.

The good militants tend to keep themselves to themselves. It has been very hard at times to meet the best people because the unevenness is incredible. People take different lessons from their experiences. We've tried hard to make sure that they're the right lessons for some.

That's where the Labour Party comes in.

27 OCTOBER NUM to sue Government over deduction of £15 from social security payments.

28 OCTOBER *Sunday Times* sensationalises NUM official's visit to Libya. Neil Kinnock joins the hypocritical chorus.

5 NOVEMBER Kinnock refuses to speak at a series of rallies with Scargill, saying he is 'too busy'. Blacking of oil won at West Thurrock and Tilbury, and of coal at Didcot power stations.

9 NOVEMBER Secret ballot at Bersham North Wales. Vote to strike.

12 NOVEMBER Offer made to pay miners £1,400 which is already owed to them as Christmas approaches. Media

launches new push for return to work at Dinnington.

13 NOVEMBER New TUC general secretary Norman Willis condemns miners' violence at South Wales rally.

Unfortunately he doesn't manage to get his head into a dangled noose. Kinnock backs him of course.

16 NOVEMBER Felixstowe seaman Dave Sanders released after strike in protest at his arrest while on a delegation to Brimlington.

20 NOVEMBER Cowley returns to work in Austin Rover dispute. AUEW and EETPU cave in to Tory laws and even the TGWU's opposition is only formal.

21 NOVEMBER £1 deducted

from miners' social security benefits.

23 NOVEMBER NCB offer further bribe of £175 to scab by the following Friday. Scab Fletcher becomes media hero for sustaining some injuries.

26 NOVEMBER Eleven miners arrested because of Fletcher.

30 NOVEMBER Government orders the moving of coal from Bold in Lancashire to test the reaction. They get away with it.

1 DECEMBER Receiver appointed. South Wales taxi owner killed driving scab to work.

2 DECEMBER Miners Defence Committee Conference meets in London. One thousand six hundred attend. Weak in

manual unions.

3 DECEMBER NUM special conference decides to boycott receiver.

4 DECEMBER The receiver, Herbert Brewer (Tory and member of the Institute of Directors) utters the immortal words, 'I am the NUM,' outside a Luxembourg bank.

7 DECEMBER Brewer resigns. TUC says it will not take action in support of NUM and risk contempt charges.

14 DECEMBER TUC meet Walker to pressure the NUM to back down.

18 DECEMBER Two drivers at Texaco Dagenham suspended for refusing to cross miners' picket line. Strike spreads to

They are the ones who will make a killing out of the strike—they can appeal to the militants on the basis that people have been on strike, are looking for answers and they give them the easy answer, voting for good people.

It reflects on the size of our organisation, our ability to pick up on individuals and to develop them beyond just that rank and file understanding. To move from militancy into politics.

■ At the beginning of the dispute it was really easy to talk about politics because people were up against it—the police and media.

I found at the start of the strike it was easy to jump in on arguments on the picket line. It got much harder as the strike wore on. It seemed that people stopped at certain levels. But there's also lads who have gone much further—like people who've joined the Socialist Workers Party.

There's also lads who you can have a relationship with, who'll buy the paper but maybe won't come to a meeting, who have questioned the whole society they live in and, for a while, rejected the prevailing ideas in society. A few lads have started to read working class history and that's one thing we'll be wanting to see in the pit—a library with books like *Days of Hope* and *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist*. Reading makes your experiences of a year on strike slip into place, it does you good.

Best activists

Before the strike I wasn't a member of the SWP and one of the things that stopped me joining was the feeling of isolation. If you're arguing with the men and you don't win you can take negative feelings from that—it's only by being a member you understand all that. It gives you the answers as to why there's unevenness in the working class.

Now the strike is over there will be a network of militants in our pit and in other pits who, at different levels, will not accept what's coming through in the media about Ireland, South Africa and the rest.

■ For a lot of the dispute I'd been involved with trying to get passive strikers to picket. What I found was that building with the two best activists around our community we did amazingly well. We got a lot of people involved and built up the consciousness of

individuals over time, with quite a few people involved politically.

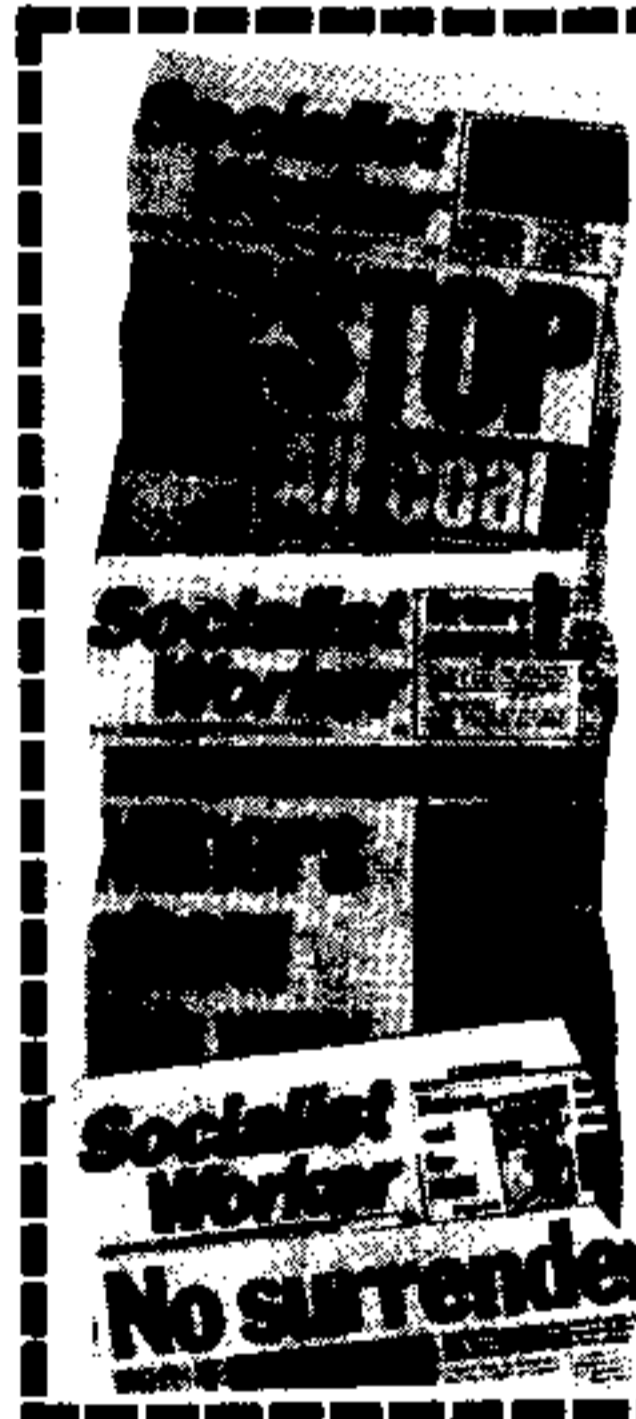
We went round on the knocker and talked to individuals to get delegations to go out to factories. We'd got one of the best logging teams, just twelve people altogether. People ask questions, what's gone wrong with the bloody dispute? Why's Scargill been the way he is? Why's Taylor been the way he is? Why didn't Scargill go over his head? Why didn't the lads take action from below in the beginning when they were in a position to do so?

■ The learning process is very slow. A lot of lads and lasses have learnt the lessons but the conclusions they have come to are open to debate. It hasn't just been SWP involved in that debate, it's been the bureaucrats and other left-wing organisations. The conclusions they've come to haven't necessarily been the correct ones. The impact of the defeat for them is going to be disastrous. We're going to lose them to reformist politics and some of them to reactionary ideas.

■ The struggle against bureaucracy: well, we got challenged, basically, to set our own strike committee up. It was around the time of Orgreave. They knew for a fact that if we

were to set one up we had no money. The bureaucrats had all the resources to draw money, and even the lads who were criticising them would still go along with them. It must be the same in other workplaces and other industries that comrades are working in. What we've taken on board during the strike is doing a lot of stuff that they should be doing, like people coming down with their little problems, like trouble with the bills, like one lad come down and his dad had died. He had no money. He didn't have respect for anyone on the committee; he asked us to go in and sort it out for him. He couldn't even get in touch with the union for a simple thing like that. It's little things like that you build up respect through. By building on those small issues you're pulling people around you and when the crunch comes people back you up. You have arguments about the TUC—it's not the first time the TUC's acted like that, the bureaucracy of the union acted like that too. You don't trust them, you've got to leave it to your own initiative. You have to have issues where you can fight; where the rank and file has been involved, it's been done correctly.

■ Well, I know that what I've learnt is that



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Canvey Island. Local TGWU official Sunny Attridge sabotages the dispute.

17 DECEMBER Signalman at Coalville removed from duty by BR area manager for being 'mentally unstable'. He was blacking coal trains.

7 JANUARY 1985 NCB claim 1,200 return to work. Not the expected surge. Scargill calls for mass pickets at Cynheidre.

10 JANUARY NUM Executive vote to expel Notts Area.

17 JANUARY London-Midland and Eastern Region British Rail strike in support of three sacked workers and one who is 'mentally unstable' at Coalville. Unofficial action on Southern Region shows leaders could

have made more of this issue.

The 30 Coalville workers have been backing the miners from the beginning of the strike.

21 JANUARY Government getting more confident as more miners return. Doesn't want talks.

24 JANUARY Heathfield/Smith meeting followed by NUM Executive decision to have more talks. Published figures reveal 1984 steel production up on 1983 figures. Kim Howells, South Wales research officer, argues for a return to work unconditionally to preserve unity, and the idea is set in motion.

1 FEBRUARY Peace talks collapse.



3 FEBRUARY Frances colliery in Fife closed—500 jobs to go.

11 FEBRUARY Solidarity Day. Pickets all over the country are attended by delegations from most major workplaces.

15 FEBRUARY Talks collapse.

19 FEBRUARY TUC grovel to Prime Minister then scurry off to see Walker.

20 FEBRUARY NUM Executive rejects stitched up deal.

21 FEBRUARY Special delegate conference rejects deal. NACODS accept.

25 FEBRUARY Easington vote to go back unconditionally. Left officials 'plan to return' gains momentum. NCB figures claim 3,800 back at work.

1 MARCH Area conferences follow Easington—return without a settlement.

2 MARCH Yorkshire votes to continue strike.

3 MARCH Congress House delegate conference votes 98 to 91 to return to work.

4 and 5 MARCH Guerrilla struggles continue in angry defiance of victimisations.

there's no way I'm going to depend on the leadership anymore. You've got to go to the union to do this, that or the other. If ever a situation like this arises again, there's no way I'm going running to the union leaders and saying: 'Here's our ideas, will you back us?' What we've got to do is organise independently of them and we'll carry our ideas out from scratch.

■What about women then?

■We couldn't have put up food kitchens on our own. We had enough trouble organising ourselves. They put up these food kitchens and without them we would have been lost, I think.

SWR: Some feminists and others on the left have argued that it is terrible that the women have been organised only as the wives of miners, that this just reinforces their role as wives and mothers.

■But that stopped. What happened was that they got talking with politically motivated people and they started learning from them. I mean it didn't stop with them just cooking a snack for us when we came off the picket line, they were talking about politics in the kitchen.

SWR: What kind of organisation have miners and their supporters got to have after the dispute?

■My wife's one of the prime examples. She works for the local council, and they've had two days of action during the dispute, and she's been in the minority that's come out on strike.

■How about the one where she tried to get a collection going for those who are on strike?
■It didn't get off the ground. It's going to be a hard battle for them, just like it's going to be a hard battle for us in our own pits.

She'd done a collection sheet up herself and she went round outside the office before they were going in to work to do a collection. We'd been on strike and she was trying to get people to sign for a weekly levy for the support of these housing strikers in Sheffield. What bloody housing strike in Sheffield? They didn't even know—this was the local Nalgo—their members didn't even know there was a strike on in Sheffield. It's been relatively right-wing dominated for years, the Nalgo branch has, it hasn't even been fetched up at branch meetings, the industrial action that was being taken in Sheffield. So she had the whole argument then about why they should be supporting them, that their turn will come when they come in for technology in the housing department or whatever. It's a hard slog for individuals.

■One cameo that stands out is when one woman got arrested at Orgreave. We went down on to the picket lines with collection sheets to pay for her fine and we didn't even have to argue it. She was arrested at Orgreave, which proved that there were lessons being learned by the lads. We talk about the party being the memory of the class and we continue reminding these people about these things.

SWR: What are you going to do straight after the strike, in terms of the party's politics.

■We are going to have to reinforce the argument that the only reason the strike's gone on this long is because of the solidarity shown by other workers. They've seen NUPE workers in canteens, they've seen

Nalgo workers on picket lines, they've received money from different sections of workers. When it comes to actually reciprocating and cementing those building blocks, then when issues come up, we have to remind individuals back at work that the reason why we could sustain the strike is because of solidarity. We have to use that argument.

■But we're going to get the argument, what about the rest of the workers.

■I disagree with you a bit actually. I've only been down to London twice collecting and I've taken guys with me that hadn't been involved with collecting out of town, just round the local factories. When they've seen individuals on the street putting money into buckets and coming home with hundreds of pounds every weekend, they're now saying that before they used to avoid collections at the pit. Inside the pit, as you know, they have a collection for other disputes right outside the pay desk. Now these guys who used to pass or just throw ten pence in, or five pence, are saying they owe these people a debt, and I'm going to put in a pound, five pound or whatever. I think it will happen... We're starting up from that low point of building up from finance to solidarity action. First of all you get the coins then you build and build and build.

■I think it'll be harder than just talking about the numbers game. The fact was, where were the other workers when we were



on strike? Yes, the individuals who were involved with the collections will understand that there was support. The trouble is the majority that didn't see the delegations, didn't see the money coming in from Nalgo. They are going to say, they didn't support us, why should we support them?

■We're all going to be faced with that problem of isolation when we go back to work. And having that understanding, that someone in the office or factory is getting six people out of forty contributing, but those six people are people he or she is going to be able to carry when they are leading a dispute: they'll have six people to turn to. Other people who can't be bothered to support the miners or the nurses or whatever because their own jobs are at stake will start to shift towards them.

Changing the union

SWR: There is a danger for our own comrades that they will be content with being self-righteous and not addressing themselves to the question of how we organise (or reorganise) the left within the union from here on. What do you think we should do?

■Firstly, the first thing I've been arguing with the lads is the question of changing the union. For some of them changing the full-time leadership has been the key to changing the union to the benefit of the membership. With that argument you need to ask where to start. You need to say, 'Do you think you'd be good in office doing their job divorced from the people you work with day in and day out? Or do you think if you want to stand for a position, what about standing for committee where you are in touch with the membership and where you know yourself that you'll report back? You've got to be able to know what's going on, on the union side as well—no secrets and such like. And I think that's what we should encourage good lads—not necessarily members of the party—to do. And also on a broader scale, building a rank and file within the NUM is going to be hard. We need to make sure that we remember the militants, like when they are standing for a position or anything like that. If they do go for a full-time position and they have been decent throughout the dispute, you campaign for them.

■I think the first few months after the dispute will be absolutely critical. We are going to have to work in difficult circumstances and be immensely disciplined. It's going to be a question of making sure of your time-keeping as well; ensuring that you understand legislation; doing your job to the best of your ability even when there's no need to; in other words being absolutely whiter than white, in order to protect the individual workers. On a broader level, though, it's going to be a question of how sensitive we are to how prominent we become in each dispute. We are going to have to be able to show that we can key into the specific issues that occur at the pit and actually be able to win them. Unless we can show that we are capable of doing that, we can't talk of the long term—branch elections and so on. In the first couple of months we are going to find it very difficult to fight against the tendency to shift to the right.

Daily Mail

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 1985 20p



Boring the middle class

ALL SUCCESSFUL newspapers have a particular identity, a distinctive way of looking at the world that determines the way in which they cover all the stories that come their way.

From hard news through fashion to sport, everything is written up in such a way as to reinforce and strengthen the papers self-image which hopefully reflects the outlook of the intended readership.

In the case of the *Daily Mail* the self image is that of the Thatcherite middle class, conservative, respectable, struggling to send the children to public school but with a bit of money left over to invest in British Telecom. *The Mail* is above all else a boring newspaper but this is no more than a successful reflection of its readership.

On 11th February, *The Mail* provided its readers with a celebration of TEN YEARS OF THE THATCHER REVOLUTION, endorsing the 'shock treatment' that had ended Britain's 'years of drift': her stand against the IRA hunger strikers, her deployment of Cruise missiles, the way she has managed 'to tilt the balance of power away from the unions and to give back to managers the right to manage' and the selling of nationalised industries are all heralded as examples of 'true leadership'.

The Mail's doubts

Interestingly however, *The Mail* has some nagging doubts about the 'Thatcher revolution'. Government expenditure has increased under the Tories, taxes and interest rates have gone up, even mass unemployment is something of a mixed blessing!

For *The Mail*, the government is in danger of doing a lot of running merely to stand still, and there is a fear that the job of actually turning the country round still remains to be done.

This fear is of considerable significance. It reflects the fact that despite its undoubted successes, the government has not actually managed to smash the trade unions in the way *The Mail* hoped it would and has not succeeded in making the working class make the sacrifices necessary to restore the competitiveness of British capital.

The crushing of the miners' union, has proven a difficult, vastly expensive task. There is a fear that victory over the NUM may in the end turn out to be a pyrrhic victory, scaring many employers away from costly confrontations.

Inevitably, much of *The Mail's* news coverage over the past year has been dominated by the miners' strike. *The Mail* loyally played its part in the sustained campaign of lies, distortion and abuse that was staged quite calculatedly by the Fleet Street barons in their efforts to undermine

support for the NUM.

No quarter was shown. *The Mail*, along with the rest of the Tory press quite openly advocated class war with the miners serving as a lesson to the rest of the labour movement.

Recently, of course, the crumbling of the strike in some areas as men were starved back to work gave cause for celebration: '3,807 BACK' was the front page headline on 26th February. The fact that over half the miners were still on strike after a year of immense hardship was ignored.

Even on their own figures a more adequate headline should have been '93,000 STILL OUT AFTER YEAR'. This was far more significant than the fact that some 3,000 poor devils had cracked, but one headline helped undermine the strike while the other might have helped sustain it.

For *The Mail*, the NUM is 'a half-dead shark' that is in its 'death-throes', it might still inflict some damage, injure a few more brave police officers, but really the union is now fighting its final rearguard action and this only to pander to the revolutionary vanity of the man with the 'blow-wave, bull-horn and baseball hat'. Scargill's only concern now is to set the scene for 'his own political martyrdom'.

In this way, the most important strike for nearly sixty years, involving tremendous hardship for hundreds of thousands of people, an unprecedented police operation resulting in 10,000 arrests (and the activities of special branch have yet to leak out) and the most shameful betrayal by the TUC and Labour Party leadership is all reduced to the personality of one man.

The actual issue at stake: closing pits and busting the union in the process are deliberately buried beneath attack after attack on Arthur Scargill.

The Government was not trying to starve, intimidate or bully miners back to work on their knees. The very idea! It was merely trying to save them from the clutches of Demon King Arthur. This was Fleet Street's great ideological con trick as far as the dispute is concerned.

By and large, the style of *The Mail's* attacks on the trade unions and the left are, at least at the present time, comparatively restrained. There is not the almost hyster-

ical sensationalism of *The Sun*, but a more middle class way of putting the boot in.

Of course, if the miners looked like winning then this would undoubtedly change dramatically. It was *The Mail* after all that supported Mosley's Blackshirts in the 1930's.

The Mail, along with the rest of the Tory press, holds the scab up as the working man at his best, and what better example than docker Medlock Bibby.

When 'Forelock' recently attended a TGWU disciplinary hearing for crossing an official picket line, he took with him a certain Brian James who promptly revealed the whole dreadful story of KANGAROO JUSTICE exclusively in *The Mail*.

The trial was 'swift, bleak and scary' as a 'dozen heavy set men' sat in judgement on the heroic Forelock, 'a big man and unafraid' will he pay the £30 fine? Of course not! Men like this are not intimidated by union bully boys. Somehow he'll raise the money to take them to the High Court. 'As we left the "court" more large men shouted "scab" at Medlock Bibby'.

Any similarities with Brando's *On The Waterfront* are completely in the minds of the journalist. ■

John Newsinger



From hero to scab

Jimmy Reid has become a hero of the right and the media during the miners' strike. In 1971-72 however, Reid was a source of inspiration to many militants and activists on the left.

As a leading figure in the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders dispute and a prominent member of the Communist Party, he seemed to offer a human and moderate road to socialism. His betrayal during the miners' strike will have come as a shock and disappointment to many.

Here Peter Bain argues that despite the conflict between the Reid of then and now, there is some continuity between his early version of socialism and his role as scab!

WHEN the Independent Broadcasting Authority insisted upon someone replying to Ken Loach's recent Channel Four film in support of the striking miners, Jimmy Reid was given the task. In early February, when Newsnight launched another scurrilous attack on the NUM, Reid again willingly took up the bosses' cudgels.

To many, Reid probably appeared to be just another disgusting hack for the ruling class. But his role is even more spew-inducing than that—for Reid knows that those who control the media are consciously using his past reputation to try to influence workers away from supporting the miners.

Reid's reputation was founded upon the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders' 'work-in' of 1971/2. The Heath government had decided to withdraw support from the shipyards—making 7,000 out of 8,500 redundant. The workforce voted not to accept redundancy, to ignore the pay-off notices, and to carry on working. This fight was financed by donations from hundreds of thousands of workers, not only on Clydeside, but from all over Britain—and beyond.

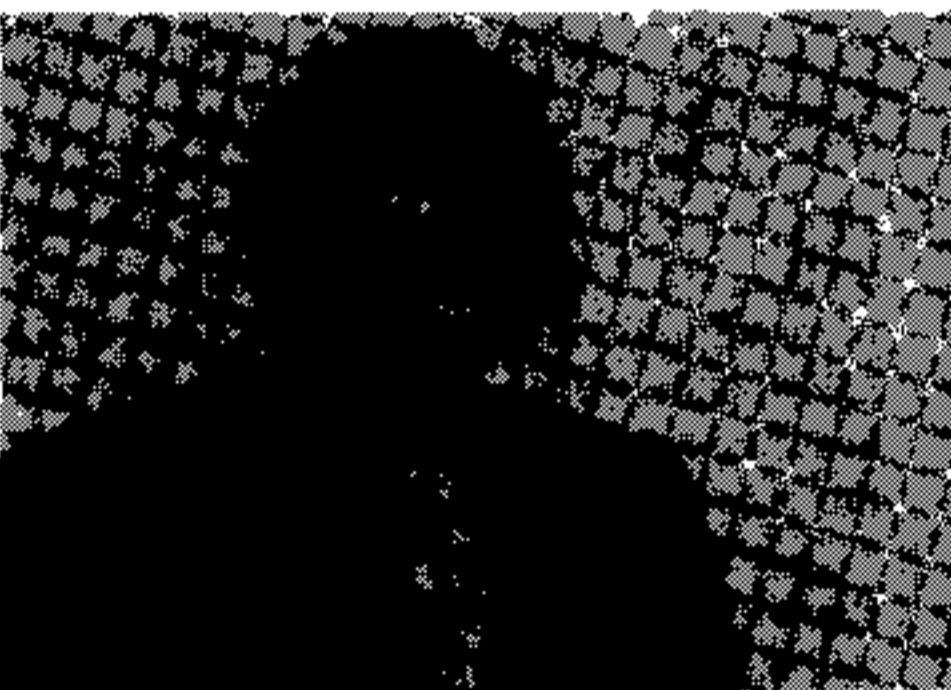
Coming at a time when unemployment was rising rapidly the UCS workers' stance struck a chord with many and showed that redundancies and unemployment could be resisted. Hundreds of thousands of Scottish dockers took part in two half day stoppages and around 80,000 demonstrated in Glasgow.

The Tories were shaken by this response, especially when Glasgow's Chief Constable told Heath that he couldn't guarantee to preserve public order if the yards were closed. After a year long campaign the UCS yards were divided up, with around 6,000 jobs

retained—with much worsened conditions.

Reid had been the shop stewards' spokesman during the campaign and, in the process, his face had become familiar to millions. On Clydeside he assumed the mantle of folk-hero. Reid, in fact, had gone to work in the yards in 1969 after 11 years as Young Communist League national organiser and the Communist Party's Scottish secretary. In the sixties he reserved much of his venom for the revolutionaries inside the then booming Labour Party Young Socialists whom he regularly denounced as 'trotskyist-fascists'.

But in the late sixties, early seventies the working class was on the move. Attempts to impose anti-union laws by Labour—In Place of Strife in 1969—and the Tories—Industrial Relations Act in 1971—were met by rank and file resistance which eventually shoved the union leaders into taking an oppositional stance.



Wage restraint had also been imposed by successive governments and had also been successfully resisted. In short, there was a high level of combativity in the working class—and victories had been won.

And—despite its limitations—the UCS campaign gave workers additional confidence about their ability to take on, and beat, the bosses and the government.

In such a period it was possible for people like Reid to emerge. Trained as a speaker by the CP—and modelling his style on the CP's ex-MP Willie Gallagher—Reid could get away with a combination of windy rhetoric and extremely 'moderate' practice. For example, at the mass meeting which started the 'work-in' he said:

'We are taking over the yard because we refuse to accept that faceless men can make these decisions. We are not strikers but responsible people.'

All through the affair—contrary to legend—the only time the UCS workers struck was on the two half-day stoppages called to support their campaign. The workers didn't 'take over' the yards, and they caused management few problems. When such action was possible—it was always averted. In January 1972, for instance, arguing against a previous decision not to release completed ships until every job

had been guaranteed Reid stated:

'We've yet to make sure that the government get no pretext for saying that these obscurantist saboteurs (sic)—the shop stewards and workers—have blasted negotiations.'

Now this incident took place at the same time as 15,000 Scottish car and truck workers were on strike, and the miners' strike was about to force the government into total surrender.

On the basis of the publicity, and mythology, about the events at UCS, Reid then stood for the AUEW executive and was narrowly beaten. He contested the 1974 election as a CP candidate in Clydebank—where there were four Communist councillors out of 21. Reid seriously believed he could win, but in the event came a poor third.

The experience of mass support and respect over his association with UCS not being reflected in support at the election appears to have been the turning-point for Reid and led to his decision to leave the CP—which he did in February 1976. Another defeat, this time as a Labour candidate in the 1979 General Election, marked his withdrawal from active political involvement.

By this time Reid had decided that his vocation lay in the media. Newspaper columns, TV and radio shows followed—with Reid never forgetting to dip into a broad Glasgow accent for a few seconds to remind his audience of his moment of glory.

Pressures for compromise

Nowadays he reveres the like of Anthony Crosland, someone whose mis-named book *The Future of Socialism* was the bible for a generation of right wing Labour politicians and who, but for his death, would be firmly in the Hattersley-Healy-cum-SDP region of politics. In the *Spectator* last October Reid lamented Crosland's death and said that he 'showed the party the way to a potentially benign capitalism'.

Crosland's book was published at a time, 1962, when the post-war boom was still underway and reforms were still possible. Just as we understand—even if Reid clearly fails to—that massive changes have since taken place in the economic system, we also have to see Reid as someone whose politics 'fitted' a period like the early seventies.

The tactics of the UCS 'work-in' owed any validity they had to the fact that there were masses of workers prepared to take supportive action, and that they were fighting a government unsure of itself. Today, we face an economic climate and a government incomparably tougher.

Reid's recent performances have, no doubt, done his career a power of good. Beneath the twinkling eyes and the theatrical gestures there lurks a nasty piece of work, an individual increasingly shunned as a renegade on Clydeside.

In times of crisis every organisation and individual is put to the test. The miners' strike has drawn very clear lines separating those who support and those who attack the strikers. Reid has failed that test—and we can expect his move to the right to continue and accelerate. ■

The American way

ELEANOR Bumpurs, a 66 year old black grandmother, was blasted to death on 29 October 1984 by New York police officer Stephen Sullivan's double-barrelled shotgun.

On 7 February 1985 7,000 New York cops marched on District Attorney Merole to protest against Sullivan's indictment for manslaughter. The New York Post described it is an American tragedy, not because Eleanor Bumpurs is dead, but because a 'cop just doing his job' stood to lose the fruits of his unblemished career.

In this case just doing his job was going to the aid of city housing officials trying to forcibly evict the arthritis ridden Mrs Bumpurs. She was four months in arrears with her \$98 a month rent.

Meanwhile, in a coma in a New York hospital is a black youth shot in the back by subway vigilante Bernhard Goetz. Goetz, the darling of right wing media coverage, was approached by four black youths and asked for \$5 dollars. He opened up with a revolver, shooting two of the fleeing youths in the back. Goetz has not been charged with attempted murder, only with illegal possession of a gun. Goetz is also suspected of being involved in illegal arms deals.

Yet Goetz and Sullivan have caught the imagination of the Law & Order brigade. Not a thought is given to the poverty and tragedy of their victims.

These events should serve as a powerful argument against those who believe that more police are the solution to the problem of crime. After all New York has 29,000 police officers already (perhaps if there were more they could have bigger demonstrations and shoot more grannies).

The media and politicians keep up a constant barrage of propaganda over law and order. It's a useful smokescreen, for behind it is hidden the real problem of poverty and despair. The atmosphere they try to create is one where only Charles Bronson would dare walk the terror-ridden streets.

Yet what the visitor to New York is struck by is not crime, but the extremes of wealth and poverty. In the midst of the grand architecture of Central Station some 100 people live almost permanently, they are luckier than many others who have to wander the streets and subways.

In the streets of Greenwich Village at 1am at sub-zero temperatures there are people selling their pathetic belongings or second-hand books.

At every station, or public place there are people begging and the mentally ill wander the streets.

Though unemployment has dropped for most it has not fallen for blacks trapped in the ghetto. In fact, for some it's worse than ten years ago.

Reagan's boom has not solved poverty, unemployment, lack of health care or homelessness. Its very success has made the



failure of the system to provide for all even more obvious.

In reality the majority of Americans are not affected by crime any more or less than any other country, but that large minority living in urban deprivation certainly are the most likely to be victims. Constant hysteria about crime ensures their problem is never dealt with, and that the conclusion is always the same—more police.

The futility of such a solution was demonstrated by Mayor Koch's recent play for electoral popularity, by providing a cop on every night time subway train (a 24 hour service operates).

On the first day of its implementation it was hailed as a great success. At 3.25am a vagrant was pushed another under a train, the man died instantly. An arrest was made, the press was delighted, saturation policing worked. It hadn't saved the dead man, but so what, it gave the law and order bandwagon a good push.

The reports were so cock-a-hoop that none of them bothered to ask why did the two men concerned need to wander the subway all night, nor to point out that the police officers had failed to save a life. It's also unlikely that the alleged killer will ever stand trial, as he was subsequently sent to a mental institution.

The obsession with crime is an obsession with the symptoms of a diseased system, not with the root causes. The police force in America has doubled to 585,000 in 20 years. In the same time crime has quadrupled. As the real tragedy of Eleanor Bumpurs demonstrates, police are not part of the solution, they are part of the problem.

The argument was succinctly summarised in the newspaper of the International Socialist Organisation, our sister organisation in America.

'As long as society contains large numbers of people who suffer from horrendous conditions of joblessness and poverty, there will be crime. No number of police can stop this crime—as recent history demonstrates.

The only effective control against crime would be an end to poverty, coupled with policing done by all people. The vast majority of crimes would be eliminated if their cause—impoverishment—were eliminated.' ■

Andy Strouthous

BOOKMARX

THE Bookmarx Club is a socialist book club that brings to its members the best political paperbacks at the lowest possible prices.

You can order individual books through your local SWP branch book-stall, or a minimum of £6.50's worth of books from: Bookmarks, 265 Seven Sisters Road, London N4 2DE (cheques payable to Bookmarks).

To break a union £1.95 (£2.95) A useful record of the Stockport Messenger dispute, and the TUC's massive sell-out, of late 1983, by NUJ official Mark Dickenson.

Political trials in Britain £2.70 (£3.50) Peter Hain shows clearly how justice is never impartial, and always political.
Trotsky: My life £3.05 (£3.95) Trotsky's classic autobiography, newly republished as a paperback, documents his role in the 1917 revolution, and the events that led to his exile in 1930.

Power! £3.50 (£4.95) MacShane, Plaut and Ward focus on the role of black South African trade unionists in the struggle to smash the racist state.

Soldiers' strikes in 1919 £2.20 (£3.95) Andrew Rothstein takes up the story of the strikes and demonstrations that swept through the British Army at the end of the 1st World War.

The forge. The track. The clash £7.15 (£8.40) Arturo Barea's biography set against political upheavals in Spain from the 1st World War to the end of the Civil War.

The Russian revolution and the Baltic Fleet £3.05 (£12.00) Looks at how revolutionary ideas affected Russian sailors, and explains how they became the shock troops of the revolution.

The Real Marxist tradition £1.50 (£1.95) John Molyneux looks at the Marxism of Marx, and its subsequent distortion at the hands of various thinkers from the 2nd International, through Stalinism to today's proponents of Third World socialism. First printed in International Socialism.

The common people £6.20 (7.95) D G H Cole and Raymond Postgate's classic history of the working class movement from 1746 to 1946.

Lenin's struggle for a revolutionary International £6.50 (£8.50) Newly published collection of documents from the years 1907 to 1916. Shows the emptiness of 2nd International resolutions, and the development of a consistent revolutionary opposition to the war.

Working for Ford £3.85 (£4.95) Hugh Beynon describes the conditions and struggles of workers at Ford, drawing extensively on the experience of shop stewards and rank and file workers.

Last cage down £3.50 (£4.50) Centred around industrial struggles in the Durham coalfield, Harold Heslop's novel of the 1930s contains fine descriptive writing and political commitment.

A history of the Irish working class £4.25 (£5.50) Peter Beresford-Ellis presents a wealth of information. But his belief that working class unity must wait until the troops get out distorts the centrality of class struggle.

Thinking
it over...

The Happiest Days of your Life

EMANUELA De Marzo, eight and a half years old, worked in a bakery—from 7.00 till 8.30 in the morning, and 1.00 to 10.00 in the afternoon and evening, with school in between from 8.30 to 12.30. His hours—and conditions—of work came to light only because he reported to hospital after three of his fingers were sliced off in one of the bakery's machines.

The case of Salvatore Cazzolino, aged eight, came to light in the same way; he reported to hospital after his right forearm was severed under the roller of a planing machine in the timber factory where he worked.

There are perhaps one to two million children employed illegally in Italy. Because they are illegal, they have no rights; they work long hours, some on the night shift, and without holidays. A 1971 Ministry of Labour survey showed that two thirds of those that worked dodged school altogether (and only just over a third qualified for the five year certificate of elementary education).

They worked in small scale factories—engineering, textiles and garments, footwear, and petty assembly operations (ball point pens, padlocks, toys). Some worked at home in cottage trades; some went to factories to help their mothers; some were in loading and packing in the fish docks, in agriculture or markets.

The numbers are quite small in Italy, tiny in comparison to the uncounted millions in India—from building labourers, street sellers, scavengers and sweat shop workers. In Sivakasi town in Tamilnadu State, 45,000 children work in tiny print shops, fireworks and match making factories—'the largest single concentration of child labour in the world' as a recent report describes it.

Most are aged 10 to 14, but the youngest the survey found was four. They work on piece rates—in matchmaking—for up to twelve hours in dark sheds. They live up to 45 kilometres from the workplaces and are collected by buses at 4.00am and returned home at between 6 and 8.00pm, for a twelve hour working day. 'If we don't make the specified number (of matches) one boy says, 'sometimes we are not allowed to get into the buses that take us home'.

The top daily wage is ten rupees (about 83p). Of course, the Indian Constitution guarantees that 'no child shall be employed in any factory or mill or be engaged in any other hazardous employment'. And the 1948 Factory Act says that employment can only be legally taken after completion of the fourteenth year.

A regular new column by Nigel Harris

In Thailand, parents—especially the poor in the north-east—are often forced to sell their young to labour brokers, who ship them to the factories and brothels of Bangkok (as John Pilger showed a few years ago in the *Daily Mirror* when he bought a young girl). In a 1979 case, fifteen girls aged under sixteen were rescued from a factory suffering from malnutrition; they worked from 5.00am to 9.00pm and had done so for two years.

In Moroccan carpet factories, the Anti Slavery Society found seven year olds, working up to 72 hours a week without pay; their parents accepted this in order that their kids could learn a trade and be paid wages as from the age of twelve.

It is so unlike the family life of our own dear Queen, far away from the green and pleasant land. In fact, child employment never died out in Britain—kids always delivered the newspapers, some of the milk and ran errands or made tea. And British capital has a record as proud as any in making the little children suffer—employing toddlers in the mines of early Victorian England to crawl down passageways too narrow for adults.

Even now, the more successful the government is in creating a competitive labour market, in cutting restrictions (Wages Councils, the inspectorates), in encouraging small firms (always the biggest employers of minors) and home production, the more employers will try to dilute their workforce. And the higher adult unemployment, the more part-time jobs for children and women become the only means to keep up family income.

The illegal employment of children eats into the legal employment of young people—as youth unemployment rises, so does the employment of under-16s. And that is a mechanism for cutting real wages, just what Tebbit wants.

The Low Pay Unit which does excellent work in mapping out the sweated trades has done a survey of child labour in Bedfordshire, Luton and London. Between a quarter and a third of school-aged children worked, half of them under the age of thirteen; 40 percent worked during the school term in paid employment, excluding odd jobs like babysitting, running errands etc.

Of the children working one in ten had

more than one job, and of these, half had more than two jobs. A third delivered papers; one in five served in shops; 13 percent worked as cleaners, and another 13 percent in hotels and restaurants; others were painters and decorators, sewed garments, did clerical work or ran market stalls. And there must be a legion of others, unrecorded, working in tiny illegal sweatshops in the backstreets.

Generally the work was part time. The majority worked less than 16 hours a week (but with school, that works out as a 51 hour week), or roughly the same paid employment as nearly half all the married women who work. Some did not get off so lightly. The recordholder, a boy in London, put in 47 hours serving in a family take away; a working week including school (if he went to school) of 82 hours, not bad for Tebbitland.

Tebbit would be impressed also by the downwardly 'flexible' wages. For 12 percent of girls and 20 percent of boys, hourly earnings were under 50p. 36 percent of girls and 45 percent of boys were paid between 51p and one pound an hour.

Because the jobs were illegal, workers were paid outside the firm's normal accounts and in cash. No tax or insurance was paid. The children had no normal rights—against unfair dismissal; they did not get properly specified pay slips, nor sick pay; they had no right to industrial accident compensation (indeed, parents were held liable if their children were illegally employed). The child worker is in essence in the same position as an illegal immigrant.

As in the Italian case, the problem was not the law. There are lots of statutes already available in Britain to prevent child labour. Furthermore, twelve years ago an Act was passed to tighten the regulations and fill loopholes, but the regulations have never been put into force. But with one Health and Safety inspector for every one thousand manufacturing establishments, and 119 Wages Inspectors for the whole country, it is unlikely the working kids can ever be found.

Only the accidents illuminate the reality, whether these are the damage of industrial injuries, or conscientious teachers trying to trace truants to source or find out why so many kids appear exhausted, always yawning and inattentive.

There is no regular count or estimate of the numbers of minors at work. We can only guess at how the slow evolution of the system restores the full power of the market over labour, and brings back all those good old days of the Victorian spirit. ■

Nigel Harris

THE POLITICS OF THE POPULAR FRONT

Compromise & collaboration

Over recent months *Marxism Today* has been campaigning around the need for a broad alliance to stop what they term 'Thatcherism'. What is needed is an alliance linking the labour movement with those parties representing middle class voters, the SDP and Liberals, and even 'progressive' Tories.

The need for such an alliance is centred on the idea that Thatcherism is a new phenomenon—a right wing current which has won popular support by using ideas like nationalism, the threat to law and order and the freedom of choice.

The arguments of *Marxism Today* have attracted an audience wider than the thinning ranks of the Communist Party.

But they aren't new. *Marxism Today* itself points to the French Popular Front, formed 50 years ago this summer, as a model for their 'broad democratic alliance'.

The ideas behind the Popular Front were those of the Communist Party. Party leader Thorez argued that the fascists were able to use the appeal of ideas like nationalism to win support. The left had to capture those ideas for itself. Describing the Popular Front strategy Thorez wrote:

'We boldly deprived our enemies of the things they had stolen from us and trampled under-foot. We took back the Marseillaise and the Tricolour'.

In an election broadcast he told listeners:

'We stretch our hand to your national volunteer, ex-servicemen belonging to the Croix de Feu, because you are a son of the people and suffer like us from disorder and corruption, because you, like us, wish to prevent the country from sliding into ruin and catastrophe.'

The Croix de Feu was the main fascist grouping.

Soon after the Popular Front was formed Thorez called for a 'French Front' including right wing parties to defend the 'motherland' from the German threat. All of this was justified by the threat of fascism which the working class alone couldn't stop.

The threat of fascism was a real one in France. The various fascist bands claimed a membership of one million. In February 1934 they felt confident enough to launch a full scale attack on the French parliament in a bid to oust the Radical Party government. The Radicals resigned and were replaced by a govern-

ment of the 'hard' right which seemed set to pave the way for fascism.

In response the Socialist Party and the CGT, the main trade union federation, called a one day strike. In Paris alone one million workers took part.

On the day itself two demonstrations set off from Paris' east end. One was led by the Socialist and union leaders, the other by the Communist Party. Along the route the two columns met. For a while they faced each other before, with cries of 'unity, unity', the two marches joined to sweep through Paris.

Such a demonstration of unity seemed to open up a new chapter for the left. In Germany Hitler had been able to take power because a divided left was incapable of mounting serious opposition.

Along with the other European parties the French Socialist Party was undergoing a strong radicalisation.

The left wing in the French Socialist Party claimed the support of a third of the membership. In particular it controlled the key Paris region.

In July 1934 the Socialist and Communist Parties signed a 'United Action Pact'. By October Thorez was calling for a 'broad people's front' which included the Radical Party which he claimed represented the middle classes.

After much negotiating the new Popular Front was launched with a giant parade to mark Bastille Day, 1935.

In May 1936 a Popular Front government was elected. Before the voting it had been agreed that the Radicals would take the Premiership. In the event their vote slumped. The Socialists were the largest party and Leon Blum, their leader, became premier. The Communists also won spectacular gains.

The elections triggered the greatest strike wave yet seen in working class history.

A year previously strikes in the naval dockyards of Brest and Toulon had signalled an increase in workers' confidence. It was closely connected to the belief that the left had defeated fascism.

This radicalisation was reflected within the Socialist Party. The left whilst organisationally united became politically divided. One grouping shared the Communist Party's politics and loyally backed Blum. The other, the 'revolutionary left' led by Marceau Pivert, began to

The need for broad unity against 'Thatcherism' has become popular with sections of the left. They cite as a successful precedent the Popular Front in France in the 1930s. Chris Bambery separates the myth from the reality



Stalin—architect of the popular front

adopt positions close to revolutionary socialism.

Pivert declared 'everything is possible'. He meant everything in the Popular Front's programme but the slogan fitted the mood. Across France factories were occupied. The strikes spread to unorganised clerks and even the dancers in the Folies Bergere.

Thorez announced 'no everything is not possible' and then warned 'it is necessary to know how to end a strike'. Communist Party paper *L'Humanité* carried the headline 'The Communist Party means order'. Leon Blum however would write: 'great reforms became the only means of avoiding revolution'.

The union leaders hurriedly reached an agreement giving higher wages, shorter hours and paid holidays. Despite resistance the strikes were called off.

In March 1937 the Socialist interior minister ordered police to open fire at protesters outside a fascist rally. Four were shot dead.

While the Socialist and Communist Parties had refused to join together to fight fascism the exiled Trotsky had called for a united front of the working class organisations. Now he turned his pen against the new Popular Front strategy.

Trotsky had attacked Stalin's idea that the Socialists were 'social fascists' because it ruled out joint activity with those workers who had reformist ideas. That prevented the mass mobilisation of workers needed to defeat Hitler. Now he pointed out that a Popular Front with the Radicals, the main party of French imperialism would have the same effect.

Trotsky called for a united front which could mobilise both reformist and revolutionary workers. In contrast the Popular Front was based on a programme which strictly limited the activities of its supporters.

He wrote:

'The French Popular Front has signified from the outset that the Socialists and Communists placed their political activity under the control of the Radicals.'

The Popular Front's programme was even attacked by some Radicals for being too mild. On the question of fascism it limited itself to calls for a state ban. In particular it backed French rearmament—just two months before Russia had signed a military pact with France.

Far from uniting workers in joint activity it was simply an agreement between leaders who stood above the masses. By agreeing to drop any criticism of each other these leaders were effectively silencing any criticism of their actions.

Trotsky did not rule out alliances with sections outside the working class. Indeed he pointed out that the Russian Revolution wouldn't have succeeded without the support of the peasantry.

Thorez claimed that an alliance with the Radicals represented unity between the working classes and the middle class and the peasantry. In reply Trotsky pointed out:

'the alliance between the proletariat and the little men of the city and country can be realised only in the irreconcilable struggle against the traditional parliamentary representatives

of the petty bourgeoisie'.

Trotsky described the middle class as being pulled between the two great classes—the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. At times of crisis the middle classes looked to desperate solutions. A bankrupted shopkeeper or a peasant with a crushing mortgage wanted to curb the power of the bankers.

In that situation they could be attracted to either the far right or far left—whoever appeared capable of achieving a solution. The Popular Front looked to unity behind the very politicians the middle class and peasantry were deserting. The Radical party was in Trotsky's words the party which bound the middle classes to the bankers and the multinationals.

Trotsky stood for unity around limited demands which advanced the interests of workers. Within that unity all organisations would maintain their own positions and have freedom of criticism. Above all it was geared to creating mass struggle and participation. In contrast he described the Popular Front as a 'brake' on the mass movement.

The only opposition to the Popular Front government came from Pivert's 'Revolutionary Left', who were themselves part of the Socialist Party. But whose politics were confused. They called for a 'Popular Front of Struggle'. Pivert campaigned for 'revolutionary action committees'. But at the height of the strikes he took a job as the government's information officer!

One of Pivert's followers, wrote:

'For the sake of Popular Front No 2 (the 'Popular Front of Struggle'), we let ourselves be drawn into participating loyally in Popular Front No 1. We found a seeming justification for this compromise. We had to be present in No 1 in order to push it forwards.'

Likewise Pivert called for a revolutionary party along the lines of Lenin's but argued that the Socialist Party could be transformed from within.

Pivert's group was genuinely attracted to revolutionary ideas. But Trotsky criticised them mercilessly for their refusal to break from Blum or to challenge the official leaders of the French working class.

'Repeating this or that revolutionary slogan, Marceau Pivert subordinates it to the abstract principle of "organisational unity"... The essence of the Pivert tendency is just that: to accept "revolutionary" slogans but not to draw from them the necessary conclusions...without that, all the "revolutionary" slogans become null and void. At the present stage the Pivert agitation is a sort of opium for the revolutionary workers. Pivert wants to teach them that one can be for revolutionary struggle, for "revolutionary action"...and remain at the same time on good terms with the chauvinist scum.'

By clinging to the Socialist Party Pivert entered 'into the system of the Popular Front'.

Blum was happy to sit back and let the Communist Party and their allies on the left of the Socialist Party attack Pivert. He waited till Pivert

was isolated as the struggle receded and then moved to expel the 'Revolutionary Left'. Pivert tried to create a new party but after declaring the need to remain in the Socialist Party could only take out a minority of his supporters.

The Popular Front became a means for the Socialist Party leadership to ride a period of growing class militancy. As that militancy receded they ditched their left allies. Blum in particular used the arguments of the Communist Party—which gave a left gloss to the ditching of socialism—as a means to isolate and break his left wing.

The French Popular Front never became a mass movement in any real sense.

As the strike wave grew the Radicals grew increasingly frightened. In order to preserve them within the Front the Communist Party increasingly demanded everything must be done within the confines of the Front's programme—within the confines set by the Radicals.

In July 1938 the Radicals, back in government on their own, scrapped the 40 hour week and other gains won in the strikes. After attempting negotiations the Communist Party controlled unions eventually called a one-day strike.

It was designed more to show the Communists' continuing influence than anything else. On the day two million workers came out on what the organisers claimed was a 'non-political' protest. In Paris the police physically attacked the strikers. The government declared the strike a flop and workers were told to return to work.

Meanwhile the middle classes having briefly pinned their hopes on the left had seen the Popular Front deliver all too familiar policies. Once again they shifted their support to the parties of the right.

Today Eurocommunist theoreticians point to what they claim were the successes of the Popular Front.

The first is that all this was necessary because socialism wasn't possible in France.

If the working class had tried to take power, Nazi Germany, fascist Italy, not to mention imperialist Britain, would have intervened. If they had the one and a half million Radical voters would have been frightened into the hands of fascism.

It has to be said that if such councils had prevailed among the Bolsheviks in 1917, faced with an even more pressing enemy on their borders and a far weaker working class, then Lenin would have stayed put in Geneva. More importantly it simply dismisses the fact that as virtually every commentator noted, the strikes and factory occupations of the summer of 1936 met with considerable sympathy from sections of the middle class.

It also ignores the fact that across the Pyrenees that summer the Spanish working class had virtually taken power in Catalonia and the major cities. The revolutionary wave which opened the Spanish Civil War would end a year later when the Spanish Popular Front government used its troops to smash workers' power in Barcelona.

But at no time did the French Popular Front

government send military aid to assist the fight against Franco, despite its ideal geographical position. Indeed it voted not to intervene.

In defence of the Popular Front it is claimed that it allowed the left to regain popular support. There is no doubting the growth of the Communist party in France and elsewhere. And trade union membership grew from under a million to eight million in the summer of 1936.

But three years later union membership in France was down to one million—an indication of the bosses' offensive. At the outbreak of war the French left was in a mess. The once strong left wing of the Socialist Party fragmented.

The French Communist Party did try to 'undermine' the popular appeal of the far right. As the Popular Front disintegrated it proposed a new alliance based on 'respect for the law, defence of the national economy and of the freedom and independence of our country'.

Needless to say this call met with little response from those who accepted fascist or right wing ideas. In contrast the mass strikes had won over many workers who had previously given support to the fascist bands. But what such arguments did was shield the main threat workers faced—from the Communist Party's ex-allies in the Popular Front.

Finally did the Popular Front succeed in its stated aim of stopping fascism? In 1933 the German ruling class opted for Hitler because it was convinced that the working class could not mount effective resistance.

At the beginning of 1934 the French bourgeoisie was clearly toying with backing a fascist take over. The virtually spontaneous response of the working class which reached its height in the factory occupations stopped any serious thought of that.

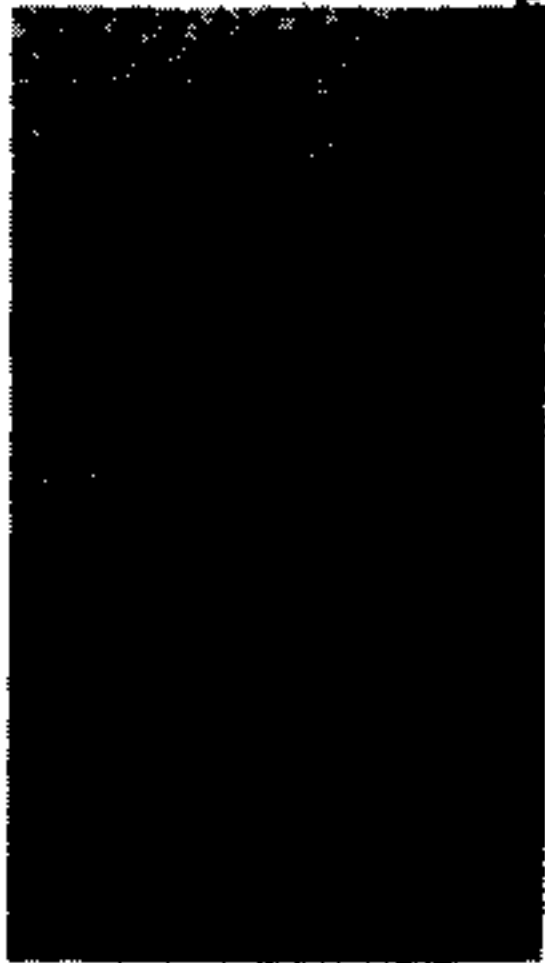
But the bourgeoisie had seen the threat of socialism. Despite the promises of Thorez that this wasn't on the agenda they began to look to a way to defeat the working class. The Radicals and the other bourgeois parties were too weak to do this.

In June 1940 the French ruling class found a saviour from without its borders—Adolf Hitler. The tragedy was that the left was in no position to offer the slightest real lead to French workers.

One other point must be made. In all this the Eurocommunists of today counterpose the Popular Front strategy to the earlier ultra-left line which they blame on Stalin. The heroes of the hour were Dimitrov and Thorez who succeeded in overcoming Stalin's arguments.

Thus the present distancing of Eurocommunism is pre-dated by 50 years. But both Dimitrov and Thorez were loyal followers of Stalin. They toed the previous ultra-left position just as they had dutifully ditched the Popular Front line when Moscow changed tack.

History repeats itself. But if the Popular Front of 1935 ended in tragedy the idea of an alliance between *Marxism Today's* editors with David Owen or Ted Heath is at the level of farce.



Trotsky—he argued that the Popular Front would dissipate workers' struggles

Painting nationalism red?

THE DEFEAT of the Argentinian forces in the 1982 Falklands/Malvinas war, and the subsequent collapse of Galtieri's brutal military dictatorship raised a number of important questions for socialists.

In Argentina too, socialists were faced with the same questions; what position to take with respect to the war was soon seen to depend on a whole range of related questions, the most important of which concerned the characterisation of Argentina itself.

Many on the left saw it as a neo-colony, a semi-colony, or as suffering from a variety of other complaints standing in the way of its complete national liberation. This led them to support the generals—critically or uncritically—in the 1982 war.

Dabat and Lorenzano's book *Argentina, the Malvinas and the End of Military Rule*, however, shows quite conclusively that Argentina is a fully developed capitalist power, and indeed a regional power of some significance in the southern hemisphere, and that nationalist support for the generals was quite illegitimate. What then was the basis of this regional power and what was the relationship of the working class to it?

Public sector

Underlying the collapse of the dictatorship there was a deep crisis in the society and economy over which the generals presided. Unlike the situation in Chile, where the generals used the political power they gained in their 1973 coup to *dismantle* the state-directed part of the economy created in Allende's 'socialist' experiment of 1970-73, in Argentina it was the reverse: the hierarchy and bureaucracy of the army became more and more an integral part of the whole way the economy was organised during the seven long years of military rule.

In spite of explicit privatisation drives by the generals, such moves were always dwarfed by the continual and uninterrupted growth of the public sector. In the late 1970s for instance, the economic ministers, led by Martinez de Hoz, after much effort succeeded in selling state assets worth \$80-100m, but at the same time they found themselves acquiring other assets worth no less than \$250m.

Throughout military rule much more than a half of total investment came from the state and even in the best years for private capital—1976-78—the level of state investment did not fall below 53 percent of the total.

In short, while the generals in Chile acted as the guardians of private capital (at least in the first few years of their reign) in Argentina they seemed rather to provide a state capitalist *alternative* to private capital.

The centrepiece of this strategy in Argentina was a true example of that much over-used expression, a 'military/industrial complex'. It existed at three main levels.

First of all there was a high level of military management of basic industries (the army being responsible for iron, steel and oil, the navy for atomic energy and shipbuilding, and the airforce for aircraft and the giant IME complex).

Then there were the wholly state-owned military equipment plants (plus a large number of big non-arms companies in which the military was the majority shareholder).

Finally there was the provision of retired military officers as directors, advisors and managers of leading private companies.

One of the strengths of Dabat and Lorenzano's book is that it charts very clearly the process through which this militarised form of state capitalism arose.

They divide the history of Argentina into four periods: (1) the formation of the nation (1778-1881), when it became a viable state, centrally run from Buenos Aires and able to defend its borders with an adequate infra-

easily overtook it—particularly in the late 1940s.

Yet the political framework in which these gains took place in the post-war world was a highly repressive and authoritarian one. Centred on the person of Juan Peron, it was built in a very corporatist manner. A state bureaucracy was created—or sometimes expanded—into which both the union leaderships and the captains of industry were subordinated.

For the Argentinian Communist Party this 'justicialista' state, as it was called, was a species of fascism—indeed they referred to it as 'Nazi-Peronism'.

But at the same time there took place a massive expansion of shop stewards' organisation, the creation of factory commissions, an increasing level of strike activity (tolerated often enough by the state) and the passing of labour laws that were comparatively favourable to workers.

In short, Peronist and Nazi strategies for the working class were clearly entirely opposite in nature. Peron did not attempt to smash the working class as much as he tried to buy it off.

For thirty years now Argentinian capitalism has been facing the consequences

PERON: sought to buy off workers

structure of communications, (2) the development of an agricultural economy integrated into the world economy (1881-1929), (3) the period of semi-autarchic industrialisation (1930-50), and finally (4) the attempts to reintegrate Argentina into the world economy. The latter two periods are the ones that have been crucial in the formation of Argentina's military state capitalism.

Faced with the crash of the early 1930s and the massive loss of export earnings that went with it the first period of industrialisation took place very rapidly in an attempt at widespread import-substitution.

By the end of this period the industrial workforce had doubled and Argentina had been converted into a largely industrial nation.

Such events were not unique in the 1930-50 period. In the 1930s a comparable scale of import-substitution industrialisation was taking place in Brazil, Japan, and—most notably—in Stalin's Russia. But only in Argentina did it go along with increases in workers' living standards that not only kept up with the growth of the economy, but

of the high price he had to pay. Ultimately only the most savage of military dictatorships succeeded in forcing down workers' living standards, and this required an end to the Peronist justicialista framework itself.

But Peronism had collapsed long before this. General Aramburu's 1955 coup brought it to an end formally, but before this, in the last two years of Peronist rule, economic growth had ground to a halt, exports collapsed and real wages had begun to fall quite dramatically.

No fewer than eight civilian and military regimes then succeeded one another from that point on until 1983, yet none of them were able to alter this basic state of affairs.

For a time this was not so apparent. Indeed, from 1960-75 the economy grew again, at the rate of 4 percent a year. To begin with, particularly from 1959-62, foreign investment played an important role, but thereafter it fell right back again.

It was after the fall-off in foreign investment that the Argentinian ruling class was faced with the choice of seeing this modern industrial sector decline or of nurturing the state capitalist sector of the economy to take

it over.

But the gamble went badly wrong. The only takers of the products of the woefully inefficient heavy industries became the military authorities themselves. From the mid-1970s the economy went into stagnation and then actual decline.

Workers' struggles

Unable to compete in the free market, one had the ultimate irony of the viciously 'anti-Communist' 1976-83 military junta on the one hand running Argentina in a manner not unlike the way Gosplan ran Russia, and on the other hand that regime increasingly involving itself in foreign trade not with the West and via the market, but rather with Russia by means of Comecon-type bilateral deals.

Why then did the ruling class support the 1976 coup in the first place when there would seem to have been so little in it for them? Partly, as we have seen, the generals—or a large section of them—would have wanted it otherwise, but their attempts to privatise and to re-enter the world market came to nothing.

But much more important was the quite

building of resistance organisations in working class communities and the rapid growth of a revolutionary left.

This culminated in the massive linking together of workers' struggles through the Intersindicales in 1975-76 and the near insurrection that has become known as the Rodrigazo.

In terms of the intensity of the struggle, its duration, the proportion of the working class involved and its combination of political and economic aspects, this whole period stands comparison with the highest achievements of the working class anywhere in the post-war world. Yet in spite of this magnificent record the 1976 coup was able to succeed and to drown the workers' movement in the blood of 30,000 and more leading activists. How did this happen?

The influence of Peronism was crucial here. The Peronist years were, after all, years of rising workers' living standards and as a result there was a whole layer of state, municipal and above all trade union bureaucrats, who were identified by many workers as sympathetic to their interests. It is true that a number of civilian governments that called themselves 'Peronist' presided over the continuing attack on workers' living standards

armed forces were nothing more than an army of occupation. Calling for a 'second independence' or for 'national liberation', they launched a campaign of terrorism against anything in uniform, confident that they would gain the overwhelming backing of the Argentinian masses—with disastrous results.

What was needed—and what the Montoneros failed to provide—involved two elements. First of all the starting point should have been the existing level of class struggle, its strengths and weaknesses, and how it could be taken forward so as to contend for power. Secondly, the sharpest possible battle should have been conducted against all the nationalist nonsense that enabled denunciations of US imperialism to be used as a cover for failing to prosecute the class struggle at home.

It was not just the Montoneros who failed to do these things, but others who followed in a more orthodoxly Marxist or Trotskyist tradition too. Influenced much more by the Vietnamese and Cuban revolutions than by a tradition of workers' power—whether in Russia in 1917 or for that matter in Bolivia in 1954—most of the rest of the left also fell into the trap of failing to make the struggles of the Argentinian working class central and of echoing the Peronists' attitude to US imperialism.

Nationalist concessions

That much of the Argentinian left is still trapped within such a framework of ideas is revealed by the fact that many supported the generals in the war with Thatcher over the Falklands. The real value of Dabat and Lorenzano's book is that they show how nonsensical this position was.

However even they do not go nearly far enough. At some points, for instance, they advance abstract, juridical notions which have no real connection with the class struggle. They argue, for example, that 'There are numerous historical, geographical and juridical arguments on which the legitimacy of Argentina's claim (to the Falklands) is based'.

Elsewhere their concessions to nationalism seem more marked when they say that the extension of Argentinian power into the Antarctic might lead to 'the prevention of big power exploitation of its land and adjacent regions for counter-revolutionary military purposes'.

And in still other places they seem to be playing right into the Peronists' hands in claiming that the reoccupation of the Falklands 'would allow the people to redress an unjust seizure, the memory of which dates back more than a century and a half and has become a matter of national pride'.

Happily, such comments are infrequent and the authors are at pains to point out that such arguments are much less important than the implications of the war for the class struggle itself. ■

Pete Binns

Review of Alejandro Dabat and Luis Lorenzano, *Argentina: The Malvinas and the End of Military Rule*, Verso, London 1983, £5.95 pbk

GALTIERI: trade with Britain

massive upsurge in working class struggle, spurred on by the continuing attacks upon them in the twenty-two years preceding the 1976 coup. These struggles had shaken the Argentinian ruling class to the core, and this reason, more than anything else, was why they welcomed the 1976 coup with open arms. They were not alone in doing so; the Church almost in its entirety and large sections of the trade union bureaucracy welcomed it too, seeing it as the only way to restore 'peace' and 'social order' to the country.

It is difficult to summarise these working class struggles in a few lines, but basically they went through four stages. The first was the huge strike wave of 1957-59 in which the strikes were longer and more bitter than for a generation. Then followed a period of intensified struggle marked by the factory occupations of 1962-65. The third period, 1969-71, saw the escalation of these struggles to levels of semi-insurrections in the industrial cities of Cordoba and Rosario. The final period, 1972-76, saw a consolidation of unions committed to struggle, combinations of general strikes with acts of sabotage, the

in the early 1970s, but this did not seem to lead to any very major break in the hold that these ideas continued to have. On the contrary it seemed rather to lead the faithful into sharply separating off the revered saints of the movements of yesteryear (in particular Juan and Eva Peron) from the apostasy of some of its contemporary incumbents. Only a few challenged and rejected these views in their entirety.

The Peronists were able to gain left-wing credentials while at the same time favouring a state-run corporatist society in which class struggle would be eliminated, by their characterisation of US imperialism as the main enemy of the masses. It was not capitalism but the Yanks who were at fault; therefore what was needed was a pulling together of all genuine forces in the country behind the banners of nationalism.

These assumptions were shared by all too many of the alternative organisations which arose to challenge the official forces of Peronism on the left. The urban guerrillas of the Montoneros were a case in point. Taking the Peronist theory quite literally, they were forced to conclude that the Argentinian

WORK PLACE NOTES

This month *Socialist Worker Review* interviewed a NUPE shop steward in a secondary school. She represents ten other cleaners and two caretakers

THE FIRST WEEK I worked at the school, I felt like leaving straight away.

The caretaker, our supervisor, ran the show like a prison governor. His most common answer to any hint of complaint was, 'if you don't like it, you know where the door is'.

The work is filthy; within a few weeks your hands and scalp itch, your eyes burn and you develop blisters that become callouses on your inner hand.

When I asked about the union—surprise, surprise, the caretaker was also the 'union'. Although all the girls (there were sixteen at the time) were in the union, the limit of trade unionism was money docked out of the wages and garbled information about what the 'union' was saying, doing or had done.

No one was happy with this... 'It's always been like this', 'We could never change it', 'We only work two hours a night, who wants the aggro?'. I'm sure even many socialists could think 'Why bother, what chance is there of organising in a place like this?'

With me, I just needed the job and found as time went on, that I couldn't help giving a lead.

It's hard when you only work two hours a night, you have a few minutes together at the start of the shift and ten minutes at the end and then whatever chances you can find to talk to each other in between.

At 30 I'm now the youngest cleaner, most are in their 40s and have worked there for ten or more years. The teachers talk to us as if we're a bit slow, the caretaker as if we're kids and the headmaster as if we're nobody. These attitudes were what annoyed us more than any other single issue.

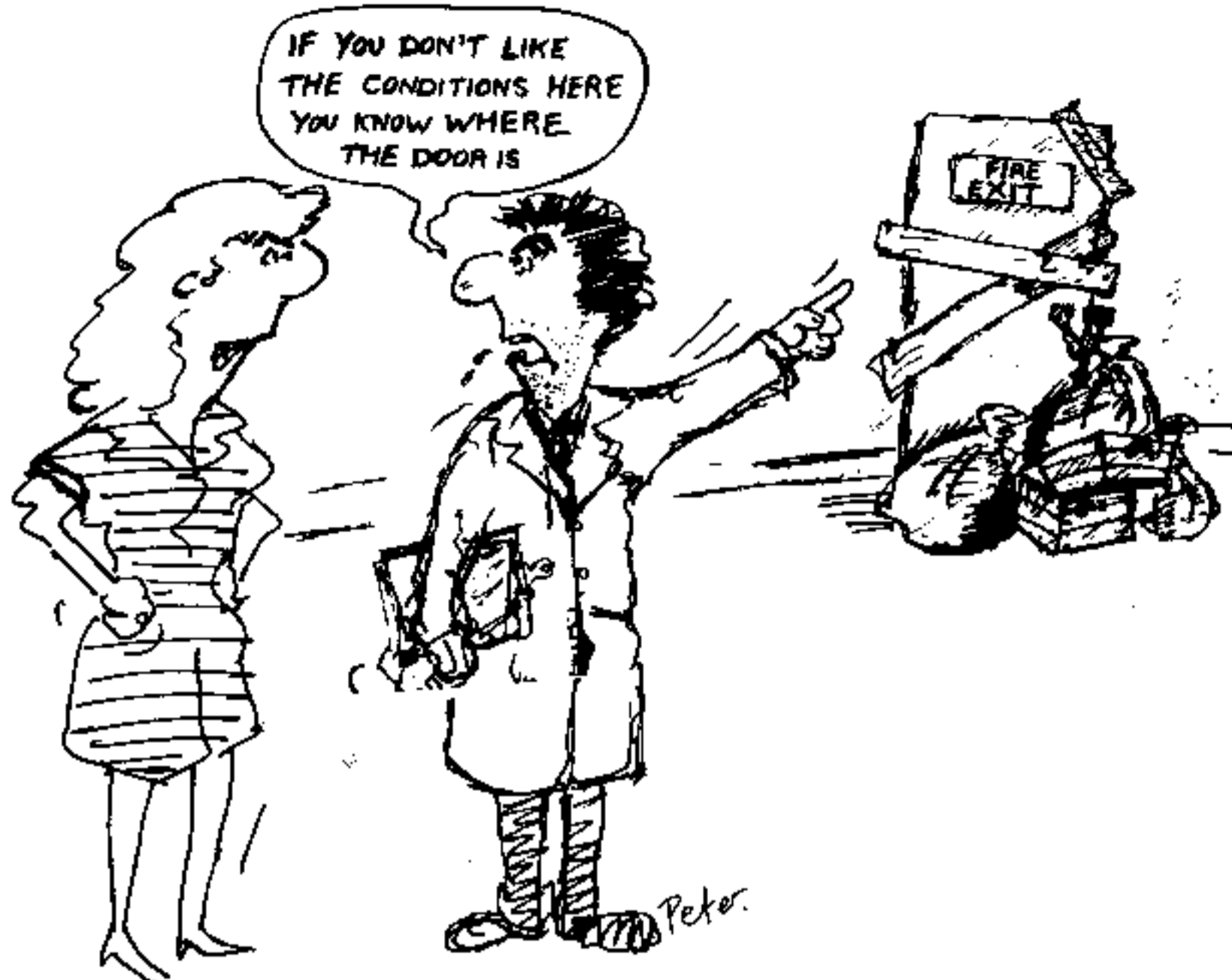
I remember we had a meeting to elect a shop steward and of all the things I said, and I really did go on, I got the biggest response when I said:

'We have to stop management seeing us and treating us like jumped up school-kids in overalls and mops and start treating us as intelligent adults capable of thinking and acting for ourselves.'

It certainly is the thing that gets to you the most.

Anyway, the first five months I worked there I was pregnant, so I spent my time getting to know the girls and the job—but I couldn't stop myself saying 'we could do this', or 'we should do that' or 'we don't have to stand for this'. Much of the time they just shrugged their shoulders and nothing was done.

During the time I was out having the baby, something happened at the school and the girls phoned up the 'union'—a caretaker shop steward at another school—and said they didn't want our caretaker as steward any more.



There was a ballot organised with one nomination, the caretaker, none of the cleaners voted for him; the school had no steward, and he was even more vitriolic afterwards.

I came back to work when my boy was four months old and threw myself into the union. We used to have lots of arguments, many between myself and a card-carrying Tory, others would sometimes join in. We'd row about everything unions, strikes, abortion, Benn, you name it.

She was a great example of the crazy contradictions you find in people. Despite all her terrible views in the abstract, on the ground she was a really outspoken militant—she stood her ground with the caretaker and rarely got put down, she was one of the few that had never been reduced to tears by him.

She was the second girl I sold *Socialist Worker* to. Her husband was out on strike for weeks last year. When I found out, I invited myself round to meet him. He was a shop steward and on the strike committee and driven round the bend by his wife's Tory views.

Kids with mops

Well his strike changed those views. I can still picture her not long afterwards storming into our local Tory's surgery (held at our school), asking him to sign our 'Save the GLC' petition.

My regular *Socialist Worker* buyer was a lovely girl with two kids. She was a staunch Kinnock supporter and was really keen to have a screaming match with me anytime about how we get socialism.

We rowed about everything from Liverpool council's stand against the government to insurrection and workers' councils. She was keen to be involved in union activity in the school, but said her kids came first and that she had little time for much else.

Now while that's a genuine response, I don't believe what holds back girls like her is just the husband and kids. It's more the commitment, the motivation to get involved in political activity.

Many women are prepared to make an effort to go out without the husband and leave him to see to meals and the kids, but (like this girl), only for a night out at bingo,

jewellery parties or the pub. I think many women need the guarantee that what they're going to do is worth the effort of getting out.

Twice issues have arisen where she, along with the other girls have been prepared to make such sacrifices. In the first instance, this meant stopping behind after work, and in the second it meant travelling 20 miles immediately after work to go to a union meeting.

The first was caused by the caretaker telling us that from now on four of the girls would have to mop, as well as sweep and dust, the classrooms.

Everyone was livid and the hairs on my back stood on end. I said we'd have to have a meeting. Then, a few of us organised a meeting after work behind the school bus!

All the girls stopped behind and we agreed that the four girls should refuse to do the extra work, and we'd all back them up.

There was a real excitement and confidence about that meeting—which was quickly shattered when the caretaker realised something was up and caught us holding the meeting. You've never seen a crowd of girls scatter so fast. But we never heard another thing about extra mopping!

That was a turning point. They asked me that night to be steward. I refused because I felt we needed more of these type of battles where they could see what my 'commie' politics meant in practice before I stood.

Shortly afterwards, the caretaker told us moves were afoot to cut our bonus. We earn £18 basic and £6 bonus so that was a lot of money. Everyone was worried, even the caretaker, and he agreed to organise a mini-bus to take all of us to the meeting that was being held 20 miles away.

In the event he didn't organise transport, so a local Socialist Workers Party member took four of the girls to the meeting.

There was well over a hundred in attendance. The girl with the two young kids and myself hardly kept our mouths shut all night. The union negotiating committee were ever so wet and made it quite clear they were not prepared to even try to campaign in the schools for action against the wage cuts.

The entire meeting, with the exception of our caretaker voted against these cuts, yet still the committee would do nothing.

We had a meeting to report back to the girls, and I agreed to stand for steward.

Every obstacle was put up to stop me. The caretaker even said that women couldn't be stewards only 'spokesmen' for cleaners. Anyway my union branch backed me and I finally got recognised.

Formal recognition meant nothing though. The headmaster refused to meet me. The caretaker carried on much as before.

It was at this time that two of the girls and myself decided to start going to union branch meetings. We've really been able to use them to help us organise inside.

It's important to make going to union meetings a good night out. We meet up before the meeting, travel together, sit together and pass little notes to each other, and go down the pub afterwards.

Our caretaker was a branch auditor and used to attend all the meetings; I used to get great pleasure out of putting a sweet innocent face on and saying 'In my school...' and describe one of the atrocities the caretaker carried out... He used to go all red and put his head in his hands as the union official or branch secretary backed up what I was saying.

By this time six girls had left in as many months. Every week we seemed to be having goodbye drink ups. In the area we live it's still possible to leave one job for another, and many of the best younger girls did so.

Becoming steward

After they left, I felt we'd gone two steps forward and three steps back. It's no good getting all depressed though, you just have to keep on. My new sidekick at work has come to every meeting with me. She's a real character. She says she'd never go on strike, she won't buy *Socialist Worker* and we sit in the pub after meetings arguing.

I'm sure every week she thinks I'm more and more of a dreamer. But you have to look for what you've got in common and in her case she will fight for what's 'fair', is interested in knowing what's going on and we share so many laughs at the caretaker's expense. The lovely thing about humour is that it's one of the things he can't share with us.

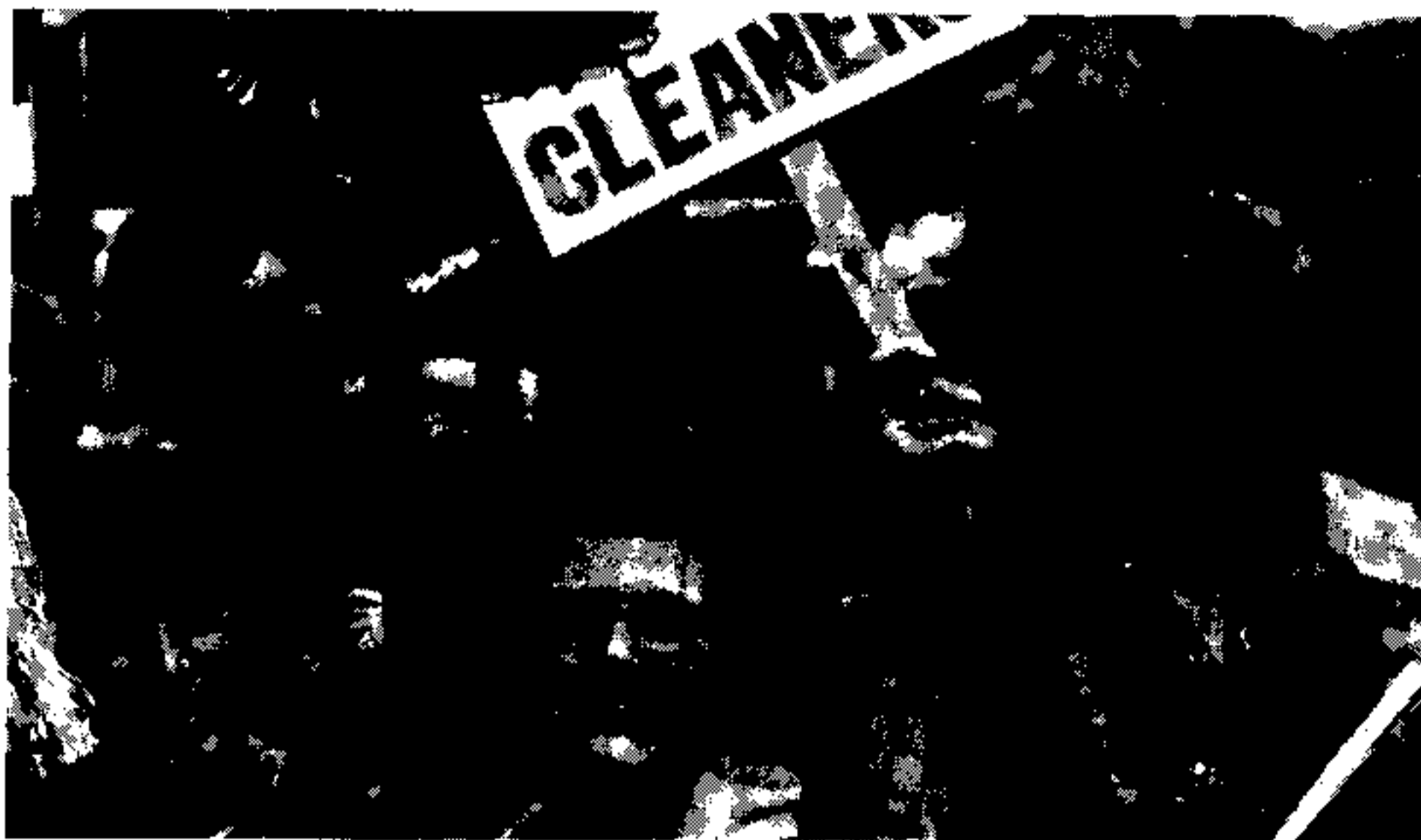
We always get the girls together after union meetings. We tell them what we've found out and see what they think. It's great because they've really got used to meetings and expect them now.

Around this time we noticed the first softening of attitudes from the caretaker. He began to talk to us civilly. Started asking our opinions about things, and even started to discuss issues with me. I think it's a mixture of us getting organised and fear of any more girls leaving that has mellowed him.

Thankfully no one is under the illusion that he's had a personality transplant, we're all waiting for him to return to his old ways but I do believe he won't be driving any of the girls to tears any more.

All this can seem like such small fry compared to the experiences I had as a steward working in an engineering factory. Here we have no real economic power, just a handful of union members, a faceless management 20 miles away, short hours and much of your time spent working alone.

But even so there's still loads to get your



teeth into. Health and safety stuff, getting to know other cleaners in other schools, getting them to elect their own stewards.

Recently mass meetings accepted a productivity deal linked to a wage cut. over 200 across the district voted for it and nine were against, five of them from the mass meeting I attended.

It's no good getting depressed about it though. It was great to meet four others at that meeting who voted against and now at the school we'll have to have some battles to win some degree of mutuality, ie union control, in the changes that they'll try and force on us.

I think two things keep my spirits up. Firstly, no matter how grim things are and how much the girls argue with my ideas, just sharing the little daily fights and having a laugh together creates a special bond that overrides our other differences.

The second thing is my Socialist Workers Party branch. I don't know how militants without an organisation survive. In times like these it would be so much easier not to

raise unpopular arguments for the sake of a quiet life. But going to the branch gives you the confidence to open your mouth, however unsure you feel about the response.

It was like that with miners' collections. We'd had big rows about the miners but it took me a while to go round with my first collection. When I did I had the picture of young comrades in my branch stuck in my head and was surprised when eight of the 16 girls did give.

As the girls left the school collecting got harder. I remember distinctly one night when I asked all the girls about giving, I nearly got lynched. It was me versus the rest. Experiences like that remind me of how much you need those hours and hours of individual argument that in my job you don't get.

Despite terrible differences like that of the miners, I think the girls have come to look at me as a pet commie. They might not agree with my views but I think secretly it pleases them that their steward can't keep her mouth shut. ■

socialist worker
Review

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Equal jobs and rights?

THE RECENT case of sexual harassment in the London Fire Brigade has shown how difficult it is for women who choose to work in traditionally male dominated industries.

The case has also highlighted the inability of the Fire Brigades Union to fight for its members interests and has raised many questions and posed many problems for active trade unionists and socialists on the ground. More than this it has proved to be a sticky wicket for the left wing led Greater London Council.

Fire fighter Garry Langford was dismissed by the Fire Brigade last September for his degrading treatment of woman fire fighter, Lynne Gunning, a few months previously in the Soho station in London.

Every new recruit to the Fire Brigade is forced to go through a disgusting initiation ceremony. This usually involves the new fire fighter being tied to a ladder and doused with water. In Lynne Gunning's case, it is alleged, she was tied to a ladder, had urine poured over her and suffered sexual abuse and indecent exposure.

The routine is degrading for all fire fighters—but particularly so for women. The number of women in the brigade in London could be counted on the fingers of one hand and the sexism of the majority of fire fighters is overwhelming.

This has caused problems for the GLC in implementing their equal opportunities programme, which states:

'...that no job applicant or employee receives less favourable treatment on the grounds of sex, race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origins, marital status, sexual orientation, age, trade union activity, political or religious beliefs.'

The failure to carry out this policy can result in disciplinary action against the employer and/or employee.

The GLC have been campaigning for more women to join the brigade. Posters and leaflets have been produced and the GLC



produce a newspaper called *Equals* which is distributed to their employees arguing that there is a need for more representation in jobs for ethnic minorities, women etc.

Yet none of this has come to terms with the sexism of a male dominated fire brigade.

Garry Langford has been reinstated in his job in a decision taken by the Public Services and Fire Brigade Committee in January of this year. This committee deals with appeals and its decision has caused great embarrassment and anger in the GLC.

The GLC wanted Garry Langford sacked—they see his retaining his job as condoning the sexism of fire fighters. Many leading figures in the GLC, among them Ken Livingstone, are said to be furious at the final outcome. The votes on the committee were meant to be in favour of the man losing his job—but in the course of the hearing two of the Labour members changed their vote.

Among the two was Jenni Fletcher, the vice-chair of the GLC Women's Committee. There is a lot of pressure, from various quarters but mainly from the feminists, for her to resign. And the Women's Committee have mounted a token picket for one hour on

the station in which Garry Langford is working in an attempt to get him out of the service.

The problems caused for the GLC over this case are a direct result of implementing policy from above. It is a result of being unable to change workers' ideas by good deeds or decrees.

All socialists would like to see more women in male dominated jobs—on an equal basis. The disgusting way in which Lynne Gunning was treated—as a result she had to spend many months away from her work—has shown the bias and inequality that women suffer in these types of jobs. It is almost impossible for women to work on an equal basis with men when such a high level of prejudice exists. It is for that reason that workers should stand firm behind the principles of the GLC Women's Committee. More women in the brigade and less sexism.

We have to add riders to this. The tragedy of the case is that it wasn't dealt with within the structures of the FBU. That the circumstances and sympathies did not exist at a shopfloor level which allowed Garry Langford to be disciplined by his workmates.

This is because neither the FBU nor the GLC have had campaigns at a rank and file level which has confronted the dominant ideas of the majority of fire fighters. This has to be done by active trade unionists and socialists. It is not an easy task—it will mean standing against the stream, taking abuse and being branded as 'strange'. The need to carry such a campaign is urgent. It has already started on a small scale in London when fire fighters built support for the miners by taking miners' wives around the stations. This has started to break down the sexism by presenting women as they are—as part of the working class and as part of the fight to change the system.

Women workers

This work needs to be built on with a more general campaign at station level around the question of sexism. Local women trade unionists should be invited onto the stations to talk about the problems, and successes, of organising in a workplace.

Women should be invited to debate about the role of women in society—rape, abortion, sexuality, wife-battering, to name a few issues.

But we must recognise that abstract discussion can help to raise the issues but in itself does not convince people. To do that good militants should be attempting to involve fire fighters in activity. By supporting local pickets and activities when they arise, for example over the Gillick decision and the Powell Bill. By actively campaigning for solidarity with women trade unionists when in struggle. It will be by confronting their backward ideas in action that sexist fire fighters can be changed.

Only if this is done will we build an alternative to the tokenism of the GLC and the bureaucracy of the FBU and eventually create an atmosphere and attitude at station level which recognises women as workers and welcomes them as such. ■

Julie Waterson

Socialists want to change the world, to get rid of the rotten society we live in and build a better one based on workers' power.

Feminists too want to change the world, to make women free and equal. Are the two struggles the same, or separate?

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Norah Carlin
Women
and the
struggle
for
Socialism

What do
we mean
by.



The state

THE question of the state has been one of the great causes of division in the socialist movement throughout this century. World War One split socialists into reformist and revolutionary wings over the issue of support for capitalist states in their imperialist rivalries. The same question still haunts people calling themselves socialists today: witness the failure of the Labour Party to attack the Tories over the Falklands.

The 1917 Russian Revolution, when a revolutionary workers' movement destroyed the capitalist state, occasioned an organisational split within world socialism, with the founding of the Third International. In turn, the subsequent degeneration of the Russian Revolution posed issues for socialists directly centring on the state: should they support a 'socialist' state which attacked its workers and peasants, depriving them of all control over society? How should the regime of Stalin and his heirs, for whom the safety of the state was the supreme law, be understood? Those who upheld the banner of revolutionary Marxism in the world found themselves splitting again.

The State Illusion

Most people who call themselves socialists are still dominated by the idea that socialism is about expanding the sphere of activity of the state. For them, the key criterion of socialism is the nationalisation of property. The more militant their socialism, they assume, the more they must favour state property. A distinguishing mark of the Labour Left is its avowal of extensive nationalisation.

Similarly, judgements about the 'socialist' character of various regimes are based on the degree to which the means of production are in state ownership. On this issue, Labourites, Stalinists and 'orthodox Trotskyists' are in broad agreement.

Surprises in Marx and Engels

Given this apparently widespread agreement among 20th century socialists, it is a refreshing shock to read Marx and Engels on this question. In 1916, Lenin experienced this shock: the young Bolshevik Bukharin had argued that Marxists should aim to *destroy* the state, a view Lenin associated with anarchism. To defeat Bukharin, Lenin systematically read what Marx and Engels had to say on the question—and discovered how correct Bukharin was. The outcome of his researches was the brilliant pamphlet, *The State and Revolution*.

Marx and Engels did not identify socialism with nationalisation of property.

Their attitude to the state was one of unremitting hostility. Far from wishing to expand its activities, they sought to do away with it. In 1844, Marx declared that the most useful thing the state could do for society was to commit suicide. The following year, he and Engels declared '...if the proletarians wish to assert themselves as individuals, they must overthrow the state.'

Marx celebrated the Paris Commune of 1871 on the grounds that it was 'a Revolution against the State itself'. And in 1884, Engels looked forward to the day when the state would end its life 'in the Museum of Antiquities, by the side of the spinning wheel and the bronze axe'. What a pleasant vision: all the pomp and glory of the state, finally reduced to an object for the amusement of children on wet afternoons!

The Nature of the State

A right-wing version of these ideas appears in what passes for Marxism today. What is wrong with the state, it is alleged, is that it supports the ruling class, capitalism and private property. This idea, though not untrue, leaves the door open to all manner of reformist ideas. For if the whole case against the state is that it supports capitalism, the possibility remains that the state can be won to other, socialist purposes. Much of 'fashionable Marxism', indeed, turns out to be of this type: at its heart is a deep opposition to smashing the state.

This was not Marx's view. The problem is not simply that the state is an *accessory* to capitalism. It is an enemy in its own right; its existence is nothing but a *barrier* to socialism.

The state is an historical phenomenon. For the overwhelming majority of human history, our species managed without states. The real history of the state, as a specific social institution, is little more than 10,000 years old.

Stateless societies did not lack social regulation; life within them could be orderly, and remarkably affluent. We can begin to grasp how people in these societies managed their lives if we consider aspects of our own existence that are outside state regulation. In many areas of our social life, we live by our own moral rules. We put pressure on each other to live by these rules: to remember relatives' birthdays, to 'stand our round' in the pub, not to pick our noses in public. If we break these rules, no policeman arrests us, no judge fines or imprisons us. We keep each other 'in line' by various forms of moral pressure, including occasional small-scale violence. A lot of the time, we hardly even notice these rules: yet they are the real basis of social order.

Marx defines the state in terms of social relations. Here, the state is an organised body of people with a *monopoly* of crucial social functions, including that of making and enforcing rules. The state's very existence necessarily involves the loss, by the majority of society, of the power to govern their own lives. The power of the state equals and parallels the powerlessness of its subjects. The state, which steals the function of government, 'stands over' the society it robs.

The emergence of states is associated above all with the development of settled agriculture and the peasant village. The peasantry is one of the two great exploited classes of history, the other is the working class. In both cases, although for different reasons, the state's continuance rests ultimately on division and powerlessness among the exploited.

Even a casual analysis of states, from ancient Sumeria to the present, reveals immediately that the state everywhere is an *exploiter* of society. Those who compose the state depend on the direct producers to feed, house and clothe them. The relation of ruler



and ruled is also, immediately, a relation of exploiter and exploited. Who says 'state' also says exploitation. It is probable that the first form of class society to emerge historically out of pre-class communal societies was that in which the state itself was the sole ruling class. In later social development, above all with the growth of capitalism, the composition of the ruling class became more complex and divided. But the state remains, in its own right an exploiter, adjusting the forms of its surplus-extraction to the prevailing mode of production.

This aspect of the state is all too often missing from modern 'Marxist' accounts of the state. It was taken for granted by Marx and Engels.

Marx insisted that the state is in no sense a sphere of the 'general interest'. It is a private interest, held as a monopoly against society, and defended by means of violence that are themselves based on exploitation, tax and conscription.

The political implications are of course obvious: those who oppose class exploitation must, necessarily, oppose the state. This is not simply because the state supports exploitation, but because it is itself directly a form of exploitation. Socialists who wish to maintain the existing state are simply not serious.

State Organisation and State Functions

The typical organisational form of the state is bureaucracy, with a centralised power and a hierarchy of state servants: army, police, judiciary, civil servants. Its form is significant: it is organised so that its personnel are dependent for the rules that control their actions on those above them, rather than on the people. It of course needs armed force as part of its structure, to protect its monopoly: no state could survive without its 'armed bodies of men'.

None of this is to deny that states can and do perform 'useful functions' for society. They do, in their fashion, preserve 'law and order', redistribute resources within society, provide valuable services from water supply and roads to hospitals. Even if banditry is every state's real relation to society, it must, to survive, be more than a mere bandit: it must perform services to seem indispensable.

But, always, states exact a price for their services: their own existence. We can find state power lurking behind the very phrases that deny it: 'equality before the law', for instance, places us all in a situation of equal powerlessness before the state.

State services—often valuable in themselves—have multiplied within modern capitalist countries, often because workers have fought for them. But every one of them has two crucial features which diminishes its real value: first, they all involve subordination to the state (education, welfare, law); second, they involve the division and atomisation of the population (competition in schools, health and welfare services for individualised 'patients' and 'clients').

Hence the ambiguity of the 'victories' won by workers through nationalisation of industries, or the expansion of state welfare. Class rule has been modified, but in no sense

fundamentally challenged.

On the other hand, the fact that the state has been the mechanism through which workers have won significant concessions and improvements in their material and civil rights, is the real basis of the illusions of modern reformism.

The state formulates and maintains rules to maintain its place above society: there are special rules and procedures for making complaints against its officers difficult; there are rules of 'official' secrecy; certain offences 'against the state' attract the highest punishments; to give voice to the widespread 'contempt' people feel for its courts is a punishable matter.

Parliamentarism

Does modern 'parliamentary democracy' give us real control over the state? Hardly. In elections we vote as atomised individuals for representatives over whom we have no subsequent control by way of mandate or right of recall. Compared with the MP, the worst shop steward is the height of democracy! Parliament itself does not rule the whole state. Police, army, judiciary, secret service, civil service (even the DHSS) maintain their areas of 'autonomy' from parliamentary scrutiny and control. By far the largest part of the state is not subject to election, nor to direct control by any agency outside itself. This applies to the entire massive 'executive' of the state, which includes the army and police branches.

As the tragedy of Chile revealed yet again, the elected, parliamentary element in the rule of the state can be dispensed with by the ruling class if it threatens the class monopoly.

Rosa Luxemburg was correct: those who want to preserve the existing state machinery

in the struggle for socialism are not simply arguing for a different road to socialism; they are arguing against socialism itself. The heart of the socialist idea is self-government in every sphere of life, including production. And the state, in its very essence, is nothing but a series of massive impediments to that self-rule.

In practice, those who defend the 'parliamentary road' are, in the most exact meaning of the term, counter-revolutionary. As a long and bitter history in many different countries has shown, they prepare and even organise the defeats of workers' movements aiming for socialism.

The aim of all those who want working class self-emancipation has to be the destruction of the capitalist state. Its existence is incompatible with the development of socialism.

The struggle for socialism is necessarily revolutionary. It involves a war between two opposed forms of organisation: on one hand, the centuries-old system of state exploitation; on the other, developing counter-institutions, led by workers but embracing all the exploited and oppressed of society, and based on the principles of the most complete democracy possible. Marx first identified these democratic principles in the brief explosion of the Paris Commune in 1871. They have re-appeared time and again in the 20th century, in the workers' councils that have characterised every genuine revolutionary workers' movement, from Russia in 1905 to Gdansk in 1980.

The development of socialism will only begin when such democratic organisations as these succeed in unifying their forces to break up the state power, replacing it with their own democratic and popular rule. ■

Colin Barker



Sorting out the myths

THERE ARE two myths about the British Labour Party. The right wing myth is that it was once a nice sensible organisation that never dreamt of changing society, eschewed all talk of socialism, and got on with the very reasonable job of representing the interests of workers within a framework provided for it by an unchallenged capitalism. The left wing myth is that there was once this raving socialist monster, red in tooth and claw, thoroughly committed to getting rid of capitalism and all its works, albeit by means of winning parliamentary elections rather than by violent revolution.

For those who believe in the first myth, the thing that has gone wrong is that lots of leftist interlopers with socialist ideas have infiltrated a basically moderate party and distorted it. For those who believe in the second myth, the thing that has gone wrong is that a load of rotten right wingers craving after a peerage have jumped on the bandwagon of a successful socialist organisation and highjacked it for compromise.

Like all myths, these two efforts try to explain something about the real world but in a mystical form. The value of this book, and it is a real value, is that it casts a great deal of light into the otherwise murky years of the formation of the Labour Party.

The Labour Party dates itself from the formation of the Labour Representation Committee, founded in 1900. The financial muscle for the LRC was provided by the bureaucrats of the trade unions who, then as now, were under threat from the law. The bodies were provided by a motley collection of socialist groups, of which the largest was the Independent Labour Party (ILP).

A new book, covering the early history of the ILP, and its relationship to other currents in the labour movement, is a valuable source for helping us to understand the complexities of working class politics which led to the founding of that current which has dominated the politics of the left ever since.

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, sections of the male working class gradually won the vote. In much of the country, the trade unions, and trade union activists, looked to the Liberal Party as the natural representative of their political interests. In some areas, it was the Tory Party that provided that focus, but *nowhere* was there independent working class organisation.

This set up made for some very curious situations. The Liberal Party was then the main capitalist party. It was dominated by capitalists. So, very often, workers in a particular industry would find themselves engaged in a bitter strike against, say, a mill owner and, a few months later, vote for him as their representative in Parliament.

Such behaviour was justified partly by the famous distinction between politics and economics which has allowed many a subsequent Labour politician off similar hooks,

and partly by the belief that, whatever might be the case at this moment, the economic policies of the Liberals—free trade, a free market, self-help—would maximise the economic goods available and thus allow everybody to be better off.

The underpinning of this curious set up was the economic domination of Britain over the world market, and the consequent expansion of capitalism and rise of working class living standards which had destroyed the radical impulse behind the early Chartist phase of working class organisation.

By the last few years of the century the rise of competing economies in Germany and the USA, and the consequent sharpening of capitalist competition, meant that the base for this soft ride was beginning to erode, and with it there came a new generation of working class militants propelled into political activity.

The 1880s were the crucial years for generating these new people. There was an upsurge of working class struggle and organisation which included large and successful strikes amongst groups of unskilled and semi-skilled workers previously thought unorganisable. In a period of sharp economic fluctuations, the terrain of the class struggle was constantly shifting.

Workers Expectations

1886 saw unemployed workers rioting in central London. 1887 saw coal strikes in Scotland and Northumberland and, on 13 November, the 'Bloody Sunday' police attack on a left wing meeting in Trafalgar Square. 1888 saw better economic conditions and the successful strike by the East London Match girls. 1889 saw the formation of dockers' and gasworkers' unions and major strikes by both groups in London. In addition, that year the Miners Federation of Great Britain was formed. Further strikes by gas workers, a rail strike in Scotland and a major strike at Manningham Mills in Bradford took place in 1890.

It is clear even from that short list of highlights that those years were ones of upturn in the movement, with struggle leading to other struggles, new organisations developing, a generalisation of workers' consciousness and a new openness to socialist ideas.

Such a situation was tailor-made for the growth of a revolutionary organisation, and certainly individual revolutionaries played a very prominent role in many of these struggles. Eleanor Marx, for example, was involved in most of the big strikes in London, helped form the gasworkers' union, wrote its constitution and was elected to its executive, a post she held until her death. It is unnerving to think that David Basnett today heads a union set up by Karl Marx's daughter.

But such a situation is never simple. Neither of the two major socialist organ-

isations of the time, the Social Democratic Federation and the Socialist League, were able to recruit massively out of the struggles, largely because they did not understand how to relate to the struggles *as organisations*. There were, too, other political forces around which had their own ideas of the way forward, notably Keir Hardie, whose project was never anything other than change through parliament.

The ILP came to represent the organised form of that reformist current, but in the early days the boundaries of the two different tendencies were not at all clear. At local level people worked together. The SDF, usually thought of as the most sectarian and dogmatic of the Marxist organisations, was, in West Ham at least, very successful at winning local council elections. Local ILPs, on the other hand, played prominent roles in strikes and other working class struggles. To the activists who came flooding into the various organisations available, it was by no means clear cut which organisation represented which tendency.

The ILP, founded in January 1893, took many of its members from the provincial Fabian Societies, despite the fact that the national organisation, opposed to working class organisation, sent Bernard Shaw to try to wreck the founding conference. And, in its early years, it included Tom Mann, whose whole political life was dedicated to socialism and who understood very clearly the need for working class struggle. Mann was, in fact, elected National Secretary in 1894. On the other hand, it included Philip Snowden, who was, all his life, a dedicated opponent of socialism and defender of Gladstonian Liberal economics.

The issues which are crystal clear in hindsight were not at all clear to the people involved in them at the time. One of the merits of this book is that it brings out very clearly the fact that the early ILP was a compromise: it contained socialists who wanted to fight capitalism and it contained reformers who wanted to compromise with it.

One index of that was a resolution moved by the Manchester branches at the founding conference, which called upon members to refuse to support any candidate who was not a socialist. This was defeated. Now this, of course, was not just a rejection of revolutionary socialism, but of consistent reformism as well, but, placed in its context, it showed that there was one current inside the ILP that placed socialism first and another that placed electoral success first. There was even a debate over the name: *Socialist Labour Party*, or *Independent Labour Party*.

The question facing the new organisation was: which current would predominate. As it turned out, the organisation was founded at the end of the period of successful workers' struggles and had to build itself in a period of retreat and downturn. The employers counter-attacked very determinedly, the new unions lost members and even the much better established craft unions found themselves on the retreat. These, of course, were exactly the circumstances which favoured the most right-wing of the tendencies.

The path to electoral success seemed a valid one in the harsh world of the late 1890s, with the employers on the offensive. As the ILP hardened and solidified, and as it built a stable internal structure dominated by people who were determined to maintain labour organisation but also determined to get into parliament, electoralism took over.

This meant the destruction of other impulses that were present in the early phase of the ILP. Winning elections requires a single-minded devotion, and, as Howell puts it:

...the ILP's emergence and survival involved the canalisation and dilution of energies that had ignored the boundaries of conventional politics. Loss lay not just in the rapid subordination of ethical sentiments to electoral imperatives, but in a long-lasting strait-jacketing of thought, not just about the means to socialism, but also about the content of any socialist society.'

That choice, at least for the leadership of the ILP, was easily made: Howell shows how, from very early on, the National Advisory Committee devoted its time to discussing virtually nothing but elections.

Lack of political clarity in a period of class retreat was fatal for the impulse towards socialism that was undoubtedly one of the currents present in the early ILP. If you put the notion of socialism at the centre of your politics, then you are forced all the time to think about the means by which it can be obtained. That impulse can lead you in the direction of revolutionary development as the lessons of the other roads become clearer and clearer: that in fact was the road trodden by Tom Mann.

On the other hand, if you put the winning of elections at the centre of your politics, then you are forced all the time to think about the means by which *that* might be achieved. And the logic of that is that you start to think about the alliances you can make with the various non-socialist forces that exist to the right: that in fact was the road trodden by Ramsay MacDonald, and the bulk of the ILP.

The force to the right that had to be wooed in order to win elections was the Radical wing of Liberalism and the 'Lib-Lab' coalition which produced a number of working class non-socialist MPs and councillors. In many areas, in particular some of the miners' constituencies, there were 'organic links' between the trade unions and the Liberal Party of the kind that we are told today are characteristic of the Labour Party. One strategy for winning seats was to make various sorts of deals about selection of candidates, joint and cross voting, and what not, with precisely this force.

In the 1890s the ILP flirted here and there with that alliance, but the founding of the LRC meant that this became *the* strategy for the fledgling Labour Party: it was founded to pursue independent *Labour* not socialist representation.

Whatever the membership of the ILP might have thought or wanted, the deal was to a large extent the result of the manipulation of the ILP leadership, in particular McDonald. They had persuaded the leadership of the unions that independent

Labour representation was possible without letting the socialist wolves off the hook, and they went on to persuade the Liberal Party leadership that it was in their interest to come to an electoral deal with the LRC.

Thus, from its very foundation, the Labour Party contained within it the two different tendencies of mythology. It was never simply a socialist party dedicated to changing the world, but it was also never *simply* a vehicle for the right. After all, the SDF were among the founders.

Electoral dominance

The central lesson is not that it was a question of right or left, but that it was never anything but a question of elections. Winning seats on every possible board, council, whatever, was the dominant force. It was that which led inevitably to the shoddy tale of compromise and sell out that makes up the familiar history of the Labour Party because it meant, from the start, an alliance with alien, anti-working class currents.

It is on the details of those squalid deals that this book is strongest. Despite its title, it contains much more about the Liberal party than about strikes. It is, a consequence both of that and of the author's style, a work of mind-numbing tedium. It does, however, contain material you won't find elsewhere.

The question which is inevitably raised is: was such a development, the dominance of the British Labour movement by a thoroughly rotten political party which was only ever even reformist in its best moments, absolutely inevitable? Of course, the general answer must be: no. Nothing in political life is impossible, it all depends on what workers do.

More precisely, though, it is possible at

least to enumerate the factors that led to the outcome of the process. The 1880s saw the emergence of a new layer of militants, who confronted a working class movement dominated by the most mindless forms of class collaboration. Some, the group around Engels, William Morris' Socialist League, were undoubtedly revolutionaries. Others, like the SDF, were too, by and large. There was also a hardline reformist wing around the Fabians, and, in different terms the like of Hardie.

In the period of working class advance these two tendencies could work together without the differences becoming too great. But as the ruling class regained the initiative, the consequences of choosing an electoral perspective to the exclusion of all else drew its proponents to the right. Their organisation rigidified and came to be dominated by people whose commitments were only and above all to Parliament.

When, nearly two decades later, the working class once more went on the offensive, the die was cast: the bulk of the militants looked for new forms of struggle because the main 'labour' organisation was so compromised as to be meaningless.

It has a familiar ring. A generation radicalised in struggle and then dividing in a downturn. A choice between revolutionary socialism and increasingly right-wing reformism. Don't despair. The material conditions for the triumph of the reformist current last time round was the strength of British capitalism resting on the possession of a vast colonial empire. Things are different today. This story can have a happy ending. ■

Colin Sparks

British Workers and the Independent Labour Party D Howard
Manchester University Press, £9.50



Kier Hardie and his Independent Labour Party refused to join other working class MPs who sat with the liberals

The bosses' bards

NOW THAT Ted Hughes is Poet Laureate are we going to see the intrusion of such things as rate capping and the miners' strike into the royal Odes? A look back tells us more.

The first official Poet Laureate was Dryden, appointed by Charles II at an annual wage of £200 and 126 gallons of best Canary wine. Although one reason for the appointment was mere royal vanity (surely any king worth his salt should have his own poet), it was also very much a political decision.

The monarchy had only just been restored after the death of Cromwell, and was by no means secure. It was a period of different religious and economic factions competing bitterly for power, and, although the pulpit was still the most important means of reaching the masses, in the cities amongst a middle class growing swiftly both in size and power, the theatre was immensely popular and therefore one of the most important means of propaganda.

State and church

Dryden himself certainly can't be accused of political naivety, or of allowing his art to stand in the way of his interests. He wrote poems praising Cromwell and then after the restoration praising Charles II; he first defended the Anglican Church and then on the succession of the Catholic James II defended Papacy.

Thomas Shadwell who picked the wrong side during one particular wrangle, and attacked Dryden, paid the price and didn't have a single one of his plays performed for the next eight years. It turned out, however, to his advantage in the end. For when William III, who unfortunately for Dryden was a protestant Whig, ascended to the throne, Dryden was dismissed and Shadwell took his place.

In 1789 a hundred years of ruling class complacency was shattered by the French revolution. The state needed re-assurance and in terms of the Poet Laureateship this was amply represented by Southey and Wordsworth, who were, what the establishment likes best, reformed rebels.

Both had been ardent supporters of the revolution. Wordsworth had even gone over to France during its course.

But as the French revolution consumed itself, terrified by the ensuing violence and the rise of Napoleon, and without any political model to sustain their idealism, both poets, along with many other intellectuals of their day, moved swiftly to the right.

Southey, who had been expelled from school for writing against flogging ended up writing odes to George III and Queen Charlotte. Indeed his first poem as Laureate was censored as it was so viciously anti-French that it was felt it would endanger peace negotiations.

It was up to Tennyson to really put the

Poet Laureate back on the map. A personal friend of Queen Victoria, his involvement with politics increased with his fame, his writings epitomising the attitudes of the upper and middle classes of Victorian Britain.

He moved from heralding an age of science and progress (with some guilty regrets over the vast poverty and suffering of what was becoming the most heavily industrialised country in the world), to a poetry thick with nostalgia and sentimentality that reflected a nation that had really passed its peak and whose vast empire was beginning to come under challenge from other nations.

He wrote poems attacking Russia, France and Germany. But in a poem he wrote in the 1880s he revealed the more fundamental fear that was still at the heart of his class:

'You, you that have the ordering of her fleet,
If you should only compass her disgrace,
When all men starve, the mob's million feet
Will kick you from your place,
But then too late, too late.'

If Tennyson had been belligerent his successor, Austin, was just plain vicious. He took over when colonial rivalry had reached its peak with the scramble for Africa. An arch right winger and leader writer for the Tory daily, *The Standard*, Austin's career as a poet had already been distinguished by Bismark asking for a copy of his anti-French poem *The Challenge* shortly before destroying the French army at Sedan.

Austin, like his fellow Laureates, accurately reflected ruling class opinion of the period, more accurately at times than they wanted. When the British South Africa Company mounted an illegal peacetime raid on the Transvaal, causing an international incident and the resignation of Cecil Rhodes, Austin, to the immense embarrassment of the government, had a poem printed in *The Times* fully supporting the action.

But, as the Boer war proved only three years later, he had merely said what his rulers had been thinking.

Knowing that the Laureate is the voice of the ruling class it is easy to guess from reading Austin's poetry, full of jingoism and sabre rattling, where it would all end, and sure enough he died on the eve of the First World War.

The war destroyed a good deal of the old order of things in Britain. The working class was now consolidated and better organised, and even had its own political party. This resulted in a Laureate being chosen who had more of an appeal to the 'common man'.

This was John Masefield. He was a popularist in the best *Sun* sense of the word. He had made his name writing poems about earthy rural characters and seamen, and had served the perfect apprenticeship for Poet

Laureate by working for the British propaganda department in the first world war.

As Laureate he was responsible for producing some of the most appallingly trivial poems about the royal family ever written. But also, more tragically, he had to write trying to justify the Second World War. His poem *A Generation Risen*, in praise of young people at war, ironically appeared just after his own son had been killed in action.

His successor C Day-Lewis represents in the twentieth century what Southey and Wordsworth were in the nineteenth. As a young man he had been part of a group inspired by Russia and the working class movements of the thirties. On the eve of the Spanish civil war he actually joined the Communist Party.

But the Communist Party was unable to provide him with an ideology that could deal with the defeat of the Spanish left or the growth of Fascism in Europe.

He, together with a large section of the intellectual left, crumbled overnight. Within three years he was working for the ministry of information disseminating war time propaganda.

A different course

By 1967 the post war boom was over, unemployment was beginning to creep up, and the unions were beginning to flex their muscles. Day-Lewis leapt fiercely into the 'Should the Unions be allowed to run Britain' debate with a piece commissioned by the *Daily Mail* in response to an idea that each worker should work thirty minutes a day free for Britain.

'Do you remember those mornings after the blitzes...

such days are here again... Your enemies are nearer home yet, nibbling at Britain's nerve

Few stood on their dignity or lines of demarcation

No haggling about overtime...'

It was of course Harold Wilson that appointed C Day-Lewis.

If Lewis was the poet of the upturn then Betjeman was the poet of crisis. The bubble had burst, British industry was in collapse, unemployment was rocketing and the miners brought down the government.

Naturally enough we were given a poet to take our minds off things. Another popularist, Radio and TV performer, Betjeman's anthologies actually sold hundreds of thousands of copies.

He was the great peddler of nostalgia, the poetic equivalent to television's *Brideshead Revisited*, looking back to days where the working class weren't so apparent, with, as he put it, 'A great admiration for the land owning classes and the houses and the parks in which they were lucky enough to live.'

With such a pedigree it seems unlikely that the new Laureate's poems will be chanted in quite the same way as the workers changed Mayakovsky's when they stormed the winter palace:

'Guzzle your pineapples

Gulp your champagne

Your last day has come bourgeoisie

Never again.' ■

Keith Walters

Non-Marxist...and marginal

I WAS pleased to see an article concerning the situation in Iran in *Socialist Worker Review* (January 1985, issue 1), after several years of silence by the majority of British left wing organisations, including the Socialist Workers Party. However, I would question both the writer's and the editorial board's motives for publishing such a 'wishy-washy' article, as it was neither accurate nor analytical in its description of the situation in Iran and the task of the left in general.

The article was poorly researched, even failing to change the figure for rent accurately from toman into sterling. More alarmingly, it also stated that the Hojatieh was forced out of the political scene by 'technocrats'. As far as I am aware it is still a faction of the government and is very much alive. For example, it still controls the 'Ministry of Islamic economy' and 'The Guardian Council'.

Lastly, and most importantly, I was amazed to read an article in a left wing organisation's review that degraded and falsified the Iranian left (a mistake hopefully, like the others, due to sloppiness rather than wilful negligence) to a degree that was totally unacceptable. Please note, Mr Marshall and Ms Pouya, that the Mojahideen can

hardly be labelled as a 'left wing' organisation as they are merely radical Moslems (a fact they themselves like to emphasise so much).

Similarly, the Tudeh Party is anything but a communist party. Its links with the Soviet Union and the KGB are well known facts and the party is more like a spying faction working for the Kremlin and the Kremlin alone.

So, out of the three organisations that you named, only one could be accurately described as 'left wing'. But what happened to the remaining 20 to 30 left wing organisations and parties that were formed after the 1979 revolution in Iran? Should not some of them be included in your 'detailed' analysis of the situation in Iran?

Finally, I would like to point out that we welcome any attempt to analyse the situation as long as it is based on Marxist methods of analysing—namely historical and dialectical materialism. I would urge these comrades to go back to first principles and try to write something that will not mislead readers of the review in an attempt to justify theories on the bankruptcy of socialist organisations in third world countries.■

A Asgari
North London

LINDSEY GERMAN is, as usual, wrong. I don't accept the reformism of the Labour and trade union bureaucracies, nor do I use patriarchy as a cover for it. My position is *for* class struggle and *against* patriarchal class struggle. Her problem is that in refusing to systematically account for the ways in which men's power over women has not only subordinated women but distorted the priorities and practices of class struggle she, and the SWP, can't explain the links between Labourism and sexism.

Finally, my book *Wigan Pier Revisited* has a chapter on the miners, which tries to explain how their patriarchal priorities produced a lack of political emphasis on a whole range of trade union demands that would have changed the lives not only of miners, but the whole community.

It wasn't embarrassing that it came out on the eve of the miners' strike, it seems to me it was most pertinent. But then if you can't see that, then it perhaps explains why the SWP has become (a) completely marginal and (b) so confused about the current miners' strike.■

Beatrix Campbell

Every month *Socialist Worker Review* publishes articles on a wide variety of subjects. The aftermath of the miners' strike has itself created the urgent need for debate and discussion. In addition *Socialist Worker Review* has ranged widely in recent months—from Gillick to the Popular Front and from Argentina to Auschwitz. On all these and other questions we welcome your letters and brief contributions for our forthcoming issues.

Send all correspondence to:
Socialist Review
PO Box 82
London E2

Reviews

Fighting anti-communism

The Socialist Register 1984
Merlin Press. £5.50

THE CURRENT *Socialist Register* (dated 1984, but this annual always appears at the end of the year) is devoted to a single theme: *The Uses of Anti-Communism*.

It is a good idea and the editors have pulled together a great deal of valuable material.

Especially interesting and informative are the pieces on *Fighting the Cold War on the Home front: America, Britain, Australia and Canada* (by Reg Whitaker) and *Ernest Bevin and the Cold War: 1945-50* by John Saville, a devastatingly effective demonstration of the central role of the British Labour Party in promoting cold war politics in Europe and Asia.

The other essays, (there are 14 in all) are uneven but almost always instructive.

The theme of the book is clearly stated in the opening paragraph of the first article: *Reflections on Anti-Communism* by Ralph Miliband and Marcel Liebman.

'Ever since the Bolshevik Revolution of October, anti-communism has been a

dominant theme in the political warfare waged by conservative forces against the left, communist and non-communist; and, since 1945 and the onset of the Cold War in particular, anti-communism has been ceaselessly disseminated by a multitude of different sources and means—newspapers, radio, television, films, articles, pamphlets, books, speeches, sermons, official documents—in a massive enterprise of propaganda and indoctrination. No subject other than 'communism' has received anything like the same volume of criticism and denunciation.'

Absolutely right, and the reactionary intentions and effects of this brain-washing operation are well demonstrated in the book.

There is a problem though, and a very serious weakness in this book. The real nature of the 'communism' denounced by the conservative, fascist and social-democratic propagandists has changed fundamentally since the triumph of Stalinism in the USSR.

Of course it is true that nearly every rebel movement, working class or otherwise, that appears to

threaten the rule of big business anywhere is denounced as 'communist'. But so are the rulers of the USSR and the other Stalinist states.

Of course they are not. Miliband and Liebman recognise this.

'The socialist project means, and certainly meant for Marx, the subordination of the state to society. Precisely the reverse characterises the Soviet system... The domination of the state in that system is assured by an extremely hierarchical, tightly controlled and fiercely monopolistic party aided by a formidable police apparatus... To call this 'socialism' is to degrade the concept to the level assigned to it by its enemies.'

It could have been better put. To describe as 'Soviet' a regime which murderously represses every attempt at independent working class organisation, let alone workers' councils, is to accept the lying hypocrisy of American and Russian propagandists. Still, we are agreed, the Stalinist regimes have nothing to do with socialism or communism. *They are hostile to both, as hostile as Reagan or Thatcher.*

Unfortunately, most of the contributors to this volume, in so far as they address the question, assume the opposite. In particular, Jon Halliday's *Anti-Communism and the Korean War 1950-53* is an unblushing apologia for the vicious, anti-working class dictatorship of Kim Il Sung.

This said, the book is worthy of study. A good deal can be learned from it. And since it is likely to be ignored in 'respectable' quarters, local libraries should be pestered to get it.■

Duncan Hallas

Down the third road

Social Policy and Socialism
Bob Deacon
Pluto Press £6.95

Social Policy and Socialism is a study of welfare in six so-called socialist countries that sets out to draw up a blueprint of future socialist welfare policies by using the examples of Russia, Hungary, Poland, China, Cuba and Mozambique. Not surprisingly, the first three have none at all. This is the most interesting part of the book, and anyone who thinks that socialism comes in Russian tanks should read it. Workers' housing, social security and health are sacrificed to production targets set by bureaucrats who enjoy higher pay, better accommodation and the medication of closed access clinics.

Though he equivocates over the question of state capitalism, Deacon finds that none of this adds up to socialism. However, when the focus shifts to the third world, he views the use of communal housing, local democracy and preventive medicine as genuine commitments to socialism, even though the working class has never held power.

Whatever he learned about the Soviet bloc in his days with IS, Deacon has forgotten with regard to Mao, Castro and Machel: no doubt they have brought about improvements in people's standards of living, but to interpret this, and papier-mache 'democratic committees' as genuine socialist welfare is completely mistaken.

One of the main criteria Deacon correctly uses to ascertain the socialist nature of a regime's welfare policy is the sexual division of labour. After saying that the 1917 to 1921 period of the Russian Revolution 'remains the only glimpse of policies that match up to our theoretically derived communist future', he goes on to state that the subjugation of women is due to the lack of an independent feminist movement that could push their case.

But how does this square with his comments on the Russian Revolution? Militant working class women who wanted to challenge their social roles were in the Bolshevik Party, not forming separate groups outside it.

At the end Deacon concludes that Eastern Europe will require a workers' revolution. Quite right! But he goes on to argue that third world regimes already blessed with socialist leaders will need either struggles from an emerging working class to keep them on the straight and narrow, or a dynamic leadership that will inspire struggle from below.

In the first instance he's partially right. Revolution will be required—but not to keep them in check, rather to ditch them altogether. As to his second option, the mind boggles. What sort of dynamic

leadership will encourage revolution against itself?

Finally the book compares various attitudes towards 'prefigurative socialism'. He uses as an example the argument between the SWP and left Labour councils, who have brought in scab labour to break council workers' strikes.

Of Labour Deacon says that they are trying to build socialism under capitalism, but at the expense of the only people who can make it a reality. Of the SWP, we relate correctly to workplace organisation but pay no attention to presenting socialist visions that will inspire the working class.

His own solution is drawn from Vincente Navarro, whose 'third road' is to transform the state from within by the struggles of public employees in alliance with workers

A tale of two books

The Nehrus and the Gandhis: An Indian Dynasty

Tariq Ali
Picador £2.50

India: The Siege Within
M J Akbar
Penguin £2.95

THE APPEARANCE of two modestly-priced paperbacks on contemporary Indian history is an unusual event. Even less usual is the fact that one of them is a very useful book which reveals the nature and role of communalism in Indian and Pakistani politics. Unfortunately, it is not the book written by Tariq Ali.

This is another act in the unfolding of a minor tragedy, as a very considerable socialist talent is dissipated. By now Tariq Ali is little more than an eloquent apologist for reformist demagogues around the world—Ken Livingstone one day, Indira Gandhi the next.

His book charts the careers of Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi and her sons Sanjay and Rajiv. It is not a political book in that you never learn in a systematic way how their politics developed, or very much about the contemporary history of India. Snippets of information are dropped in at random points in the stories of these great people—and not always very accurate snippets, either.

For instance, he misses out that Nehru's rise to the top of the Congress in the 1920s was on the back of waves of struggle, and that having got there, he then compromised with the Indian bourgeoisie at every critical point of the anti-British struggle.

To take just two examples, he misses out how Nehru initially built his political reputation by associating with the peasant movement in UP (a province in north India) in the early 1920s, or that his election as Congress President in 1929

outside. This is possible, he argues, as the state is nothing more than a set of class power relations and can be tampered with to put the workers in the saddle.

It is not made clear just how public sector workers and their allies are going to transform the police, the judiciary and the army from within. Nor how Reagan, Thatcher, Chernenko and their class are going to accept being 'power relations' and just say goodbye. In this part of the book Deacon's initial premise dovetails into a rather strange conclusion.

He holds to the position that unless the left draw up convincing blueprints of a socialist society of the future, then the right will have a field day in popular consciousness and workers will never advance beyond self-interested struggles. In this instance he has grasped a half truth, the full theory clearly being false.

followed on from a mass strike wave in 1928-29 which linked in with a revival of the anti-imperialist campaign.

Although Tariq Ali runs a commentary through the book 'putting the right line' at various points, he carefully avoids the obvious but rather damaging conclusion that the overriding interest of Nehru, Indira Gandhi and her sons has always been the survival of the Indian ruling class. The book gets worse towards the end, as he has obviously swallowed the authorised version of Indira Gandhi's fall from power in 1977. This leads him to make elementary mistakes which have the effect of altering history.

For instance, he argues that Indira Gandhi called the 1977 election to 'decide the issues' after a member of her cabinet, Jagjivan Ram, had split. He further argues that she did not expect to win, which clearly leads to the conclusion that she retained some democratic principles. This is a total load of rubbish. At the time, almost everyone expected her to win, and there was no sign that the regime was crumbling when she called a snap election on 18 January 1977. The whole edifice only began to collapse when Jagjivan Ram split on 2 February—after she called the election. Tariq Ali's version invests Indira Gandhi with an utterly undeserved integrity.

There are many more examples of these kinds in the book. The whole thing is a wretched apology for Indian populism. The only reason to buy this book is if you're stumped for a birthday present for a friend in the Congress Party.

By contrast *India: the Siege Within* is a very good book. Let's say at once that Akbar is a liberal journalist with massive illusions in the virtues of Indian bourgeois

If it was simply a case of competing, Saatchi and Saatchi style, with the right for the ideas in workers' heads, then there could never be class struggle in the first place—the ruling class having, as Marx said, 'control over the prevailing ideas of society'. The half that Deacon did get right was the need to carry workers' struggles beyond the immediate issue and into the general struggle for socialism.

Such a process requires a revolutionary party built within the ranks of the working class. A party that will provide leadership not merely with vision of the future but also with the practical application of past experiences. As Lenin and the Bolsheviks did in October 1917. Still, this book is worth a read, if only for the information it gives on the Soviet bloc. ■

Sean Piggott

democracy. The strength of the book is that it does a comprehensive job of explaining how communalism operates in Indian and Pakistani politics, and in the process does an excellent job of destroying the ideology of Pakistan and of Sikh separatism (Akbar is an Indian Muslim who obviously loathes the clergy).

For this reason alone it should be required reading for all SWP members in areas with Asian communities as it contains the basic material for defeating the arguments of communalist politicians now on the rise in those communities.

Akbar also provides an insight into parts of Indian history which usually don't get an airing. One third of the book is about Kashmir, where the nationalist organisation was both anti-Pakistani and overwhelmingly Muslim, led by Sheikh Mohammed Abdulla. Although Abdulla was a thoroughly bourgeois politician, he did lead an organisation which defeated Muslim communalism, overthrew the Maharajah, and carried out a land reform. This stands in contrast to Nehru, who compromised with communalism, compromised with the British, and failed with land reform.

The book also introduces another mislaid piece of history—the Self Respect Movement of Tamil Nadu of the 1920s and 30s—a mass anti-caste organisation led by a militant atheist, E V Ramaswami Naicker. Although this movement has now degenerated into a couple of corrupt bourgeois parties which run the state, it does show that there is an anti-caste tradition in Indian politics and it is possible to build mass campaigns on that basis.

Because Akbar is a liberal journalist the working class only makes fleeting appearances in his book, although he does point out the class divisions inside the Sikhs

which led to the rise of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, the Sikh separatist leader.

What you do get is an able and interesting introduction to the history of India and Pakistan and a wealth of basic information in a

No problems solved

Art Politics Cinema
edited by D Georgakas and
Lenny Rubenstein
Pluto, £7.50

THIS book is a collection of interviews by the editors of the leftist US film magazine *Cineaste*. It contains some interesting material like Pontecorvo talking about *Battle of Algiers*, Bertolucci about *1900*, and John Howard Lawson, one of the famous Hollywood Ten black-listees, talking about organising the Screen Writers Guild in Hollywood in the 1930s.

Because it is a series of interviews it does not have a connected case to argue, other than the clichés trotted out by Robert Ebert in the foreword, so it is not a book to buy if you want an introduction to the problems its title suggests. The

Zero rating

Marxism and Historical Writing
Paul Hirst
Routledge & Keegan Paul, £20.00

THIS is a book of rather specialised interest: a collection of essays written from 1975 onwards, and mainly concerned with criticism of the writings of Perry Anderson and E P Thompson.

It also, the author tells us, tries 'to settle accounts justly and honestly with Louis Althusser and Nicos Poulantzas', and includes two chapters 'which make my own political concerns clear'.

Hirst is the foremost of that group of British former disciples of Althusser whose 'theoretical practice' led them ultimately to reject historical materialism (in any sense I can recognise it), the labour theory of value, and, if the final essays of this book are a fair guide, the class struggle itself.

Now there is nothing remarkable or original in these ideas. They are and have been, since at least Ramsay MacDonald's time, the common coin of the Labour right. What is unusual is the route by which Hirst and his associates have arrived at them.

From a 'Marxist-Leninist journal' (Hirst's description) through an attempt to 'push forward Althusser's main lines of theoretical work' to a position 'which shatters much of the substance of Althusser's theory' (Hirst again) to political positions entirely acceptable to Roy Hattersley—it is quite an evolution.

Two points of comment. Were all

form which socialists can use in understanding the politics of those countries and arguing against communist politics in Britain. It's a bargain at the price. ■
Barry Pavier

interview form also imposes limits on what the book can get away with: the interviewers had to be just as nice to the stool-pigeon Budd Schulberg as to his victim Lawson. The taste of the interviewers is not mine either—they have a penchant for European art cinema—but if you are into that sort of thing then you will find all the right names here.

Lastly, this is another product of the Pluto Press get-rich-quick-scheme: they have put their covers on a US publication without lifting an editorial finger. So Pontecorvo's film that we know as *Queimada* appeared in the US, and in this book, as *Burn!*, without even the courtesy of a footnote explaining things. ■

Colin Sparks

the prolonged and arduous labours of 'theoretical practice' really necessary to arrive at such banal right wing conclusions as:

'Labour should not simply renationalise...but rethink the economic role of public sector industries... Likewise the priority cannot be simply to spend more on health, education and welfare but to rethink the ways in which such services are delivered... A sustained incomes policy... Incomes policy cannot be a matter of a two or three year wage freeze... Reflation must be based on an agreement with our partners in the EEC.'

The second point is: was anything of value, in terms of Marxist method or factual results, obtained in the course of the whole long Althusser debate? I have yet to be convinced that it added one jot to the armour of revolutionary Marxism. Others whose opinions cannot be dismissed, notably Alex Callinicos, take a different view. One thing is certain. Hirst's politics are rotten.

But does that entitle us to dismiss his views on historical writing? On his principles, yes. For Hirst says that

'writing must be governed by considerations of its political value and not its contribution to the 'discipline' of history.'

The political value of this volume is zero. ■

Duncan Hallas

Facts and figures

Communism in Eastern Europe
T Rakowska-Harmstone ed
Manchester University Press, £7.50
Planning and Profits in Socialist Economies
J C Asselain
RKP, £12.50

INTERNATIONAL relations specialists are certainly not the most coherent thinkers and writers in social science. Consider *Communism in Eastern Europe*, a collection of essays meant as a textbook for university students. It deals with a number of Eastern European countries individually, as well as a few general issues about the area. The essays are typically crammed with information about politics, the economy, social structure and general outlook of these countries in the 1980s.

This is a favourite style of international relations experts. You might not have a single worthwhile idea about what makes society tick, but keep piling facts and figures up. If nothing comes out of it at least you will have bluffed your way into an academic post.

For the persevering reader, however, there are some benefits. It is quite striking to realise how differentiated Eastern Europe is. There are differences in the degree of industrialisation and of course the size and experience of the working class.

Political conditions vary greatly and there is much more scope for activity in some, for example Hungary, than in others. At the same time the ruling classes are not simply obedient stooges of Moscow. A degree of independence in how they pursue their own national interests exists and it varies from country to country.

There are also common characteristics. Most of the ruling classes share a similar dirty past in securing their ascendancy after World War II. Rampant chauvinism holds the state together and forces the rulers to make some show of independence. Most significant of all, the ruling class look with unease into the future: Deep economic and social crisis is facing them just as much as their counterparts in the West.

This crisis is the main concern of J C Asselain's *Planning and Profits in Socialist Economies*, although he largely forgets that the West is also in crisis. His main argument is surprisingly simple, given the length of the book and the ponderous and esoteric writing.

Asselain starts with a description of the 'pure command economy'—his 'model'. It involves the complete exclusion of private enterprise, centralised planning and production by directive and a system of incentives. For the author this is the crux of the problem as far as Eastern Europe is concerned.

These economies have all done away with the market and are paying the price in terms of inevitable inefficiency and slackness.

He goes on to say that reality in Eastern Europe has never exactly been like his 'model'. Particular enterprises have always had some residual freedom, figures have been 'massaged' to give management new options and there has always been a lot of fraud. All this, he claims, is due to the impossibility of applying the principles of a planned economy to human beings.

The imposition of such a system lead to 'fundamental imbalances'. Unfortunately you will nowhere find a clear statement of what these 'fundamental imbalances' are. By gleaning bits here and there it is possible to work out that they are to be found in the frequent mismatches of demand and supply, which leads either to gluts of goods or, more often, long queues, and a reluctance to innovate which leaves firms using the same old techniques.

The rest of this book is an obscure account of changes in economic policy in Eastern Europe since Stalin. The rulers tried to do something about the distortions caused by planning and they introduced measures of the free market. Each time, however, the plan proved too strong for the gentle touch of market forces and defeated them. Asselain concludes that this must be so, and unless planning is eliminated to allow private initiative to flourish, there is no hope for the people of the 'socialist countries'.

You would be quite right to object that this is nothing like a general theory of the crisis in Eastern Europe. There the crisis means a failure to raise living standards, low quality consumption goods, bad housing, waste and low productivity in industry and disasters in agriculture, apathy and corruption all round. Has all this been explained by these 'fundamental imbalances'? Not at all. It is anyone's guess how these mismatches in supply and demand and the failure to innovate result in the above list of disasters. And how will the free market solve these problems? If it is so wonderful, then why are the economies of the West in such a state?

In both East and West there are deeper forces at play. The world produces for the sake of accumulation and this is the core of all its problems. Accumulation pursued for its own sake always speeds up and crushes people under its weight. At the same time it has a central flaw which forces it to stop. Classical Marxism called this the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. It would be really interesting to find out how this law operates in Eastern Europe. Platitudes about market

clearance rates are at best questions of third rate importance.

It never occurs to these economists to ask who plans and who is being planned. Planning in the USSR is an instrument of rapid accumulation. What else could force planners to demand that their targets are regularly exceeded rather than met? The ruling class uses this blunt instrument to squeeze every bit of effort out of its workers. This in itself is enough to explain the legendary inefficiency and corruption.

In order to work planning requires the conscious participation of a free people. Otherwise it has to rely on incentives, compulsion and fear. Until the mid sixties transport costs were not included in prices in a country the size of the USSR. The reform of 1965 made a point of demanding that consumer demand and the weather be taken into account. They could tell people what and how much they could consume, but how on earth did they hope to order the weather about? It is ridiculous to mistake such

'planning' with the way in which a free socialist society would organise its affairs.

There is no doubt that constructing a planned economy will pose enormous problems. The task of gathering information, processing it, reaching extremely complex decisions and making sure that they are put into practice is huge. Doing so democratically adds an extra dimension, but it also solves a myriad of information gathering and incentive problems.

Of course such a process would not work smoothly from day one because the workers who will have to run it will not have much experience of working the system, but over time there is no reason why things should not run smoothly.

It is quite absurd to sing hymns to the ghost of free competition in the midst of the world crisis. Rational planning is the only future for humanity, which has grown too big and too sophisticated to depend any longer on the blind laws of the market. ■

Costas Lapvitas

Duma inquiry into the treatment of the Social Democratic deputies arrested in 1907. Two agitators, wearing false moustaches, stationed themselves at 6pm near a footbridge leading to the factory. When the workers started home, they shouted, "Comrades! Stop! Allow us to say a few words about the Social Democratic deputies to the Second Duma." After 200 men had gathered, one of the agitators made a short speech, a resolution was passed protesting the government's action, and the meeting broke up before the police could intervene.' (158-9).

Massovka meetings, by contrast, were Sunday outings held under the guise of picnics. Word of the outing would be passed at work. Workers would arrive alone, carrying picnic baskets or musical instruments, in attempts to divert police attention.

Normally such meetings would have 30 to 50 in attendance, although some got as large as 300. (Attention to details such as numbers at meetings, or precise figures about the circulation of newspapers, and even statistics concerning leaflet production and distribution is one of the best features of this book.)

'After hearing several agitational speeches and usually an appeal to join the party, the workers would make plans for future projects, partake in some food and drink and perhaps listen to some poetry or sing revolutionary songs until late at night.'

Elwood has an unusual sense for what organising in the period after 1905 must have been like. He conveys this feeling well. For example:

'Walking down Ekaterinoslavskii Prospekt on a summer evening in 1906 was like strolling through the entire spectrum of Russian oppositional politics. At five o'clock the usual boulevardiers were replaced by members of the various political parties: the first

three blocks were taken over by the Social Democrats, the next by the Bund, then the SRs, the Zionists, on down to the anarchists. Until seven o'clock the Prospekt became ... the "party exchange" where Social Democrats met to discuss politics, exchange literature, receive assignments and perhaps listen to a party speaker.'

But just one year later the activity on the streets in Ekaterinoslav was almost non-existent; the 'basic form of party life' had been extinguished. By 1909 it could be written in *Pravda*, (Trotsky's Vienna paper) that in Ekaterinoslav,

'the workers complain that for more than a year not a living soul who knows anything about the party or about what the proletariat should be doing, has shown his face in this town.'

Ekaterinoslav party membership dropped from 2,000 during the revolution to 100 in 1908, and by 1910 there were no active party members in the town at all. For the Ukraine as a whole party membership dropped from 20,000 in 1905-6 to only about 200 members in 1910. Most of the organisers in Ekaterinoslav had been arrested in April 1908 and during 1910 only one leaflet was issued from the Social Democrats in the city.

The local party was only revived by a visit by Semkov, a Bolshevik who was recruiting students for a party school being organised by Lenin near Paris. Semkov selected a pro-party Menshevik (ie one who opposed liquidating the RSDRP), Zevin, to attend the school, and these two re-established the underground organisation in the city. By the end of 1911, there were 150 members in Ekaterinoslav.

Elwood's book provides a useful description of the ways in which the Russian Social Democrats coped with this most difficult period of building and prepared for the renewed upsurge before the First World War. ■

Glen Perusek

Spreading the word

Russian Social Democracy in the Underground: A Study of the RSDRP in the Ukraine, 1907-1914.
Ralph Carter Elwood,
Van Gorcum, 1974

BECAUSE of the importance of maintaining revolutionary organisation in periods of low levels of class struggle, any discussion of the historical experience of the Marxist movement during such periods is extremely valuable.

One such discussion is presented in this book. Elwood is a North American academic. His book is a poor guide to the faction fighting in the Russian Social Democratic Party during the period of reaction—he is quite sympathetic to the position of people such as Trotsky who called for unity between various tendencies in the party without regard to political differences.

But this should not overshadow the great value of the descriptive material in this book. Elwood has an extremely acute sense for organisational details. He presents a great picture of the life of the Russian Social Democrats during the most difficult period of building.

For example, Elwood gives a detailed description of the organisation of propaganda circles. These he calls 'the lifeblood of an underground organisation'.

After 1905, intellectuals left the RSDRP in droves. As a result, it was necessary to train new propagandists, and at the same time counteract demoralisation after the failed revolution.

The propaganda circles—meetings of six to fifteen people—met (if

properly organised) once per week. Under illegal conditions where to meet was actually the hardest problem for local leaders to solve. As Lenin said, the 'room question' was a sore point for many local organisations.

The party generally divided discussion circles into types according to how experienced the members were—'low' circles studied the basics, 'middle' and 'high' circles more complicated subjects. A College of Propagandists was organised by local committees to plan the study circles and to train new propagandists—who would then lead other circles.

Elwood notes that 'while all of the major Ukrainian organisations had a College of Propagandists at one time or another, few lasted for more than six months.' Arrests decimated their ranks, and without trained propagandists, circles had to organise study themselves. The workers in the circles would not accept unprepared or shoddy presentations. The circles chastised such individuals and demanded propagandists who prepared their lectures in advance.

Elwood informs us that two different types of agitational meetings were held: *letuchka* (flying meetings) and *massovki*. Agitation was specifically directed at a given group of workers, 'to call the workers' attention to specific instances of economic exploitation or political oppression.'

Flying meetings were held at factory gates.

'The Kiev Committee, for instance, decided to hold a flying meeting outside the Gretter Factory to coincide with the

The revolutionary road to socialism

An 80-page book outlining what the Socialist Workers Party stands for.



A tool for the bosses

Electronic Illusions

Ian Reinecke
Penguin £2.95

In the week Sir Keith Joseph announces education cuts, it seems ridiculously utopian to predict the near future bringing higher education for everyone up till their mid-20s, a shortened working week of about 28 hours by the mid-1980s, and retirement at 50 by 1990.

All these predictions were nevertheless made by one Chris Evans in 1979 in a book he wrote about microchips. There is no doubt that the technology is available to do all these things, and as microchips become both cheaper and more powerful, education on a mass scale is possible. But there is absolutely no sign that these things are likely to happen without a radical change in the way this technology is being applied.

About the only one of Evans' predictions that has come true is that of a later start to working life, though not for the reasons he suggested.

In opposition to these highly utopian ideas, Reinecke puts forward a view that is encapsulated in his book's subtitle: *A Sceptic's View of Our High Tech Future*.

He explains the development of computers over the last 40 years and illustrates the changes they have brought to industry and commerce, both physically and from the perspective of the workers whose jobs and conditions have been affected by this new technology. In doing so he challenges the view that new technology is of itself neutral and that it will necessarily be put to socially useful ends.

One of the benefits that is claimed for the new electronic technology is that it will bring much greater freedom to all our lives. In practice, when applied to the working environment, it results in a control of the workforce which is equal to or greater than that which went before.

For example, Reinecke compares the pressures of working on the line in the Chrysler plant in Detroit, where the worker could not leave even to grab a drink of water, to computerised telephone exchange systems which automatically alert a supervisor if the operator leaves his or her terminal. Such examples abound; from the word processors which measure productivity to machine tools which are designed to eliminate the possibility of workers being able to slow down the production process. The possibilities for enhanced management control are in fact used as a sales pitch in many cases.

This increase in control comes about because the people who introduce the technology are the

very people who own and run the factories and offices where it is designed to be applied.

The myth that computers expand personal freedom is only one of many that Reinecke tackles. Others include the question of where the new jobs will come from to replace those eliminated by the new technology; why employees aren't paid more if computers are so efficient in running businesses, and why such incomprehensible jargon is used in the description of new technology, and why so little attempt is made to make it accessible to ordinary people.

Unemployment

Take for example the question of jobs. Those who unreservedly support the introduction of new technology take it as an article of faith that new types of jobs will be created to replace those swept away. Reinecke shows that this is not necessarily the case, and that in manufacturing industries in particular a great deal of work is going into the design of machines which will do away with factories full of workers. So far, many of these require too much investment, but the costs are coming down rapidly.

The biggest predicted area of job growth was computer programming. But the initial surge in numbers of programmers in the early 70s has slowed, and the US Bureau of Labour Statistics predict there will be less than 500,000 people employed as programmers in the United States by 1985. Furthermore researchers into artificial intelligence are aiming to produce computers which can programme themselves to solve new problems they come across.

There is no doubt that the rapid growth of the microchip industry has generated a large amount of wealth, both for those companies which produce the chips themselves and those which use them in equipment. But the wealth generated—\$100,000 million yearly turnover worldwide by the early 1990s—remains in the hands of the people who have always controlled the wealth in society.

Where jobs are not made completely obsolete by new technology, deskilling has taken place. A recurring complaint from workers in the different industries which Reinecke has investigated is loss of job satisfaction. This is as true of typists as of telephone engineers. Their jobs have been broken up into a series of repetitive, routine tasks, or very basic maintenance such as replacing faulty circuit boards with new ones. Most of the diagnostic work can be done

by computer.

Some new jobs are created which require much higher levels of skill, for example in electronic engineering, but these are much fewer in number.

In structuring his argument, Reinecke takes on what he sees as the two main camps in favour of electronic technology. The first comprises those who favour its introductions as quickly as possible, dismissing all objections as reactionary and anti-progress. The second camp is more pragmatic, recognises the upheavals the new technology is causing, but is confident it can be done in a socially useful way. This latter group have no fundamental quarrel with capitalism—they are basically reformists, who see the technology being used to make society more equitable and stable. A prime example of the latter is François Mitterrand, whose government is in favour of new technology as a means of French economic growth. Reinecke compares Mitterrand's inability to control and guide the introduction of new technology for the good of all to his inability to carry out his policies in the face of the attack on the franc on the international money market shortly after his election.

Once Reinecke has outlined his reasons for being a sceptic, and given a very good description of the workings of the microchip for laymen, he launches into a descriptions of the changes it has wrought in such areas as tele-

communications, printing, banking, offices, factories, and TV. All are informative and fascinating, but the feeling at the end of this section of the book approaches one of despair. The bloody chip seems unstoppable!

Although Reinecke's sympathies and concern obviously lie with the working class, and though he is obviously aware both of resistance to new technology on the bosses' terms and the reasons such as the recession as to why that resistance has often been easily overcome, his answer as to what we should do about it is principally to educate ourselves. We must not allow the technocrats to have a monopoly of knowledge. This is of course important, because the very speed at which the technology is being developed makes it easy for people to let it all sweep by them.

Besides acquiring knowledge, we are to be sceptical and campaign to force governments to recognise the dangers, and make information available to all. Reinecke admits that though he aims this advice at individuals, this cannot be done by people acting individually. And even though he attacks Mitterrand's brand of pragmatism, he recognises that the likes of Thatcher and Reagan are not even willing to mildly curb the effects of technology.

He does not take up the question of the potential power of workers who operate computers—which is the background to the present strike of DHSS workers in Newcastle.

Nevertheless this is a readable, informative book, on a subject that is going to play an ever-increasing role in all our lives. ■
Mairi Macleod

Radical woolliness

Local Socialism?

Edited by Martin Boddy and
Colin Fudge

Macmillan, £6.95

THIS is a series of essays written and edited (with one exception) by academics active in the Labour Party.

It is notable for four things:

First the word radical. I did not believe it possible to use one adjective so many times in one book. This could be laziness or a house style but it is my impression that it reflects a lack of understanding and precision. It is a useful all-purpose word to give a fresh flavour to a long-chewed reformism.

Second, its woolliness, both in its language and content. It is not an easy read and when I had finished it I felt that I had been right round the topic and returned to the beginning; learning little on the way.

Thirdly the topic. Anyone looking for a whiff of socialism here will be disappointed. Under this false

flag sail sketches of Labour and local government and a quick breeze around four topics: 'women's initiatives', 'race initiatives', 'economic and employment strategies' and 'decentralisation: socialism goes local?' But no answers or proposals—just longer questions.

Lastly, the absence of workers as anything more than at best a fading force.

The book ends with interviews with David Blunkett and Ken Livingstone. Certainly the best part of the book though that says little for it. But even here, some distance at least from the groves of academia, is found the confused hopes of those who think that well-meaning, efficient people like themselves can bring about socialism for us.

This is a well-meaning book, written by well-meaning people that, well, has very little meaning. ■
Ian Wall

Heimat

History brought to life

THIS film has been described as everything from 'The Forsyte Saga of the 80s' and 'the movie where soap meets history' to 'a watershed in European cinema'.

Critics are bound to go over the top about a film that is not only almost sixteen hours long but is mostly in black and white, in German with subtitles, and has a cast filled with non-professional actors.

In Germany *Heimat* was often shown in one go, right through the night to packed houses. In London you can see it at the more sedate pace of four parts spread over a week-end.

Having rushed from a Saturday paper sale in the middle of Soho to start this cinematic marathon at 12.45; I found myself by 12.55 totally immersed in Schabbach, 1919 and the return of Paul Simon from the war.

What follows is a chronicle of sixty-three years in the lives of the Simon family and the village of Schabbach from 1919 to 1982. Maria, who marries Paul Simon, was born in 1900 and it is her lifetime that forms the base of the film.

This is a period of German history depicted, not as in schoolbooks or war films, but through the experiences of a part-

icular group of people. We see how they lived and died during the rise and fall of the Third Reich and follow them right through to the 80's.

Edgar Reitz, the film's producer, has said that it is because of the huge cultural shock of Nazism that very few stories dealing with the period 1933-45 appear in either German literature or film.

'We are still afraid that our little personal stories could recall our Nazi past, and remind us of our mass participation in the Third Reich.'

Reitz wanted to tell the story of 'a family and a village...without making judgements' and to revive the untold memories and stories of so many Germans.

In doing so the uncomfortable 'memories' are not avoided. From the injured English soldier shot in cold blood by an SS officer, out for a trip with his children; to the chilling lack of concern about rumours of the 'final solution'.

At an elegant gathering of local people and Nazi officials, a small boy, overhearing a conversation asks 'Mama, who gets sent up the chimney?' The question hangs in the air unanswered and the music recital continues.

Indeed there are many examples of people who found they had a lot

to gain from the rise to power of the Nazis. Eduard Simon's party membership ensures him a successful career, and a whole new bourgeois lifestyle.

His wife, so keen during the war to ingratiate herself with high ranking Nazis, has to adapt quickly to the arrival of the Americans in 1945.

She dresses in her maid's uniform, while her husband is driven to hide his treasured photo of Hitler in the grandfather clock!

The characters most sympathetically portrayed are those who remained outside the enthusiastic followers of Hitler's movement. Paul's mother significantly ignores Hitler's birthday celebrations in Schabbach to make her annual visit to her brother's house instead.

However when, during the night, her Communist nephew is arrested by the SS, her only reaction is the quiet understatement: 'that can make you think twice about going to bed'.

No voice is given to any clear political dissension to the Nazi movement, nor any analysis of why it was able to come to power. As a result Reitz fails to examine many of the questions a film about this period raises.

At the end *Heimat* is more personal than political, but it is also much more than the 'soap meets history' tag would imply. In the film we see the lives of ordinary working people, how they grow and change

as a result of their experiences, and in turn delight and disappoint.

We are treated to a wealth of visual and musical images and themes. An old story of a man who goes out for a beer and never returns inspired Reitz's main pre-occupation; the homeland that binds and restricts, yet the longing and the pull to return that plagues those who leave.

We watch as Schabbach is dragged into the twentieth century by technological advances of communication. Paul's first home made radio, the first car and telephone and eventually television, end the village's isolation from the rest of the world for ever.

Above all *Heimat* is visually stunning, from the rolling hills and forests of the region to the detail of the interiors.

Although it was originally planned to film it in black and white, when you see an early scene in the Simon's forge you will understand and applaud Reitz's decision to occasionally use some colour.

The fact that I and the rest of the audience were not only still awake but totally absorbed after fifteen and a half hours should be recommendation enough for those tempted to give up a weekend to go and see it.

My advice is: miss the next four Hollywood blockbusters and fork out to see all of *Heimat* instead. You won't regret it!■

Judith Orr

Munch and the workers

EDVARD Munch was a Norwegian artist. He was, as they say, a prolific producer and during his long lifetime (1863-1944) his work underwent many changes.

The exhibition now showing at the Barbican Centre in London, *Munch and the Workers*, is a collection of drawings and paintings done at the end of his life.

In the 1890s his work changed from a competent realism to statements which became increasingly personal and subjective. Most of his famous works were done within a few years of 1895, the year in which Freud published his *Studies on Hysteria*. He was the first modern painter to make a continuous study of the idea that personality is created by conflict.

His paintings, lithographs and woodcuttings attempted to express artistically Freud's notion that the individual is a battleground where the forces of desire conflict with social constraint. He wrote that the characters in his future paintings 'should be living people who breathe, feel, suffer and love. People shall understand the holy quality about them.'

Many of his paintings are autobiographical, relating especially to his childhood which was, by all

accounts, pretty nasty. His father was a ranting religious bigot, his mother a submissive wreck, and his beloved sister died of TB. He is quoted as saying, 'Disease and insanity were the black angels on guard at my cradle.' This pessimism with life was never to leave him.

His works on women, though often haunting for their portrayal of suffering, tend to show them either as seductive vampires or innocent idols. He is said to have believed that sex was, in all senses but that of procreation, inherently destructive.

By the end of the century he started painting city scenes. They brilliantly capture the growing capitals of Europe at the time through images of the metropolis as devourer of souls; the place of lonely crowds, artificial distraction, masked faces and alienation.

After a nervous breakdown he returned from Germany to Norway where, after long technical experiments, he produced rhythmically strong, fluent paintings in brilliant colours. The theme he chose to explore was working life, and he worked increasingly on murals and frescoes. It is these that are on show.

Rapid industrialisation and construction were transforming Norwegian towns, and it was a time of



widespread militant workers' activity and rebellion. Munch thus saw workers as an 'ideal' subject and thought of his work as a way to 'honour' them.

In 1922 he completed murals for the canteen of the Freia chocolate factory in Oslo. He chose this medium as he was against the manufacture of art purely for the market, art 'influenced by the worst moneyed clique, namely the bourgeoisie'.

'I wonder if small scale painting will soon be pushed aside,' he wrote in 1929. 'With their large frames, they are merely a bourgeois art form designed for sitting rooms. It is an art dealers' art... Now it is time for the workers. Do you suppose that art should become the property of everyone, and resume its rightful place on the spacious walls of public buildings.'

In the paintings at the Barbican, Munch shows the dignity and strength of labour, along with the suffering and physical transformation of labour under capitalism. All, however, are of workers outdoors—in fields, on construction sites, or coming away from a factory. None of them reflect the militancy which inspired and surrounded him, nor the collective spirit of people working or fighting together.

The 'Workers Returning Home' series, for example, shows worn out people wandering home battered and marked by their long hours in the factory. They are brilliant paintings, but the only sign of feeling is a few clenched fists which Munch said described their anger and symbolised the battle he had had for public acceptance of his art.

The depiction of workers in this exhibition is essentially from an outsider's viewpoint, a subjective portrayal of what they look like. Using his undoubted artistic talents and his understanding of the harshness of labour under capitalism as opposed to its potential strength, Munch has produced some very fine pictures which are well worth going to see.■

Clare Fermont

Against all odds

AS THE pictures crowd onto the television screens in the next few months to remind us that it is 40 years since the end of World War Two, no doubt some time will be devoted to a reminder of just how great the Nazi horror was.

The images of the concentration camps will appear for a few minutes. And as ever the effect will be to numb the mind. The number of people who perished in the camps is far higher than the six million generally quoted. That figure refers to the Jews, yet in Auschwitz alone the number of dead was 3½ to 4 million, of whom perhaps a third were Jewish.

The standard version of these terrible events is that the Nazis' victims accepted their fate passively—meek, unaware or terrified. This is a convenient view for the different ruling classes involved.

It justifies the Zionist arguments about the need for a Jewish state and the Allied propaganda—East and West—about their inability to do anything to stop the slaughter. Above all it suggests that ordinary people were helpless in face of the holocaust.

Organising resistance

And yet any of the tales of heroism of the war are overshadowed by what actually took place in the death camps. Spontaneous revolts and individual acts performed out of desperation gave way to planned uprisings.

Those at the heart of these rebellions were socialist militants—men and women who in many cases had fought fascism before the war. And though many of those involved in the uprisings were Russian prisoners or Polish partisans, the Jewish prisoners were in the vanguard—largely because they had the fewest illusions about their fate after the destruction of the ghettos of Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia.

The history of all these uprisings deserves a place in the heart of every socialist. Perhaps most of all what happened at Auschwitz. We only know the story because of handwritten testimonies buried in the crematorium grounds and uncovered in some cases ten or 15 years after the war.

The writers of these testimonies were members of the so-called *Sonderkommando*—Jewish prisoners selected by the Nazis to dispose of the corpses. It took months for them to begin to organise. Many of the non-Jewish prisoners were Polish nationalists (and even fascists) who had persecuted Jews before the war. Others were socialists, like Cyrankiewicz, later prime minister, who saw the priority as getting information out to persuade the British and American governments to do something. The information did get out (including photographs), yet the Allied powers did nothing.

The men of the *Sonderkommando*, forced every day to wade through unbelievable horrors, aimed to blow up the gas chambers themselves, though they knew they would almost certainly die in the attempt. They also

tried to set down in writing some of the scenes they witnessed.

One incident recorded by a man who signed himself I.A.R.A. took place at the end of 1943 when a group of 164 Poles were brought to be gassed, including '12 young ladies, all of them members of an underground organisation'. Naked in the gas bunker, one of the women addressed the hundreds about to be slaughtered:

'Our initiative will live on and blossom... Down with the barbarism in the shape of Hitler's Germany! Long live Poland!' She then turned to the Jews of the *Sonderkommando* and said, 'Remember, it is your sacred duty to revenge our innocent blood.'

The writer continues that the Poles knelt for prayer and sang the national anthem:

'They poured out their last feelings and their heartening faith in the future of their people. Afterwards they all sang together the *Internationale*. In the middle of it...they dropped the gas into the bunker. Their souls left them in the middle of the song and the ecstasy of the dream of brotherhood and the perfectability of the world.'

This and other scenes inspired the *Sonderkommando* to launch their insurrection. A key figure in the organisation was David Szmulewski—a Polish exile, first in Palestine then in the International Brigades in Spain, imprisoned in France and then a fighter in the French resistance. He was the link between the *Sonderkommando* and the veterans of the International Brigade at Auschwitz.

Another key role was played by an organisation of women slave labourers from the

Krupp munitions works adjoining the camp. It was they who supplied the explosives.

Tragically, when the Auschwitz uprising occurred on 7 October 1944, it was forced on the *Sonderkommando* because their plans were discovered. The main gas chambers could not be destroyed, although one was blown up. Fittingly, several SS officers were flung alive into the furnaces where their victims were cremated. Twenty-seven prisoners escaped from the camp; 250 were killed.

Despite several weeks of torture by the Gestapo, none of the survivors, nor the women from the factory, revealed any details of the organisation of the revolt. The last words of one of the women, Roza Robota, were that it was easier to die if she knew the work of the resistance organisation was continuing. She and her comrades were hanged on 6 January 1945.

The Auschwitz revolt did not 'succeed'—unlike similar uprisings at Treblinka and Sobibor. It was organised against odds so overwhelming that the idea must have seemed mad. Yet had the Allies or the Polish underground been prepared to give aid, the Nazis' main extermination factory could have been destroyed. The men and women who organised under such circumstances were ordinary flesh and blood, steered by politics and experience.

Writing 14 years later about his role as a leader of the uprising at Treblinka, a man called Yankl Wiernik expressed it in a nutshell:

'At the age of 12 I left my parents' home and began to work. Some time later I joined the Bund. I was arrested while organising strikes in factories to achieve an eight-hour working day and better wages... I was sent to Siberia... It is because I am a working man and can also fight that I escaped from the hands of the butchers.' ■

Dave Beecham

