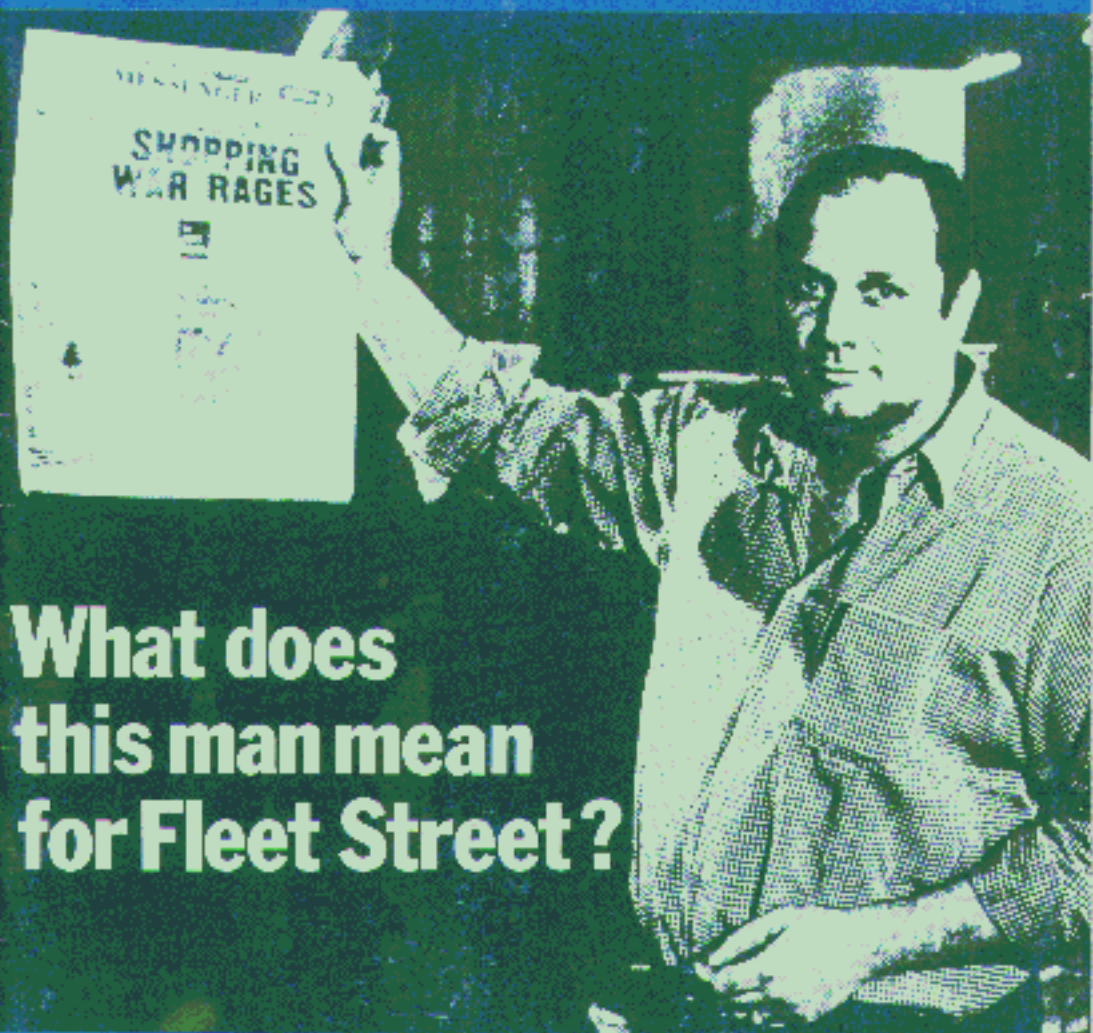


socialist worker Review

July/August 1985 Issue 78 60p



**What does
this man mean
for Fleet Street?**

**plus Women and the Marxist tradition
Police powers Bruce Springsteen**

NOTES OF THE MONTH	3
Tory strategies; Labour Party—reselection, witch hunt and black sections; Gorbachev's plans; Italy.	
WHAT THE PAPERS SAY	8
<i>The Guardian</i> is John Newsinger's target this month.	
LEBANON, THE FACTS	9
Phil Marshall explains the background to the Shi'ite attacks on the Palestinians and the TWA hi-jacking.	
THE POLICE TODAY	10
Audrey Farrell provides a briefing on the new powers the police are seeking.	
THINKING IT OVER	12
Communal strife in India is the subject for Nigel Harris's column this month.	
REVIEW ARTICLE	14
Chris Bambery looks at a new book by Duncan Hallas on the history of the Communist International.	
BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN	16
John Rees takes a look at the background to the rock and roll superstar.	
PRINT WORKERS UNDER ATTACK	17
Eddie Shah is setting up a union busting operation to bring out a new national daily paper. Murdoch is also throwing down the gauntlet. Alan Gibson talks to workers in the print industry about the likely response to the challenge.	
WOMEN'S OPPRESSION AND THE MARXIST TRADITION	20
Lindsey German comes to the defence of Marxism on the question of women, and argues that both in theory and practice it is the only tradition to fight for genuine liberation.	
THE TEACHERS' DISPUTE	24
Mike Stirland reports on the teachers' action and the likely outcome of the dispute.	
WHAT DO WE MEAN BY working class	25
Norah Carlin explains.	
WHATEVER HAPPENED TO RED KEN?	26
Pete Clark provides the answers explaining why Livingstone moved to the right.	
WORKPLACE NOTES	28
Two postal workers provide us with this month's workplace experience.	
WRITERS REVIEWED	29
Sean Piggot looks at the works of left wing author Barry Hines.	
REVIEWS	30
DEBATE AND LETTERS	34
On abortion, syndicalism, the Communist Party, <i>Workplace Notes</i> , history and anarchism.	
OUR HISTORY	36
Revolutionary Germany following the first world war is our subject this time.	

Edited by Lindsey German
Assisted by Jane Basset, Pat Stack, Gareth Jenkins, Andy Zebrowski, Noel Halifax, Dave Beecham, Norah Carlin, Laurence Wong, John Deason, Cathie Jasper, Rob Ferguson, Julie Waterson, Bill Thompson, Sean Piggot and Pete Binns

Production and business Pat Stack, Rob Ferguson
Reviews Colin Sparks

Subscription rate for one year:
 Britain and Ireland £8 Overseas surface £9 Europe Air £11
 Elsewhere Air £14.50
 (institutions add £7.50)
 Cheques and postal orders payable to Socialist Review.
 Socialist Worker Review is sent free to all prisoners on request.
 ISSN 0141 2442
 Printed by Laneridge Ltd (TU all depts) London E2.

NOTES of the month

GOVERNMENT POLICY

Risky business

AT THE end of the miners' strike two contrasting strategies emerged from the Tories. Put simply, the choice was between seizing the opportunity to go on an all-out offensive or recognising that the situation was ripe for a more conciliatory approach. It is a measure of the government's disarray—despite the defeat of the NUM—that neither strategy has yet won endorsement. Indeed as time passes the difficulty for the Tories is that neither looks very attractive.

The government recognises that its key failure in terms of rebuilding the profits of British capitalism is that wages are still moving ahead of inflation—even despite the increase in inflation from 5 to 7 percent in the first part of 1985.

This is by no means the result of a successful offensive by workers, as readers of this magazine well know. Although there have been important strikes for higher wages, they have, without exception, been isolated—and are often the result of the employers pushing just that bit too far, rather than any confidence on the part of the workers.

The current level of increases in earnings—around 8.5 percent in manufacturing and 7.5 percent as a whole—is the result of other, less obvious, pressures. The employers are having to pay more to recruit and hold skilled workers, they are having to push up overtime, they are having to buy the concessions on the shopfloor which three years ago they could demand as of right.

The Tories want to deal with these problems. The hardline strategy would ideally be as follows: corral the unions, abolish pay arrangements which cover the whole of an industry, remove the element of control some workers have over their skills (apprenticeships, job demarcation etc), drive down the overall level of wages, starting with the weakest groups first.

Some of these attacks have been partly

carried out. Some are on the way. Two obvious examples are to hand. In the recent budget the government announced an important change to National Insurance arrangements from October. Broadly the changes make it more attractive for employers to take on workers at very low rates of pay (between £36 and £90 a week) and replace fulltime workers with part-timers. They also make it less attractive to some workers to push up their pay.

The intention behind these changes is clear—it is to push up profits and make it more attractive to hold down wages.

At the same time as announcing these changes, the government declared its intention to abolish or castrate Wages Councils. Wages Councils are bodies which set legally enforceable minimum wages for workers in weakly-organised jobs: hairdressers, shops, clothing factories, pubs, hotels. The legal minimum wages and conditions are pathetically low, but the government knows it can reduce them further—and encourage employers to hold them down—by removing their protection from all or some of the workers concerned.

So the Tories have taken two steps in the hardline direction. But the response of its supporters has been most interesting. First, the real hardliners are worried that the changes do not go far enough. They want a much more concerted attack on welfare and the so-called 'disincentives to work' (the dole, supplementary benefit) at the same time as the abolition of a much wider range of reforms on maternity leave, redundancy money, protection against dismissal.

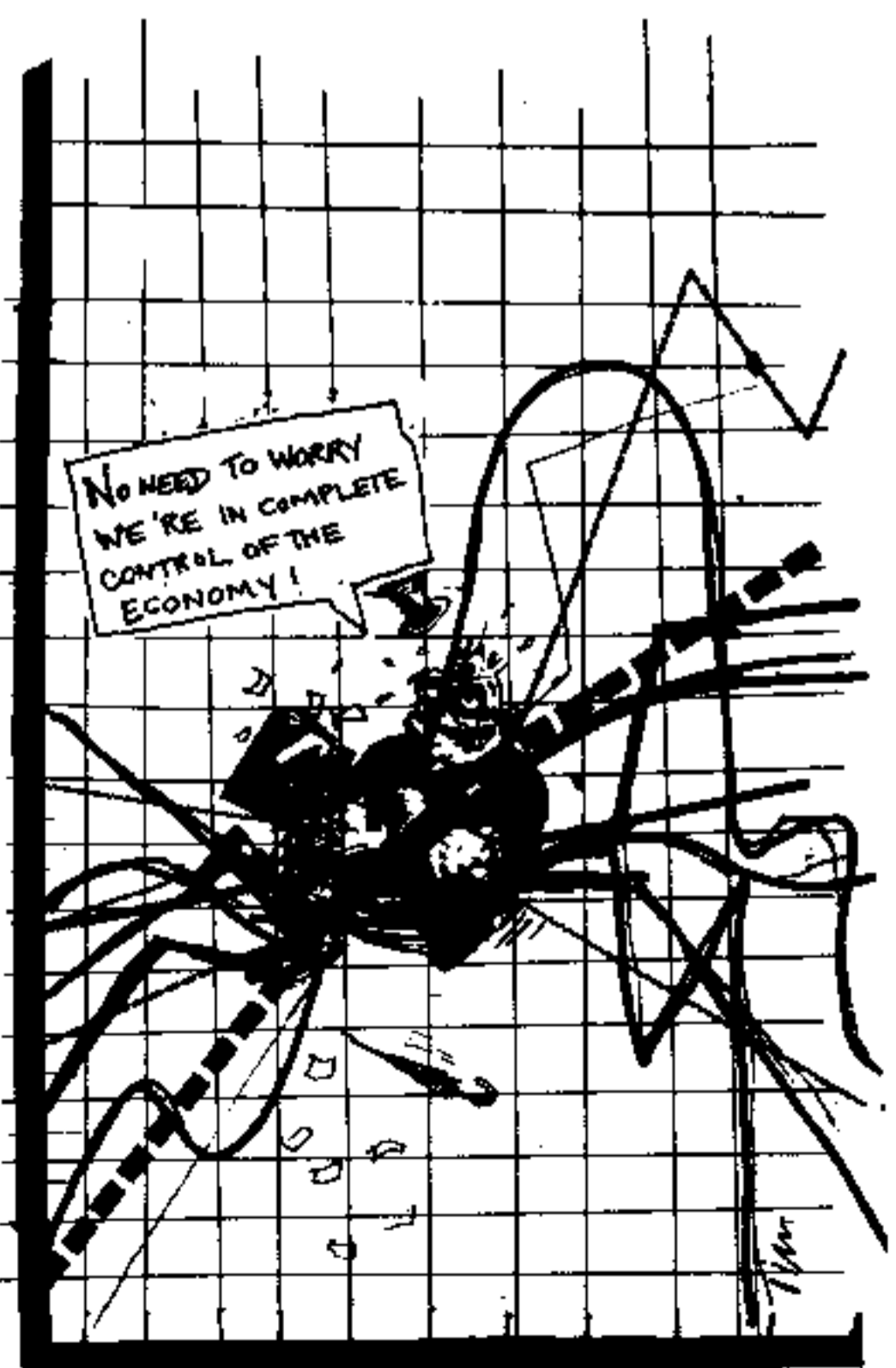
At the same time there has been a hostile response from the other wing of the ruling class—and not just the Tory 'wets'. The National Insurance changes have been attacked by the CBI and large companies as creating inflexibility (eg on overtime working) and also because the government simultaneously decided to increase NI payments for the higher-paid (above £265 a week).

And the Wages Councils have been defended because they are seen to protect 'good' employers against undercutting—in other words against 'unfair' competition. Quite anti-union employers have taken this stand—for example the John Lewis group—because they also see the Wages Councils as an obstacle to trade union organisation (which was, indeed, one of the reasons why they were set up).

The point about all this is not so much the outcome (the NI changes will go through and there will probably be a compromise on the Wages Councils) but the much stronger feeling in the boardrooms and among managers that the hardline approach has (a) gone far enough, (b) is extremely risky, (c) does not work, or (d) is not in the interests of British capitalism anyway. It would be difficult (though not impossible) to hold all these positions at the same time, but a combination of them is behind much of the passive resistance from the employers to the government.

The enormous economic and political cost of the miners' strike is a decisive element in this. When the hardline Institute of Directors came out with new proposals for curbs on the unions shortly after the strike, the response was very lukewarm—and even the IoD took the position that 'another strike of this sort must be avoided at all costs'.

But just as important from the employers' view is that the Tories' recipes don't work. Nigel Lawson found himself having to



NOTES

of the month

defend the government recently in the House of Lords not just against the opposition and the 'wets' but against Lord Weinstock of GEC. The Weinstock line was very much that of the Labour right wing—Tory policies have destroyed the British manufacturing base, we have to have investment, investment has to be planned, the government has to intervene, and so on.

It is not so much that the bosses are ungrateful. They recognise what the Thatcher administration has done for them—indeed they campaigned for it back in 1978-79. It is just that the problems have changed. Long term, the outlook is bleak.

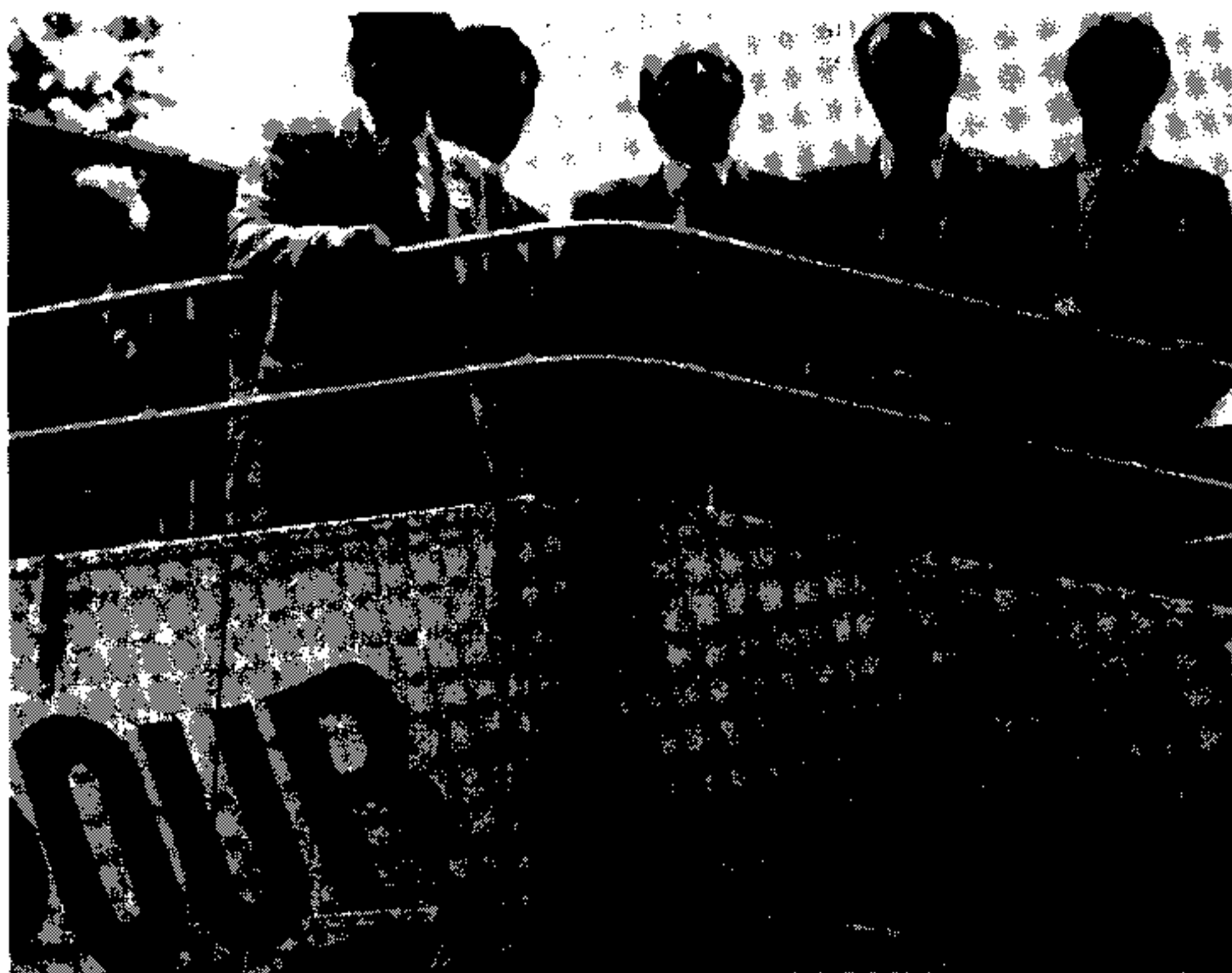
The oil factor is reaching its peak and company after company has been doing its calculations and working out that the government would have had to put up taxes a lot this year if it were not for increased output. Not only that, but oil revenues have in effect been used to sustain a high level of unemployment, not to subsidise the refurbishment of British business.

The lack of policy on interest rates and the de-control of currency has led to the international crisis having a much worse impact on British capitalism than would otherwise have been the case. The vendetta against the unions has been necessary, but has become very costly. Public spending has gone up—but not mainly on projects which would rebuild profits. Government policy on a number of issues—pensions, sick pay, housing—is creating increased burdens for private capitalism and not solving anything.

All this is good news for Kinnock, though the employers will need a lot more convincing and a few heads on spikes before they give passive support to the Labour Party. It is bad news for Thatcher.

A recent internal perspectives document from ICI showed that while the company was making massive profits and had strengthened its position against the competition, it has not overcome shop floor resistance and can only seek to make progress by buying off the opposition to change and by ensuring the unions control their members. 'All in all,' the document states, 'we are still operating in a fairly hostile environment where the capitalist/market ethos is still resisted, where manufacturing industry continues to decline in significance and where the future remains uncertain.'

This is a long, long way from where the Thatcherite wing of the ruling class hoped to be by now. ■



LABOUR RESELECTION

Right wing rebound

LABOUR has moved a long way in the last five years. It was only in 1980 that the left was hailing the new process of reselection as one of the major factors which would reshape the party.

With such a level of democracy and accountability, it was claimed, the nature of the parliamentary party would be changed irrevocably.

Few today would greet the present round of reselections with much pleasure. Over half the constituency parties now have reselected. They have hardly struck a blow for democracy. Nor have they advanced the left one iota. In fact, the opposite is true.

Right wingers who would once have felt threatened by the looming prospect of reselection are now either safely ensconced for another term, or are confident that they will pass the test of reselection when it arises in the coming months.

Of course there are exceptions. Reg Freeson has been replaced in Brent East by Ken Livingstone (with Kinnock's blessing). An MP who supported scabs in the miners' strike, Michael McGuire of Makerfield, Lancashire, has also been given the boot. But these are few and far between.

A number of MPs have been reselected from shortlists of one. These include right wingers Andrew Faulds of Warley, Gavin Strang in Edinburgh, Jack Straw in Blackburn and Jeremy Bray in Motherwell.

People whom many must have thought the reselection process was designed for, like Roy Mason in Barnsley, also sailed through the process with only one opponent.

Frank Field, the notorious right wing proposer of the 'rainbow alliance' with the SDP, has beaten a left challenge in Birkenhead.

His success is in an all too familiar and depressing pattern. Left wingers were beaten in reselection battles in two safe Labour Glasgow seats. Ken Cameron, a supporter of *Militant*, lost the nomination for Provan by 72 to 73. And those who wanted to see arch right winger and anti-abortionist James White replaced by a left winger in Pollock were also disappointed. The right wing candidate Donnachie comfortably won the nomination against another *Militant* supporter, David Churchley.

Why has the one time weapon of the left rebounded so badly? Obviously, one of the major reasons is the shift to the right inside the Labour Party itself. Delegates who once might have plumped for left wing candidates are now choosing those of the centre left or even the right.

There is even talk of moves to deselect some left MPs. Those who are now lined up behind Kinnock are determined to avoid, if they can, the selection of any MP who might rock the boat or prove an embarrassment in any way. It looks as though most of the constituency activists are going along with this.

But there is another, overlapping reason, to do with the nature of the Labour Party itself. Labour bases itself on the trade unions. Without the unions it would be starved of nearly all its funds and the bulk of its members. But the price of union affiliation and support is the union block vote. This isn't something which operates once a year at conferences. It is a crucial part of the running of the local parties—and of the reselection conferences where local unions can send delegates.

Time and again the union delegates have been instrumental in stitching up the left. In

some cases, there have been blatant attempts in recent months to pack General Management Committee meetings with bogus delegates. In Middlesbrough GMC a left councillor (he now faces expulsion from the party) alleges that the local MP was a delegate from a GMBATU council branch, as was a Hull university student. The same problem has cropped up in Dudley with a teacher mysteriously representing the GMBATU. Meanwhile GMBATU officials there have turned up as delegates from the TGWU.

But in most constituencies, that sort of manoeuvring hasn't been necessary. The union delegates have tended to move to the right, just as their leaders on the TUC general council have done. And that has meant that however keen constituency activists might be on left wingers (and the signs unfortunately are that even they are less keen), the individual vote of the member will count for very little.

So the reselection process has become one which the right find very easy to win—and not mostly by manipulation. The whole sorry story is yet another example of how difficult it is to move the party left. Because it is not based on struggle but on winning elections, the people who have traditionally run the party can use even the more democratic procedures for their own ends. ■

THE LEFT

Whistling in the dark

UNFORTUNATELY, much of the left has not begun to face up to the setbacks of recent months. These setbacks include not just the reselection conferences, but also the noticeable shift to the right in a number of unions—like CPSA and NUPE—and the retreat from any ratecapping confrontation by all but two councils.

Kinnock's speech at the TGWU conference indicated that the move to the right will continue and that the union bureaucracy will lead the attack on socialists in the Labour Party.

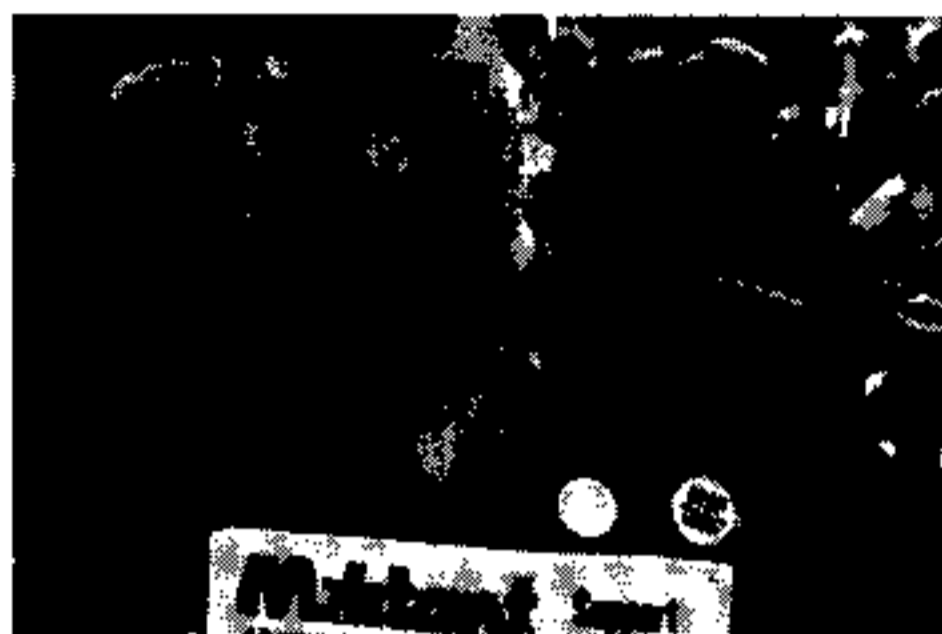
This series of retreats and defeats on the left has elicited two sorts of response. The first is to deny that there have been any real setbacks at all. This has been the line of two of the leading figureheads on the left, Tony Benn and Arthur Scargill. In a recent *Socialist Worker* interview, Benn claimed that the current witch hunt against *Militant* was a sign not of the strength of the right, but that of the left.

Scargill echoed this theme at last month's Yorkshire miners' gala. The miners' strike, he argued, was not a defeat. He compared it to the setbacks suffered by Castro in 1950s Cuba, and the Vietnamese in the sixties before their eventual victories. This

idea—that the long term result of the strike will turn out to be a victory—reflects the feeling of many of the best fighters in and around the miners' strike.

What the idea reflects is the fact that even many of the best socialists are not prepared to look at the actual balance of class forces in Britain today.

The problem with whistling in the dark is that it may keep your spirits up, but it won't do much else. It doesn't show you a way out



of the problems facing the movement. Nor does it give you an idea of the dangers lurking therein. So that section of the left which is at present taking the hardest stand against the right is at the same time *not* putting forward any sort of strategy which can begin to lead a way out of some of the problems facing the left and which have surfaced since the end of the strike.

The other response to the drift towards Kinnock has, however, been even worse. The third key figure of the hard left, Ken Livingstone, has made a decisive break with his previous politics (documented elsewhere in this *Review*). Many have taken a similar path, preferring 'realism' to sticking to hard left wing principles. And although not everyone has made such a dramatic leap as Livingstone, many more have accommodated to the rightward drift, and have gone along with the witch hunt against *Militant*.

This is even true of some of the 'hard left' groupings. Although in theory they oppose all bans, proscriptions and expulsions, in practice the main weight of their arguments often seem to be directed not at the right but at *Militant*. A recent *Socialist Action*, for example, contained several snide and gratuitous attacks on *Militant* over black sections, women, the civil service unions and the miners. *Militant* may have a wrong analysis on these and other questions. But attacks of the opportunist sort that much of the left indulge in can only give comfort to the right wing. They will be quite happy for *Militant* to be attacked by the left.

Criticisms of *Militant* have to be put in a framework of overall support for them against the right and against the witch hunt. Otherwise the left can do harm not just to *Militant* but to themselves.

But the failure to understand how to fight the right doesn't just extend to the sectlets. *Militant* themselves are not immune to the tendencies of the rest of the left. They tend to vacillate between the two approaches. Sometimes they claim that there are no fundamental problems—that the left is intact and moving forward, that the ideas of *Militant* will triumph. At other times they recognise that a Kinnock government will be extremely right wing and anti-working class.

NOTES of the month

The problem is not simply that the bulk of the left has the wrong analysis. The danger is that illusions created now can cause major problems in the future.

This is why we in the SWP argue for rejecting the idea that Labour can change or can bring about socialism. That is why we have called for socialists—in the *Militant* and outside it—to join in building a revolutionary socialist party which can begin to create an alternative to the bankrupt reformism of Labour. Unfortunately much of the left still doesn't seem to see the importance of this central task. ■

BLACK SECTIONS

A response to racism

THE divide over black sections inside the Labour Party is basically between right and left in the party. This has to be the starting point of our approach to the issue.

The right wing do not want black sections because they see them as alienating those electors who are influenced by racist ideas. Their opposition to black sections is at one with their support for racist immigration controls and their desire to have respectable, white candidates in marginal seats.

By and large, those who support black sections are those who want to resist, in however inconsistent a manner, the tendency of Kinnock and the right to accommodate to the racist vote.

Of course, Kinnockites and the right sometimes use left sounding arguments about 'unity', 'not dividing workers' and so on to justify their position. But we should no more fall for those arguments than we fall for their general talk of justifying abandonment of a socialist stance through talk of 'unity'.

When it comes to the question of black sections, such talk from Kinnock, Hattersley and so on is just a cover for their own role in going along with policies (over immigration controls, the police etc) which create division within the class by discriminating against black workers.

NOTES

of the month

If black members of the Labour Party want to form black sections to fight against such policies, then socialists have to support their right to do so.

Although we oppose the witch hunt against *Militant*, this does not mean we bury all our disagreements with them. The question of black sections, like that of Ireland, is one on which we have to criticise them. *Militant's* opposition to black sections puts them, on this issue, in the same camp as the Kinnockites who are witch hunting them. Their position follows from their general politics, that somehow the Labour Party is *the* working class party, whose unity is to be defended at all costs.

This is nonsense. As Lenin pointed out, Labour is a *bourgeois* workers' party. Sectional divisions are inbuilt into such a party, and to deny to black members the sectional rights which other groups in the party enjoy (for instance, the Zionists, with the representation of Poale Zion on General Management Committees) is to play the game of the most powerful section of all, the right wing leadership, as it chases racist votes.

This does not mean, however, that Labour Party black sections are a way forward for black workers. They are a means by which black members can try to halt the compromises with racism of the party leadership. But they are not a means that can do this successfully.

The hallmark of the Labour Party is passive vote-getting. So the pull towards compromises aimed at placating racist influenced voters will always be stronger than the influence of a minority of black members, however organised.

Under such circumstances, black sections are bound to end up as little more than black ghettos in a bureaucratically run party which adapts itself to racism.

The only *real* benefits from such sections will accrue to a very narrow stratum of black politicians, community relations experts, lawyers and so on who use them to advance their own careers. They will not do anything substantial to improve the lot of the mass of black workers.

We do not join with the Labour establishment in opposing black sections because of this. After all, that establishment serves as a means of advancing the careers of a narrow stratum of white politicians, bureaucrats, lawyers and so on. We certainly do not prefer

white careerists to black careerists. Indeed, we recognise that the more black MPs and councillors there are, the more black workers will see that such people do not provide the way forward in the fight against racist oppression.

This is because the real fight against racism depends upon building unity in struggle between black and white workers. Only this can break down the racist prejudices of white workers and provide black workers with powerful allies in their fight against discrimination and oppression.

A party committed to organising the conscious minority in the class is necessary to lead such struggles forward.

In such a party it is not only the black members, but all the members who have a duty to fight every manifestation of racism and to support black workers who are fighting back. Its members are not held back for fear of temporary unpopularity with sections of white workers (although they do, of course, follow tactics aimed at winning over white workers). In such a party, therefore, the black members should not need to organise separately.

The Labour Party is not and cannot be such a party. That is why we insist on the need to build a separate, revolutionary party. That is why, although we defend the right of black Labour Party members to form black sections, we then go on to argue with them that with or without black sections the Labour Party is in a blind alley.

Reformists never understand the distinction Lenin made between defending the *right* of oppressed groups to independent organisation, and seeing such independent organisation as the way forward.

Revolutionaries do have to understand the distinction. To defend someone's right to something is not to say they have to exercise that right (to be for the right to abortion does not mean you are for banning all women from having children!).

We support the right of black Labour Party members to form their own sections, even though such sections will be dominated by a variety of reformist politics. But at the same time revolutionaries have to argue forcefully that a black variety of reformism offers no way forward to black workers. ■

ITALY

Bosses get a boost

IN JUNE 35 million Italians voted in a national referendum called by the Italian Communist Party.

They had to vote yes or no on whether the majority of workers would get about £13 a month back in their wage packets. This money was part of wage increases calculated under the *scala mobile* agreement—in which most workers receive automatic pay rises

which are linked to the rate of inflation.

The Socialist Party led government had introduced an arbitrary cut last year, and the CP responded by collecting 1½ million signatures for a referendum on the issue. If you collect half a million signatures in Italy you can hold a referendum to cancel the law in question.

At first sight it was impossible for the CP to lose—last year there had been the biggest demonstration in post-war Italy protesting against the cut, by 1½ million trade unionists.

In the year since the government cut, inflation has remained at the same level, just under 10 percent, unemployment has increased by 5.7 percent, and—surprise surprise—profits by 8 percent.

But the level of workers' self-activity has been terribly low. 1984 was one of the lowest post-war years for strikes. The CP and their union brothers kept negotiations going with the government until ten days before the vote, and after that the 1½ million strong CP held a very low-key campaign. When the Prime Minister threatened to resign if the majority voted yes, the CP pleaded with the government not to 'dramatise' or 'politicise' the campaign.

Government victory

Come the day of the referendum something else happened. Luigi Lucchini, head of the Italian CBI, the *Confindustria*, called a surprise press conference as the ballot closed. He announced that his organisation was ripping up the *scala mobile* system, an agreement which was signed with the unions in 1975 after a preceding wave of working class militancy. He said that his decision 'had nothing to do with the referendum', and in a sense he was right. Regardless of the vote, the private sector knew they could get away with it.

A few hours later the referendum result came through. The government had won by three million votes, the 2 percent wage cut introduced last year was now permanent.

On Monday evening the Stock Exchange actually worked overtime, and on Tuesday some of the major shares rose by 5 percent.

The CP has tried to put on a brave face, announcing its 'moderate satisfaction' and droning on about the government's vote decreasing by 5 percent when compared with the local elections in May. This doesn't hide the fact that in the traditionally communist cities of Milan, Turin and Genoa, the CP actually *lost* the vote.

Trade unionists responded differently, however. On Monday afternoon in Milan there were spontaneous demonstrations against the *Confindustria's* decision, which will come into effect next January, and on Tuesday there were strikes in several northern cities. Yet there is no real alternative revolutionary leadership to the CP, and no real independent rank and file organisation.

At the moment the strikes are more an expression of impotent anger rather than organised resistance.

The moral of this story is simple. The *scala mobile* system was achieved as a result of workers' militancy, often independent of the

CP and union bureaucracy. The system has been eliminated because of the lack of a similar militancy today. It's another example of the fact that the real power of the working class doesn't lie in the ballot box. ■

RUSSIA

Gorbachev's reforms

LAST month, in a completely unprecedented speech, Mikhail Gorbachev threw out the draft that had been prepared for Russia's 1986-90 five year plan.

He made personal attacks on four ministers. Konstantin Belyak (agricultural machinery) and Alexei Yashin (building materials) displayed an 'enviable persistence' in pushing for easy plan targets, Viktor Fedorov (petrochemicals) 'does not keep his promises' to stop squandering imported equipment, and Ivan Kazanets (steel) was directly responsible for regular failure to meet plan targets. As a result, Gorbachev admitted, even the best Russian goods can 'pale in comparison' with western equivalents.

His intention is to achieve growth rates of 4 percent a year—twice the recent figures—by modernising existing enterprises. Hitherto Russia has combined the introduction of totally new factories alongside antiquated ones, with poor results.

Gorbachev has now called for a 'profound restructuring' of the whole Russian economy to make the production of shoddy goods 'unprofitable' for factory managers. The pricing system, he argued, must be 'radically improved', and wages linked directly to performance. A major implication seems to be important cuts in the bureaucracies of the ministers—particularly at the middle levels.

Gorbachev's intention is to give more power both to individual enterprise managers and to the top planning ministries, cutting out the bureaucrats in the middle. Those at the centre will therefore—in theory at least—wield more power than before, perhaps by creating super-ministries to cut across departmental vested interests.

The purpose is to make those who make the decisions have a vested interest in producing good quality products that are needed elsewhere in the economy. For the individual manager the constraint will be financial, but for the super-planner at the top the idea is to make him responsible for the performance of the economy as a whole rather than one particular branch of it.

Instead of the steel industry being judged a success because it meets its norms and produces more than that of any other nation, if the bureaucrat responsible also carries the can for difficulties which are caused elsewhere by poor quality steel, it is hoped that

the chronic problems of shoddy Russian goods can be alleviated.

No doubt there will be many people from quite a range of opinion—Reaganite to Eurocommunist—who will take Gorbachev's speech as indicating the impending collapse of Stalinism or the impossibility of making it efficient enough to compete with market-based economies.

In reality, however, things are not so simple. Russia is not like Hungary, whose economy is very small and where trade with the west must affect the way the economy is organised internally. Nor is it like China, where extreme poverty gives very little in terms of resources for the central planners to be able to shift around, and where there is no real alternative to a policy of, for instance, reliance on the autonomy of individual family units for agricultural production.

Russia is a huge country with the second largest economy in the world and with a better endowment of natural resources than any other country.

However badly it has been mismanaged, it has still achieved growth rates broadly comparable with the rest of the world economy—worse certainly than the high-fliers of the last few years like Japan or Korea, but better than sluggards like Holland or Britain. Furthermore it has shouldered the burden of a quite massive war machine at the same time.

America's deficit

Reagan's boast that Russia's failing economy would be unable to support the continuing technological demands of the arms race have cruelly rebounded on him. America's huge budget and trade deficit have forced America, not Russia, to trim demands for rising arms expenditure in future budgets.

The pressure of this competition in arms, while it has not produced the results Reagan

NOTES

of the month

desired, has certainly promoted some of the inefficiencies that so bother Gorbachev today.

The Russian war machine has been built through central administration of the economy being used to cut through any bottlenecks in production, so as to get the weapons to appear on time. It has also meant chronic disruption of the supply lines for civilian production, and with it the pressure on individual managers to store huge inventories of potentially needed supplies to guard against such disruption—hence the inefficiencies.

Yet in spite of this pressure there is still enough room to manoeuvre for reforms along Gorbachev lines to have some effect.

It seems likely that the Gorbachev reforms will lead to greater freedom for factory managers to sack workers, to increase wage differentials and to increase speed-up. The end result could therefore be the growth of bitterness and resentment in an enemy of the Russian bureaucracy far more deadly than Reagan and co—the Russian working class itself. ■

Additional notes Dave Beecham, Tom Behan, Pete Binns, Chris Harman

Socialist Worker Review

SUBSCRIBE

Socialist Worker Review can be ordered from the address below. Cover price is 60 pence (plus 20p postage) and yearly subscription rates are as follows:

Britain	£8.00	Europe Airmail	£11.00
Overseas Surface	£9.00	Elsewhere Airmail	£14.50
(Institutions add £7.50)			

Send a year's Socialist Worker Review starting with the issue to:

Name

Address

Make cheque/bank draft payable to SW Distributors
Return to Socialist Worker Review, PO Box 82, London E2

The nice people's paper

IF YOU have a social conscience and a decent salary, then the *Guardian* is the paper for you. It is the paper of the new middle class, of the welfare professionals, social workers, lecturers and the like.

Its politics very much reflect the concerns of this broad group. They oppose oppression and injustice but at the same time reject actual physical resistance to that oppression.

For the *Guardian* there is nothing fundamentally wrong with society, but in some areas there is a genuine need for reform. *Guardian* readers are obviously the sort of humane, reasonable, caring people who, with good will on all sides, will be able to put things right—especially if the salary is high enough and there is a proper career structure.

Friday's *Guardian* regularly provides almost satirical insight into the concerns of the paper's readership. How many British newspapers have a regular features page on the third world? The *Guardian* has.

Let us pick an issue completely at random. On 31 May, the *Guardian's* 'Third World Review' carried articles on the UN's inadequate response to the cyclone disaster in Bangladesh, on Amnesty International, and on state terrorism in Guatemala.

Having exercised their consciences over these issues *Guardian* readers could then turn for sustenance to the food and drink page which just by chance appears on the same day.

Here—still outraged by police terror in Guatemala—we learn that 'the wise gourmet always looks for a mucky farmyard', that 'Filipino food is good but its merit is increased by a large factor because of the tropical-rejoicing syndrome' and that our native cheese makers are an oppressed minority.

The starkness of the contrast gets right to the heart of what is wrong with the *Guardian*. Its readers care, they are strong on conscience, but they are personally too comfortably off to be serious about change.

The *Guardian* goes out of its way to debate the issues that concern its readership. It opens its columns regularly to the left of the Labour Party, to the Communist Party and even to a variety of ex-revolutionaries. Tony Benn, Ken Livingstone, Ted Knight and Michael Meacher have all been given space over the past couple of months.

Critical features on football violence by Jeremy Seabrook and Labour's move rightwards by Anthony Arblaster have been carried. The split in the CP has been debated, as has the CP's autopsy on the miners' strike (the first time an autopsy has been performed by a corpse). This openness, however, is the characteristic of the sponge rather than the sword: it can

THE GUARDIAN
Printed in London and Manchester
Thursday June 27 1986 21*

give the system a good wash down but can't slay it.

Part of the paper's function as a conscience is that it does provide considerable material which is critical of government policy. It often carries stories which are useful to socialists.

But how does it relate to actual struggles, to the efforts of real people to fight back? The paper responded with incredulity to the defiant display of support by Welsh mining communities for Russell Shankland and Dean Hancock, the two miners jailed for the killing of a blackleg taxi driver:

It was all too much for *Guardian* columnist Hugo Young who went over the top in his praise of the courage of the jury which had convicted the two men. The life sentences, according to Young, were 'socially and morally therapeutic'.

The *Guardian* response to the police attack on the peace convoy making its way to Stonehenge showed a similar attitude. Coverage of the police riot was almost non-existent. There was no great moral outrage at the police overstepping their powers. The beatings and wanton destruction dished out by the police are presumably so commonplace these days as to be scarcely worth mention. Instead we were treated to a light-hearted editorial which concluded that the law had to be upheld. The paper had to 'concur with the chief constable and tell the 30,000 to clear off'.

Much the same chronic myopia was shown when they editorialised about

terrorism on 17 and 18 June. The news pages were still dominated by the hijacking of an American airliner to Beirut by Shi'ite gunmen.

The paper immediately identified terrorism with the activities of small groups of political and religious 'fanatics'. So for a Shi'ite group to hijack a plane and kidnap some 40-odd Americans is an outrage against civilisation, while for the Israeli government to attempt to hijack the whole of Lebanon and to kidnap some 800 Shi'ites is merely an unfortunate error of political judgement. The American hostages are 'the playthings of a cruel and lawless group of kidnapers' while the Shi'ite prisoners in Israel are merely 'prisoners detained illegally'.

America and the West are exonerated from any undue blame for the situation in the Middle East. Instead, much is made of the clash of cultures and value systems, and the Shi'ites are described as the adherents of an 'alien and potent combination of religion and politics'. This is merely a posh way of saying that we are dealing with a bunch of stropky wogs! It is expressed more delicately and with more sophistication, but the whole patronising assumption of superiority adds up to the same appalling attitude.

Guardian editorials on this issue positively reek with gentle racism.

What then are we to conclude about the *Guardian*? There is a biting, if completely untrue, story that the day after the Belgrano was sunk, while the *Sun* headline was 'GOTCHA!', the *Guardian's* was 'SORRY!'

This just about sums it up.

The paper is all middle class conscience with no teeth and no backbone. It criticises the injustices of the system but draws back in horror from endorsing any real challenge to it.

Its only redeeming feature is Steve Bell's fantastic cartoon strip 'If...'—and you can buy that in book form. ■

John Newsinger

SPECIAL EDITION

INTERNATIONAL SOCIALISM ★ 29

The class struggle and the left in the aftermath of the miners' defeat

Tony Cliff writes on Patterns of Mass Strikes, Alex Callinicos analyses the Politics of 'Marxism Today' and Chris Harman provides an overall synthesis of the period in The Shape of 1984.

£1.95 from your local Socialist Worker bookstall or (plus 25p post) from IS Journal, 265 Seven Sisters Road, London N4
Make cheque/bank draft payable to Bookmarks

Tragedy of the dispossessed

THE SHI'ITES of Lebanon are rapidly replacing Ayatollah Khomeini and Colonel Qaddafi as the media's favourite Middle East bogeymen.

Socialists can have nothing to do with these attacks, or with the hypocrisy which brands the Shi'ites as terrorists, while US-backed Israeli troops continue to raid south Lebanon at will.

But the issue of the Shi'ites is not a simple one, and many socialists have been perplexed by the readiness with which the Shi'ites have attacked not only troops of the Israeli occupation force, but Palestinians in the camps of Beirut.

While the attack of the fascist Phalange militia on Sabra and Shatilla camps in 1982 was the logical result of the Israelis' attempt to install the Phalange in power and destroy the PLO, an assault on the same camps by the PLO's former Shi'ite allies is less easy to explain.

Why has it happened? The wave of Shi'ite activity expresses the revenge of Lebanon's dispossessed. After years of poverty and powerlessness, many Shi'ites feel that they have found a voice.

Their tragedy is that under the distorted conditions of Lebanese politics, they remain powerless to bring real change, and their anger is being directed into an assault on another of Lebanon's poor and powerless communities.

There are one and a half million Shi'ites among Lebanon's four million people. For centuries most were peasants, living mainly in the rural south. While there has always been a small number of wealthy Shi'ite land-owning families, the majority of the Shi'ite population has lived at subsistence level.

The Shi'ites have long been politically marginalised. Under the sectarian constitution designed in the 1940s by France—which aimed to maintain France's Maronite Christian allies in power—all Muslim communities were excluded from positions of real influence in government, administration and the army.

During the economic boom of the 1960s, the Shi'ites' position worsened. The oil money that flowed into Beirut passed largely through the hands of Maronite and Sunni businessmen, who invested in land in the south, evicting peasant farmers to make way for citrus and vegetable plantations. It was at this time that the slums of south Beirut, largely populated by southern Shi'ites forced from their land, began to grow.

The Shi'ites did not participate in the explosion of political activity of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Then the Sunni Muslim communities of the cities and the Druze of the mountains near Beirut produced most of the recruits to radical nationalist groups seeking reform of the state.

Only the small Lebanese Communist Party succeeded in drawing in some Shi'ites, and this organisation, with its strictly Stalinist strategy of forming broad fronts with land-

lords and capitalists, offered no answer to most Shi'ites' problems.

During the civil war of 1975-6, when the nationalist organisations joined with the Palestinians to fight the Maronite militias, the Shi'ites were virtual spectators.

The first signs of Shi'ite organisation came with the establishment of the Movement of the Dispossessed by Musa Sadr, a supporter of Iran's Islamic opposition. The movement spawned Amal ('Hope'), the first formal Shi'ite organisation, which combined Islamic fundamentalism with a vague programme of political reform.

The backwardness of the Shi'ite community and the loose organisation of Amal, made the movement vulnerable to every sort of external influence. By 1981 it was believed to have at least five factions, controlled respectively by supporters of Khomeini, the Lebanese secret service, the Palestinian organisation Al Fatah, the Syrians and the Israelis, each of whom were supplied with guns and finance by their backers.

In 1982 Amal fought alongside the Palestinians against the Israeli invasion force, but the alliance was short-lived. As Syria asserted its control over north and central Lebanon, it tightened its grip on Amal, effectively eliminating the influence of other groups. Supporter of Ayatollah Khomeini in Amal formed Islamic Jihad and the Hezbollah ('Party of God').

Huge mistake

In May 1985 Amal launched its attacks on the Palestinian camps of Beirut. There is little doubt that the assault was initiated by Syria's President Assad, eager to snuff out the attempt by Al Fatah to reorganise in the camps. But the willingness of the Amal militia to take on the Palestinians has taken many by surprise.

The Amal guerrillas' anti-Palestinian feeling is not difficult to understand. Most come from the villages of the south, where they were long subject to Israeli attacks, ostensibly launched to destroy Palestinian bases. Many too, are giving vent to the frustrations that built up over the 15 years that the PLO controlled much of south Lebanon.

During this time the Palestinians made the huge strategic mistake of not involving the local population in the struggle against the Lebanese state. According to Al Fatah's principle of 'non-interference' in the affairs of Arab countries, the Palestinian struggle was to be a strictly national one. The result in Lebanon was that the PLO imposed Palestinian military control on much of the south, alienating many Shi'ites who accused them not only of provoking Israeli attacks in the villages, but of arrogance that paralleled that of their Lebanese masters in Beirut.

Buoyed up by a year of successful guerrilla attacks on the Israeli army in the south, Amal gained a new identity.

Thousands flocked to the Amal militia, attracted by its military success and, impor-



Caught in the superpowers' crossfire

tantly, by the wages on offer—an important consideration in Beirut where there is over 50 percent unemployment in the southern slums.

Under the direction of the strongly pro-Syrian leader Nabih Berri, Amal assaulted the Palestinian camps. For the Shi'ite militiamen the attacks represent another demonstration of the new-found power of the community, and of their own sense of identity after years as victims of a host of wars and invasions. But the idea is an illusion. Amal is attacking not injustice, inequality, but other victims of the same system that long excluded them.

There is every sign that such tragedies will continue. As long as Lebanon remains the political playground of Israel, Syria and their superpower backers, the mutual destruction is likely to go on.

With the country's industry battered and its working class dispersed, there is little sign that a strong socialist pole of attraction, overcoming sectarian differences, will be able to emerge. A strong workers' movement in nearby Syria—where Assad's police state is always vulnerable—is the likely source of change and hope for Lebanon's dispossessed. ■

Phil Marshall

The stronger arm of the law

SINCE Thatcher came to power in 1979, funding for the police has expanded massively from £1 billion a year to no less than £2.8 billion. At the same time police productivity—measured by the crime detection rate—has been falling quite significantly. Here is one area, it would appear, that a nationalised 'lame duck' is being feather-bedded by unlimited state handouts.

It would be wrong to think, however, that the Tories will go on shelling out the money indefinitely. It is true that the more they spend on the police, the better they are able to prevent mass picketing or keep the lid on inner-city ghettos.

But they are worried about skyrocketing police expenditure. A central question for them is how to get more for their money. The police are there to protect property and profits. In order to get a higher rate of return, the police need to be able to make more arrests, to be able to make them more easily and to be able to secure convictions on the basis of these arrests more effectively.

The centrepiece of current Tory strategy is contained in the 1984 Police and Criminal Evidence Act (due to begin effective operation from January 1986) and proposed new offences are contained within the May policy statement, *Review of Public Order*.

They do two things. First of all they legitimise a whole number of existing police practices which are currently beyond legal limits. Secondly, they extend the application of other practices into new areas.

The present limit for detention in police custody is 24 hours for non-serious charges and a court appearance 'as soon as possible' for serious offences. The latter phrase is interpreted by the police to mean 'as soon as we are ready to charge'.

Increased detention

But from January 1986 detention beyond 24 hours can be authorised by a police superintendent for up to 36 hours. After that a magistrates court can add on another 96 hours with considerable leeway to allow for the time of court sittings.

Any period when suspects are merely 'helping police with inquiries' is not counted as part of the detention time. This is important because the police rarely make them aware of their status until they are formally under arrest in any case.

The Codes to the Act cover what is supposed to happen at police stations. The right to inform someone outside and to contact a solicitor remain. However, it 'need not be exercised immediately'. Access to a solicitor can be delayed for 36 hours if the offence is classified as 'serious'.

Since this includes 'gross indecency' (used against gays) and offences which 'are likely to lead to serious harm to the state or public order' (a catch-all category for political and trade union activity), it represents a major

incursion into civil rights. So too does the new power not to 'disclose information by telephone to a friend inquiring as to the whereabouts of someone detained'.

The main danger here is that the new powers to detain people will undermine the right to stay silent and will increase the pressure to sign confessions irrespective of any questions of guilt.

The Codes state:

'If the person directly asks the officer what action will be taken in the event of his answering questions, making statements or refusing to do either, then the officer may inform the person what action he proposes to take in that event, provided the action is itself proper and warranted.'

This means that threats to 'bring in' wives or friends, or delay discharge are even more likely under the new Code. The threat of longer periods of detention is bound to increase the number of false confessions extracted.

In line with this, a *Police Review* booklet

has appeared. Entitled *Catching Criminals*, it devotes 40 pages to the art of interrogation. It talks of exerting psychological pressure, of 'making the suspect feel outnumbered and vulnerable', of 'manipulating' and 'breaking' them, implying that the whole aim is to 'secure an admission' of guilt.

Back to sus

The notorious 'sus' laws—scrapped after the riots of July 1981 forced the Tories to retreat—are now to be let in through the back door instead. Indeed in some ways the situation will be worse. The stop and search powers of the Metropolitan (and some other) forces are to be extended nationally. Stops can be carried out on vague grounds of 'reasonable suspicion'.

What will constitute such grounds is indicated by a survey conducted into the 'clues' that induce police to stop people. In order of popularity these are:

'dress, reaction to officers' presence, appearance, context action, items

Ideas that can win
Buy Socialist Worker
only 25p

SPECIAL INTRODUCTORY OFFER

10 issues for £2.50, including postage

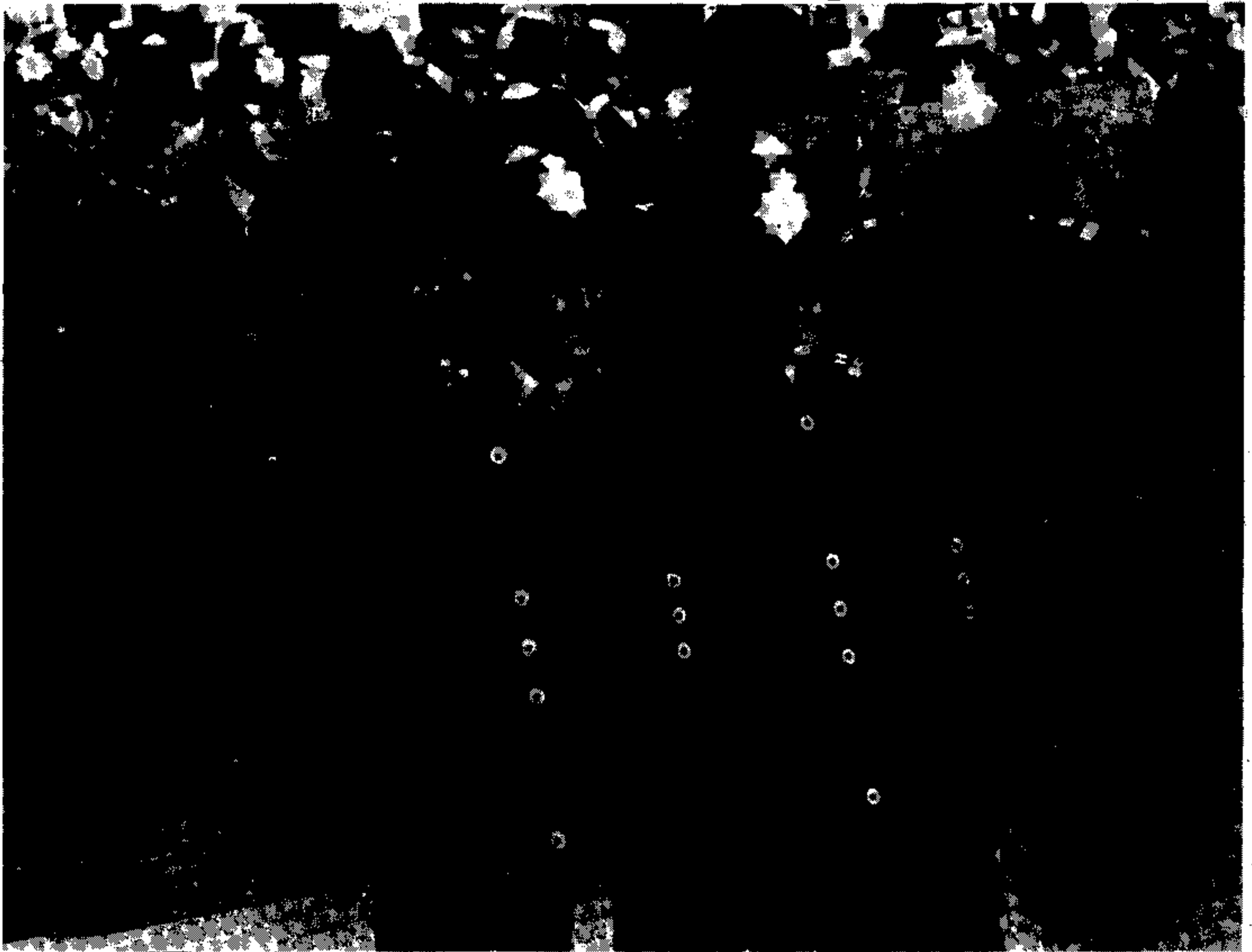
Normal rates: £10 for six months

£19 for a year

Name

Address

Money with all orders to: Socialist Worker Circulation, PO Box 82, London E2 9DS
Cheques/POs payable to Larkham Printers and Publishers. (Write for rates for libraries, institutions and overseas subscriptions.)



A law unto themselves

carried, demeanour and other behaviour, facial appearance, associates, tattoos, voice/accent, hair, vehicle, gait/posture, age, eyes and odour'.

Another notorious practice that substantially remains intact is the police carrying out investigations into complaints against themselves. The statistics reveal very clearly what this means in practice.

In 1983, only 268 complaints out of 7,711 were substantiated against the Metropolitan police. Only eight assaults were proved out of 1,585 complaints submitted. Despite surveys showing widespread racialism among the police, all 37 allegations of racial discrimination were thrown out by the police complaints procedure.

Yet in future most complaints will still be dealt with by the police themselves. Complaints of a very serious nature will go to a new 'independent' Police Complaints Authority. This body will be chaired by ex-public school, ex-Oxbridge, judge and Lieutenant Colonel Sir Keith Cothier.

And the decision to prosecute a police officer will be taken by the Director of Public Prosecutions, Sir Thomas Hetherington, who recently stated on the matter:

'The fact that there is sufficient evidence to sustain a prosecution does not necessarily mean that there ought to be a prosecution'.

The past few years have demonstrated loopholes in the legal back up for the police.

The police missed having a catch-all offence with which to charge those arrested in the 1981 riots, the Warrington NGA mass picket, Greenham Common and, most of all, the miners' pickets. They had plenty of powers to arrest individuals, but often had difficulty in making heavy charges stick.

The *Review of Public Order* contains proposals for new collective offences which are easy to prove, and can carry sentences of up to ten, five and three years' imprisonment. The major offence will be that of riot. It is proposed that:

'Where 12 or more persons are present together, whether in a public or private place, using or threatening unlawful violence to persons or property for some common purpose (which may be inferred from their conduct) and their conduct taken together is such as would cause a person of reasonable firmness if present at the scene to fear for his personal safety, each of them who uses unlawful violence for the common purpose commits the offence of riot.'

Crudely, the picket line push could carry a sentence of ten years.

The middle offence of 'violent disorder' has similar wording, but only three people need to be involved and the individual need only *threaten* violence. It carries up to five years' imprisonment. The minor offence of 'affray' involves two or more people. The two can be threatening each other. Verbal

clashes between fascists and socialists might qualify for this offence.

The proposed legislation will also require seven days' notice of most demonstrations, and there will be a new offence of 'failing to comply with police directions'. Legally the police will be able to reroute marches away from shops, shopping centres (and people).

There is, of course, a huge gap between what is on the statute book, and what sorts of laws the ruling class chooses to use on any particular occasion. After all, the Witchcraft Act of 1740 is still law. Nearer to home, the 1714 Riot Act—which included many of the features we have drawn attention to in the currently proposed legislation—was still the law of the land in the early 1960s.

Britain is not about to become a police state. The continuing need that the overwhelming bulk of the ruling class feel for a dialogue with the trade union leaders will set important limits to the extent to which any new police power can be developed in practice, as will the degree of working class resistance.

Nonetheless it is clear that Thatcher wants to be able to shift the balance between consent and coercion, in the direction of coercion. Whether that will be seen by the ruling class as centrally relevant to the continuing and intractable problems that British capitalism faces is, however, an entirely different question. ■

Audrey Farrell

Thinking it over...

Divide and rule

I WAS ill—trapped in bed, the fan clanking overhead and, outside in humid Madras, the temperature at over 100°. Each morning, the newspapers flunked on the bed, flashing their headlines: 'Tamils kill 150 in reprisal for army killing 75'; 'Over 100 slaughtered by upper caste militants in Ahmedabad'; '50 or more killed in Gujerat police rampage'; '41 murdered in Sikh bombing wave in Delhi'; 'Shiva Sena win Bombay: expel all inmigrants since 1970'.

It was dispiriting.

The latest round in the endless and unscrupulous struggle of one or other fragment of India's lower middle class to do down the rest is a kind of revolt of the privileged. Some of it echoes distantly the shouts of the brigade of bloodies in the Tory and Republican parties.

It is not restricted to India. The northern Tamils of Sri Lanka (not to be confused with the poor Tamil labourers of the tea plantations) are much over-represented in the business and professional classes of the country, and traditionally have dominated higher education.

In Gujerat, the rebellion is of the upper castes against the lower. And the Sikhs of the Punjab are likewise among the better off. It is what in the United States was called a white backlash.

Take some of the best known cases:

The Sikhs

The income per head of the Punjab, the main concentration of Sikhs, is Rs 2,768 per year. This is very far from being princely, but is fully 76 percent above the all-India level. The Green Revolution of the late sixties and a high emigration rate (producing a high inflow of remittances to the province) have transformed the area and made possible an unusual prosperity.

With under 2 percent of India's population, the Sikhs produce a disproportionate share of agricultural output (at high guaranteed prices); they are 8 percent of central government employees, 6 percent of the top civil service cadre, 5 percent of the Indian Police Service, and 7.5 percent of the army; the President of India, the Chief of the Air Force, the Governor of the Reserve Bank (India's central bank) and a clutch of generals are all Sikhs; furthermore, Sikhs constitute a major part of India's business class. The majority of Sikhs, like the majority of Indians, are poor, but it is stretching matters to propose that the Sikhs as a community are an oppressed national minority.

Yet that is exactly what the Sikh militants say, demanding the right of national self-determination and the creation of an independent 'Khalistan'. In north India, Hinduism is the great surrounding sea of the little Sikh island, and it constantly threatens to engulf the minority, pulling into the Punjab non-Sikh farm labour to work on Sikh farms. Despite the creation of the Punjab as a Sikh state (56 percent Sikh in 1966 when the new state was formed), the Sikh proportion peaked at 61 percent in 1971; by 1981 it was down to 52 percent and still falling.

Not that these issues concerned all Sikhs. Urban Sikhs—artisans, small business, shopkeepers (the Sikh castes of the Khatri, the Auroras and Ramgarhias)—remained indifferent to the demands of the Sikh ultras. The Sikh untouchables, the Mazhabis, were positively hostile. Between them, these two must contribute the 10 percent of the state's vote that goes to one or other Communist Party.

It was the peasant caste, the Jhats, that provided the main support for the Sikh communal party, the Akali, as well as popular support for the political priests that lead the national movement. Nonetheless, throughout, the Akali captured only a minority of the Sikh vote, despite their claim to speak for all Sikhs. The ruling Congress (I) always won a substantial vote.

It was the late Prime Minister, Mrs Gandhi, who started the current phase by patronising the priest, Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, as a means to split the Akali to the gain of Congress (I). Split them he did and in all directions, but by creating a new monster to defeat Congress (I) on the demand for an independent Khalistan to be achieved by terrorism.

Terror—invoking reprisals throughout India—was to force home the Sikh diaspora and establish the domination of the Sikh priesthood in a politically independent Khalistan. After all, Khomeini did no less in Iran. And in 1947 Jinnah, Bombay Muslim businessman and Uttar Pradesh Muslim landlords did the same thing to establish an independent Pakistan.

The rest is known. The Akalis became irrelevant in the duel between the Amritsar Golden Temple and Delhi. Bhindranwale's martyrdom produced the murder of Mrs Gandhi produced the Hindu slaughter of Delhi Sikhs (with the police leading, encouraging or tolerating the assault on rich Sikhs) produced the wave of Sikh bombings produced... Of the first three

arrests for the bombings, the first died 'in police custody'; the other two were battered to a pulp when produced before the magistrate.

The political leadership on both sides could hardly be more rotten. Congress (I) is soaked in communalism. With a sly nod and a wink, the Sikhs as a whole can be identified as violent and traitorous, so any assault upon any of them is tolerable. The government has continually mixed violent repression with weak concessions. The Akali, like a flock of sheep, ran in all directions as soon as the priest with a gun appeared. Most of the leadership are now madly flirting with the call for Khalistan just to save their necks.

But the majority of Sikhs and Hindus have not moved. The Sikhs at large have not retreated to the Punjab. Also Delhi would rather kill all Sikhs than concede independence to the Punjab, a precedent that threatens the whole of India, especially for a province on the border with Pakistan.

Gujerat

Since anybody can remember, the Patels have run Gujerat. In 1980, for the first time, Congress (I) put up a candidate for state Chief Minister, Solanki, who was not from this or any other upper caste. His main voting support came from a new coalition of four castes, KHAM—Kshatriyas, Harijans (Untouchables), Adivasis (tribal peoples) and Muslims.

When Solanki won, his reward was in conformity with national policy—amid riots he reserved 21 percent of places in engineering and medical colleges for 'Scheduled Castes and Tribes' (the Untouchables) and 10 percent for 'Backward Castes'.

With new elections in February, Solanki tried to anchor his electoral base by announcing that the backward castes would now have an increase in their reservations of 18 percent. Thus 49 percent of all places would now be reserved (the 30 percent of Gujerat's population that consist of upper castes would still have access to 61 percent of the places).

The riots, this time by the upper castes, swept the state with violence on the demand for an end to all reservations. The struggle produced a collapse on all fronts—murderous assaults on the lower castes, Hindu attacks on Muslims, and a general strike of all state employees (against reservations). The violence seemed endless, with



Protest against communal murder

possibly two or three hundred dead at the end of it. Solanki climbed down and withdrew the February increase in reservations.

The army moved in when the police collapsed into an attack on everyone. One policeman was killed in the riots, so the following day the police set out to punish the population. Officially, 41 people were killed and an unknown number injured. The police held up the fire brigades at gunpoint while they set light to some 800 houses and 100 vehicles. Two thousand bicycles were destroyed. Newspaper offices were a prime target for gutting because of their criticisms of the police.

The Ahmedabad City Police Commissioner was understanding: 'My boys have been on their toes for the last couple of months, and this could be a natural reaction to their frustration.' This was surreal since hardly a day passes in India without a report of police atrocities—19 injured in Tamilnadu; 22 wounded in Delhi; 5 prisoners with tied hands shot dead in Andhra; 15 tribals murdered in Bihar; and any number of rapes and assaults.

It was the British who started reservations—of seats in provincial assemblies, supposedly to 'protect

minorities', but an amazingly efficient method of setting one community against another. By these means, Muslim and Hindu were manipulated to keep the jewel in the crown for a long time—before the whole show collapsed in partition. Delhi's need to divide and rule is no less than London's used to be. What is depressing is that so many Indians allow themselves to be so manipulated. In the increasingly bloody battles of the Indian lower middle class, the poor are always losers; and the state gains.

Bombay

The Shiva Sena has been an active political movement for 20-odd years. Bombay is in the state of Maharashtra where the majority of people are Marathas, and the cry of the Shiva Sena and its dictatorial leader, Bal Thackeray, is: 'Bombay for the Marathas'. Effectively, this is an anti-southerner slogan, since the majority of the poor immigrants to the city are Tamil (and Thackeray is not too worried about the rich Gujaratis).

The Shiva Sena won 70 of the 170 seats on Bombay corporation (on a 40 percent poll), and this gave it control. Thackeray

promptly demanded the expulsion of all immigrants to the city that had arrived since 1974 ('or 1970', he threw in for good measure), and the introduction of a South African-style pass system for all new entrants.

You might have thought someone would have pointed out that Bombay's population is not growing fast, that immigration is a very small and declining element in that increase, and that, in any case, if the city water supply is bad that is because a corrupt and incompetent city administration has failed to invest enough in water, not because there are too many people.

But the Chief Minister of Maharashtra said Thackeray's idea was interesting but he needed a formal application to act. Certainly, he went on, something needed to be done to stop Bombay 'collapsing', and mentioned China's migration controls with approval.

Last year's appalling savageries against Muslims in Bhiwandi, a suburb of Bombay, will be matched sooner or later by assaults on the Tamils. Meanwhile, posters appeared in the southern city of Coimbatore promising that if one Tamil in Bombay were hurt, 'all north Indians' in Coimbatore would get it. Here we go again. Those whom the Gods wish to destroy, they first make Shiva Sena.

A civil war implies only two or three sides. But there are hundreds of sides in India—a thousand dragons, as the Chinese call it. The issues are open running sores, without any hope of healing. Punjab, Gujerat, Bombay are currently in the news. But Assam is still not settled. The Sri Lanka issue threatens to spill over into Indian Tamiland. Bihar continues as the epitome of violence and corruption. There will probably be Hindu-Muslim riots in Hyderabad shortly. And on and on. No sooner is one leak staunched than many more are sprung. The gangsters, the politicians and the police, the trinity governing India, work within riots to ensure survival and prosperity. Only the army grows. In the 23 years prior to 1974, the military were called to settle civil disputes 476 times; in the last ten years, 376 times.

Daily life in India is a nightmare. The ruling class, to keep power, manipulates all the evils—communalism, caste-ism, racialism. And its lower minions play back the same prejudices in exaggerated form, just as the petty bourgeois Nazis played back as serious intent the idle anti-Semitic snobberies of Europe's establishment. Meanwhile, the world market slowly begins to assume the direction of the domestic economy as the state liberalises. This will almost certainly speed the pace of accumulation, and release precisely those furies which, without an alternative politics, fuel the endless bloodletting. The class struggle is still a very soft background theme in the cacophony. ■

Nigel Harris

The school of revolution

The Comintern
Duncan Hallas
Bookmarks £3.50

WHAT SORT of party do we need to achieve socialism?

That question has dominated discussion among socialists since *The Communist Manifesto* first appeared in 1848.

In March 1919, in the wake of the Russian Revolution, 35 delegates met in Moscow to form the Communist International. The task they set themselves was the foundation, internationally, of mass revolutionary parties on the lines of the successful Bolshevik party.

As early as 1914, following the outbreak of World War One, Lenin had called for the formation of a new international. His call came after the Second International, which organised powerful parties like the German Social Democrats and the British Labour Party, had backed their respective governments on the outbreak of war.

The Second International had recognised the danger of war. Indeed two congresses had seen the major European socialist parties promise to call on the working class to prevent mobilisation. When Lenin first heard the news of their collapse he believed it was a fabrication devised by the intelligence services to demoralise workers.

Revolution's advance

An immediate question faced the Comintern, as the new Communist International was known. How could socialists organise parties in opposition to the tradition of the Second International which had produced the collapse of August 1914?

The discussions around that question are retold in Duncan Hallas's new book. It is the only available history of the Comintern, and isn't simply a record of obscure debates from over 80 years ago.

His book contains a whole series of arguments which still face those who want to see a revolutionary change of society.

This reflects the fact that the first four congresses of the Comintern, held under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky, were deliberately organised as schools of revolutionary strategy and tactics.

At the foundation congress, only the five Russian delegates represented a party with anything like mass support. Elsewhere there were only small groups which had attempted to oppose the war and then rallied to the Russian Revolution. But Lenin and Trotsky didn't form the Comintern in order to grace a series of sects with a grand title. It was formed on the expectation that in the aftermath of war a revolutionary crisis would grip Europe and create the conditions for mass Communist Parties to emerge.

In this they were largely correct. Within a month, shortlived Soviet Republics were to take power in Hungary and Bavaria. A wave

of factory occupations across Northern Italy meant the revolutionary seizure of power was openly discussed.

In March 1920 a right wing coup in Germany was crushed by a general strike. Even Britain seemed to move in a revolutionary direction in 1919 with mass strikes in Glasgow and Belfast.

In 1919 and early 1920 it seemed to Lenin and Trotsky that with Europe in ruins and the pre-war state machinery disorganised, a direct assault by the working class, even led by inexperienced Communist Parties, could mean victory.

Both men knew and openly warned that Soviet Russia couldn't survive in isolation. It was to Germany that both in particular looked.

There, in the closing months of 1918, the emperor had been forced to flee and the government plead for peace as a revolution swept the country.

But the Workers' Councils were largely dominated by Social Democrats who'd backed the war. A new left wing government dominated by the Social Democrats, declared a republic and promised to abolish the standing army. But this new government also moved to dissolve the Workers' Councils.

As Duncan Hallas points out, these same Social Democrats set out to rebuild the capitalist state. In order to abolish capitalism the Social Democrats claimed you had to rebuild those institutions swept away in the revolution and then begin a long term haul of reforms through parliament.

The reformists had decisively rejected the idea of workers changing society themselves and any concept of workers' power.

They had become the *barrier* to socialist revolution.

In contrast, the Comintern stood for two things: revolutionary organisation on the lines of the Bolsheviks and the spreading of soviet power as the means whereby workers could exercise power themselves.

But what was the difference between the Bolsheviks, who'd led a successful revolution, and a party like the German Social Democrats who'd spearheaded a counter revolution?

The parties of the Second International before the war are described by Duncan Hallas in these words:

'They combined an uncompromising verbal hostility to capitalism with a practical activity that was essentially confined to winning members and votes ... Socialism would come inevitably as a result of the contradictions of capitalism. Confrontation with the forces of the state, or even the employers, was avoided whenever possible. As a political force social democracy was essentially passive...the idea that socialists must win workers *in struggle* is entirely missing'.

The parties of the Second International saw themselves as representing workers

within the institutions of capitalism. In doing so they did not base themselves on the minority of workers who actively opposed aspects of that society. Indeed, they saw their task as winning over all workers, however backward their ideas, to gain electoral success.

In contrast the President of the Comintern, Zinoviev, stated:

'It is the task of communism not to adapt itself to these backward sections ... but to raise the entire working class to the level of the communist vanguard ... a really determined minority of the working class, a minority that is communist, that wants to act, that has a programme, that is out to organise the struggle of the masses — that is precisely what the communist party is'.

The Comintern's leadership was campaigning against people who refused to accept that elected deputies, union officials or journalists on party publications should be placed under any discipline by the party. That is what had happened in the Second International. It is still the reality in today's British Labour Party. Everyone is supposedly free to argue their own views. But there is all the difference in the world between a rank and file member having 'freedom' of action, and Neil Kinnock and the party leadership being able to operate without any accountability.

The need to discuss and then carry out an agreed line of action is necessary to any workers' struggle. It is based on solidarity, clarity of ideas and unity in action. In contrast a party like the Labour Party can contain racists *and* anti-racists, those who back strikes *and* those who scab. Such 'freedom' undermines the rank and file and strengthens the leadership.

The united front

However, at the formation of the Comintern, the dividing line wasn't simply between those who openly stood either for revolution or reform.

In July 1920 Lenin wrote:

'Parties and groups only recently affiliated to the Second International are more and more frequently applying for membership in the Third International, though they have not become really communist ... The Communist International is, to a certain extent, becoming fashionable ...'

Whole parties previously affiliated to the Second International—like the Italian and French Socialist Parties—sent delegations to the second congress of the Comintern that month. Their ranks included open reformists prepared to swim with the tide for the moment.

Others—like the German Independent Socialists—claimed to stand between the two internationals and to call for unity. Duncan's book charts the debates of the Comintern, led by Lenin and Trotsky, in confronting those who remained reformists and in trying to win over those who genuinely vacillated between breaking openly with reformist parties and building a revolutionary alternative.

What made all this even more difficult, as

Duncan explains, is that at the same time it had become clear to Lenin and Trotsky that the newly formed Communist Parties themselves needed schooling in strategy and tactics.

Having declared themselves, they needed to win support among the working class.

And to do that they had to deal with existing parties, either reformist or claiming to stand between the Comintern and the Second International, which retained the support of most workers.

In their desire to separate themselves politically from reformism, the new Communist Parties went too far in ruling out work with those who didn't share their ideas.

In Germany in March 1920 a right wing coup attempted to topple the Social Democratic government. The workers replied with a general strike. But the new Communist Party announced there was no difference between either side and refused to back the strike. They were forced by events to hurriedly change tack.

However, a year later the Communists tried to call a general strike with only minority support in the class. When it failed to materialise, the party organised unemployed workers into squads to try and prevent workers going into the factories.

What Lenin and Trotsky had to repeat again and again was that having separated from the reformists, the new Communist Parties had to return to them in an attempt to win support among those workers who still looked to the reformist leaders.

In a country like Germany where the Communists had significant support but remained in the minority, the Comintern urged a policy of a united front with the reformists.

Trotsky explained that class struggle wasn't suspended outside periods of revolutionary crisis. The everyday struggle against the boss and capitalist state continued.

In order to win over workers, Communists had to prove in day to day struggle that they were the best militants *as a result of their clear revolutionary politics*. Such struggles raised the need for unity between workers to fight for demands which might not topple capitalism but whose success would boost class confidence. The united front was a policy of proposing unity between revolutionary and reformist workers and between the parties they looked to.

As Duncan Hallas explains:

'Two things stand out concerning the united front tactic. First, a revolutionary party cannot *simply* carry out propaganda and agitation from the fringes of the working class movement—though it *must* do these things too. Second the united front is concerned with *working class* struggles, *working class* organisations (however reactionary) and is *fundamentally* different in principle from 'Popular Fronts' or 'Broad Democratic Alliances.'

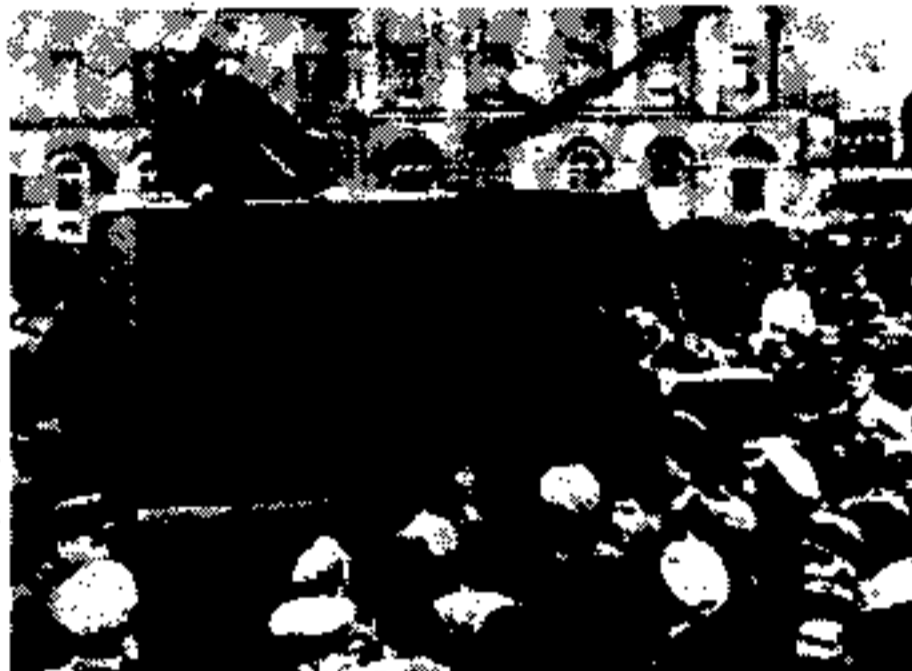
One other point is that a united front is only possible when the basis for joint activity exists and where the organisations are of comparable size.

In all this Lenin and Trotsky faced opposition from those who ruled out any compromises or any joint activity with

reformists.

In Britain, the forces involved in forming the Communist Party numbered a few thousand. At the same time the Labour Party emerged strengthened from the war. Its electoral support and individual membership boomed. Lenin pointed out that the new Communist Party had to orientate towards these workers who wanted change, who were often attracted by the Russian Revolution but who still looked to the likes of Ramsay MacDonald.

But the leaders of the new Communist Party believed that all that was necessary was to stand aside and present a formally correct programme in order to win support. They refused to become involved with non-



revolutionaries. In order to break this sectarianism, Lenin proposed the new party should affiliate to the Labour Party.

Two points need to be made. Firstly, Lenin was under no illusions about the Labour Party. Indeed he termed it 'a thoroughly bourgeois party, because, although made up of workers, it is led by reactionaries, and the worse kind of reactionaries at that.'

Secondly, Lenin wasn't proposing to *enter* the Labour Party. He proposed that the Communist Party *affiliate* to the Labour Party while retaining its own independent organisation. At a time when the party apparatus was still being formed, and groups like the Independent Labour Party or the British Socialist Party (now part of the CP) were affiliated, this wasn't unrealistic.

Lenin made it clear he expected Labour's leaders to reject the appeal. But that would give the Communists an opportunity to campaign directly among Labour members—which they did with some success in securing new recruits.

Duncan's book contains a wealth of material valuable to anyone involved in revolutionary politics. It includes arguments about work in the unions, women, elections and third world nationalism.

The second part of the book tells a different story: the degeneration of the Comintern after Lenin's death and its

dissolution by Stalin in 1943 as a gesture of solidarity to his wartime allies Roosevelt and Churchill.

The book turns on events in 1923 and in particular the failure of the German Revolution of that year. This was of no small importance. As stated, the Bolsheviks didn't believe socialism was possible in backward Russia—or any other single country for that matter. They based their hopes on international revolution and, in particular, on events in Germany.

By 1923, Russia was, as Lenin explained, a workers' state without workers. War, counter-revolution, economic blockade and famine had decimated the working class. Soviet power depended on the success of the international revolution. 1923 saw these hopes dashed.

The following year Stalin, fast gathering power based on the isolated bureaucracy which ruled Russia, declared socialism in one country was possible. By the end of the decade he'd succeeded in presiding over the counter revolution and steering Russia on the path to state capitalism. The failure of the international revolution determined the fate of soviet power.

Myth and reality

One myth that Duncan nails is that this failure was due to Russian domination of the Comintern. As he explains Lenin's and Trotsky's influence was based, not on hidden subsidies or fear of purges, but on the fact they'd led the one successful revolution. The Comintern of Lenin's time saw the Russian leaders facing bitter opposition on major questions.

The tragedy of the international revolutionary movement is that the Russian party should be playing such a leading role at the same time as the Russian Revolution, in isolation, was degenerating. The fate of the Comintern and of the Russian Revolution became intertwined.

Today many good militants rule out the possibility of building a revolutionary party—separate from the reformist party. They don't accept Lenin's idea of a party which adheres to firm principles, involving a willingness to accept, for a time, being in a small minority in the working class. And, secondly, a party which is able to work with and win workers who accept reformist ideas through intervention in day-to-day struggles.

Others like the editors of *Marxism Today* would ridicule the idea of workers leading a challenge to capitalism, let alone a revolution. As Duncan Hallas shows, while they claim to represent a new departure with the politics of alliance against 'Thatcherism' these new ideas are no more than a rehash of the failed Popular Fronts of the 1930s rammed through the Comintern by none other than Stalin.

This book describes years when revolution was a reality in modern advanced societies and when revolutionaries were able to build powerful organisations based on the ideas of workers' power. What Duncan Hallas also does is show that these ideas are far from being a pipedream today. ■

Chris Bambery

Is the dream a lie?

BRUCE Springsteen is still a member of the American steelworkers' union. His first band was called Steel Mill. At his recent Newcastle concert he donated £16,000 to the miners. He donates money to union food banks in the States.

When Ronald Reagan recently expressed his admiration for Springsteen, Springsteen was heard to say that it wasn't mutual. His songs are often peopled by blue collar workers struggling to escape, cope and survive their lives. He is a rarity then—at least among millionaire rock stars.

But behind an adulation which extends to many on the left—a closer look tells us a little more about Springsteen, and our society, than even his best lyrics.

At their best Springsteen's songs show a genuine understanding and compassion for the struggle to survive which is day-to-day life for many working people.

In the deceptively simple songs of 'Nebraska' ordinary working people are driven to violence and despair by social forces beyond their grasp. In one song a worker from an auto plant is sacked, can't find a job and shoots a night clerk while drunk. His defence to the judge is that he has debts 'no honest man could pay, the bank was holding my mortgage and they was takin' my house away'. It was 'this that put that gun in my hand'.

Against the gentle backing of 'Factory' we hear:

'Through the mansions of fear, through the mansions of pain,
I see my daddy walking through those factory gates in the rain,
Factory takes his hearing, factory gives him life,
The working, the working, just the working life.'

In his last TV interview in this country Springsteen said that his idea of what constituted a hero was changing.

It is less the motorcycle boy, the runaway teenager, the James Dean figure who features in so many of his songs. Now he identifies more with figures like his sister and brother-in-law in their everyday heroism of bringing up a family and surviving each day.

This speaks volumes about the limits of Springsteen's radicalism: working class life is a struggle to survive, not a struggle to change things; heroism is a matter of escape—down the endless highway, into the woods, down to the river—born to run. Or else heroism is merely to endure.

'The River' was dedicated on its first performance to his sister and her husband. In it a teenage couple's love affair degenerates under the impact of trying to raise a family when he 'can't get no work on account of the economy'. In Springsteen's later songs the sense of loneliness, hardship and despair as a deteriorating society eats into the fabric of individual lives is a constant motif. The easy escape of the highway is less prominent.

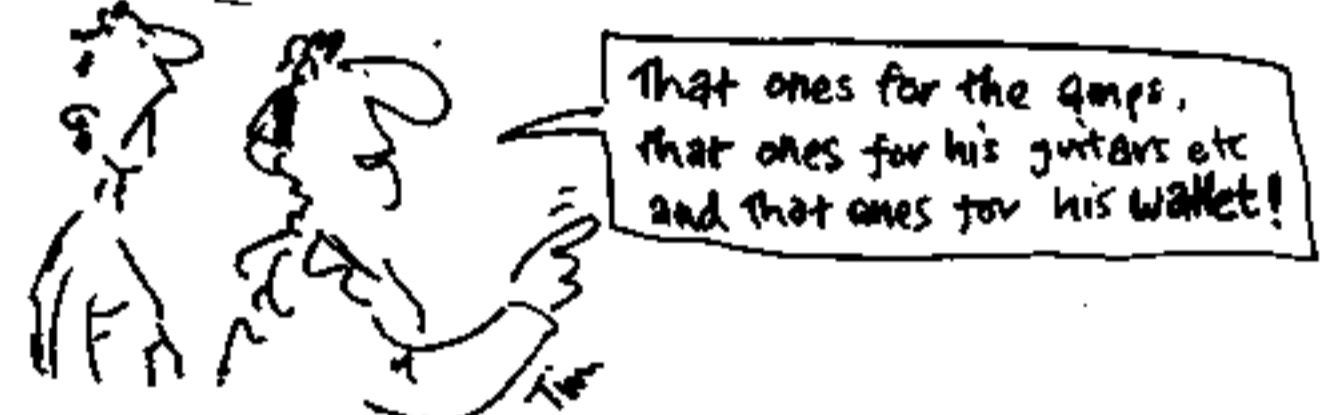
As Springsteen puts it:

'"Born to Run" was a spiritual record in dealing with values. And then "Nebraska" was about the breakdown of all those values, of all those things. It was kind of about a spiritual crisis in which man is left lost. It's like he has nothing left to tie him into society any more. He's isolated from the government. Isolated from his job. Isolated from his family...isolated from his friends.

'That's what the record is all about. That happens in this country, don't you see, all the time. You see it on the news. And it seems to be a part of modern society. I don't know what anybody can do about it.'

In a world without the prospect of collective struggle to change society, the options remain the romance of escape or the desperate heroism of noble perseverance.

Such a view has inevitable consequences:



women are rarely the ones who 'wash off the dirt, talking about the week' in preparation for going out to drink it all away. Time after time they feature as yet another means of escape, a part of life beyond the reach of the factory gates. The songs simply reproduce the predominant view of women:

'I've been working real hard, trying to get my hands clean,
Tonight we'll drive that dusty road from Monroe to Angeline,
To buy you a gold ring and a pretty dress of blue,
Baby, just one kiss will get these things for you.'
Lucky girl!

All this of course is without saying the obvious. Springsteen is where he is today precisely because big business in the shape of CBS promoted him. And Springsteen's promotion has been hype above and beyond all previous hype.

Loudly touted as 'the new Bob Dylan' (not again) early in his career, the album which really broke Springsteen worldwide—'Born to Run'—was given a massive publicity blitz. CBS made heavy use of *Rolling Stone* journalist John Landau's comment, 'I've seen the future of rock and roll, and its name is Bruce Springsteen.'

In fact, Springsteen's music is anything but futuristic. It is faithful in spirit and form to a formula which was perfected by Chuck Berry.

But in spite of its basic rock and roll foundations, in spite of the often melodramatic lyrics, Springsteen's music commands respect because it is genuine and intense. In a world rife with the plastic and the phoney Springsteen means it. He talks with an authority and compassion, not about the tribulations of choosing which of three swimming pools to use today, but about problems and escapes which are a romanticised picture of those which surround his audience.

It is a quality which has not eluded the attention of the establishment. Springsteen's home state, New Jersey, adopted 'Born to Run' as its youth anthem. The New Jersey Legislature had this to say:

'He has invested their commonplace lives, their Saturday night adventures, their teen rituals and reckless highway moments with all the significance of rock and roll myth...his music has done more than any Chamber of Commerce tourism promoter could do.'

The fact that it is a romanticised picture is vital. It is that element of idealisation which allows Springsteen's audience to escape by listening to him. Few if any will leave the

concert, jump into the re-built '32 Ford and speed away from it all down Thunder Road.

In the morning it will be back to work with the fading memory of someone who sang of an escape with which they can identify. A vicarious pleasure twice removed. And passive with it.

So, should we be grateful for a spirit of energetic rock borrowed from two generations before? Yes, perhaps we should.

Should we applaud lyrics which view working people with understanding and sympathy? Well, if the alternative is high grade philosophy a la Boy George—'War is stupid, People are stupid'—yes perhaps we should.

And undoubtedly, a performer who is committed enough to do more than go through the poses and collect the ticket money is a welcome exception. But when Springsteen asks in 'The River': 'Is a dream a lie if it don't come true, or is it something worse?', the honest answer is that the dream of escaping Reagan's desolate landscape in a '32 Ford is something worse than a lie.

It is not simply untrue, it obscures the true solution. Because Springsteen raises the question of the alienation and despair which blight working people's lives, he demands that we are more critical of his solutions than of lesser writers. Springsteen is well above average—the problem is that the average is so low. ■

John Rees

Will unity come in time?

Workers in the print industry are under attack and are badly divided. ALAN GIBSON talks to newspaper workers in Fleet Street and the provinces to find out what the prospects are for workers in the industry.

EDDIE SHAH is back in the news. His union-busting behaviour has won him the support of some very rich backers. They've managed to raise enough cash to launch a national newspaper. The full-colour daily could be on the streets by next spring.

Shah may employ unionised labour. What he won't have, however, is a closed shop. With new technology Shah no longer needs to go to the unions for labour. He can employ unskilled workers, and at rates far below those of Fleet Street.

It is from this basis that Shah can predict a 300,000 copy/day break-even point for the newspaper with a workforce of only 500.

When these figures are compared to that of the *Daily Mirror*, with a break-even point of 3½ million copies, and a workforce of 2,000 plus, it is understandable the press barons are anxious, and why they are planning to instal new technology themselves.

But what are the implications of Shah's operation to newspaper workers? And what can be done to defend jobs and conditions in the industry?

'Shah isn't like any ordinary dispute. It's bigger than anything like that, and the unions have got to think as big as Shah is thinking.' That's how one SOGAT van driver on the national press summed up the situation.

Out for confrontation

He continued, 'Shah has gone away and he's really planned the operation with his backers. Despite the Saatchi and Saatchi image of the struggling businessman who wants to talk, he's out for a confrontation. He wants to set up his own distribution network.'

'The trouble is there seems to be no clear strategy coming from the leadership of the unions.'

'There's nothing about Shah in the union journals, no meetings, nothing.'

'Back when the Pentonville dockers were put inside (in 1972) and people came round to get us on the march, you felt this was very important. There was a feeling of drama and positive action. We need the same now.'

'There's an ostrich attitude at the moment. People know something should be done but there's no leadership.'

A journalist at the *Sunday People* made the same point. 'The canteen gossip is all about Shah. People are saying Maxwell (who owns the *People*) is going to cut the workforce in half.'

'The real problem is the inter-union rivalry' she went on. 'For years there's been total mistrust and suspicion. Now there's a lot of talk among journalists of teaching the NGA a lesson. You'd think they were the main enemy.'

'In the old days of stone subbing (final corrections made to a hot metal image of the page) you could talk to the printers. Now we're not even allowed into the process room. If you go to check on something the atmosphere is totally different.'

'The printers are worried about their jobs being taken. The whole way of working is being revolutionised. All the old demarcation lines are disappearing.'

'It's no good having Dubbins and Ecclestone (general secretaries of the NGA and NUJ) at each other's throats. The whole thing needs to be looked at by all three unions.'

'A lot of the journalists are really looking forward to the new technology. They think it's going to be great.'



SOGAT, NUJ and NGA need to march together

'But the NGA have always been a strong union. They have always been there where it matters. Although no-one in the NUJ would admit it, they've ridden on the backs of the NGA for years.'

'Things have changed since Warrington though. Before, if management did something they didn't like they'd walk out. That doesn't happen now.'

An NGA member at the *Sun* agrees with this. 'People here still have High Court injunctions hanging over their heads. And a lot of the membership won't move because of the law.'

'It's management who dictate the terms now. They say what's "reasonable" and "unreasonable behaviour". And a lot of the members will go along with that.'

An NGA chapel officer on the same newspaper pointed out that one of the biggest problems was lack of communication. 'Rumour, counter-rumour. We don't know what's happening at Tower Hamlets (Murdoch's new plant in east London). We don't even know if Murdoch will even try for a non-union newspaper.'

'Management have been asked to refute the rumours, and they just say "oh, you shouldn't listen to them". Then we've asked the union officers and they say they don't know either.'

'If they would only come and tell us something is up. But the longer they leave it the worse it gets.'

Communication has worsened in recent years. When Wolverhampton and Kent (the two current disputes in the provincial press) first started we got lots of circulars from the union. But then it dried up. They are almost a forgotten army. We have to keep reminding the members the disputes are still going on.

'We have to keep taking the initiative. There's no real backing from the union. They really frowned on the recent NGA coach to Kent.'

The SOGAT member agrees. 'Dean (SOGAT's general secretary) wants more members. But she won't face up to looking after the ones she's got.'

'The issues need to be made as clear as possible. We need to start organising now.'

'The one thing the Tories never planned for was the miners' support groups. They never dreamed they would come about. Think of the millions raised in Fleet Street, and the lorries organised at a moments notice. The print can be fantastic. The people in it dynamic. People in the Street are flash. They like to think they can do things.'

'The miners' strike has bought about the seeds of Thatcher's destruction. So many people have been frightened with the viciousness and the amount of money they spent.'

'But they have a dilemma. They can't wait for Kinnock to come. It's like a cornered rat. In the end it will leap. But the leap has to be a clear strategy for winning, not just fear.'

'The level of communication has gone soft. In the 50s and the 60s people moved. The communication was there. People were involved. Communication needs to be completely redynamised.

'We've got the basis for it. The vans are going around all the time. We've got to be like the national reporting centre. The ideas have got to be put simply.

'The union jargon isn't understood. And if you haven't got the bees knees prose in the Street you lose face. Unity—federated chapels, effective coordination, central control, intelligence and strategy—that's what people understand.

'We have to match Shah with communication. If you can't communicate you can't mobilise.'

The NGA chapel officer at the the *Sun* went on 'There was a lot of activity around the miners. The majority were all fully behind them. They wanted to see them win.

'But we don't do the same for ourselves. The last time we got the sack we realised we should have had some more money to pay at least one week's wages. We now think we should build up our chapel funds.

'I think we could get a sizeable levy going. Money was the key thing during *The Times* lock-out. They told us they couldn't have withstood 11 months without the money.

'Because of the high lifestyle we've got high commitments—big mortgages. The levy will have to be big as well.

The SOGAT member agrees. 'We need a fighting fund, a levy on our members. We must get prepared to stay out for a long time.

It would start to bring home the seriousness of the problem.

'There's a big ostrich attitude that we've left it too late. People were hiding behind the miners. They were the SAS of the working class.

'If the financial thing was lifted off the ground they could see something was being done. They are incensed, but they're worried about the hardship and having their homes repossessed.

'The people at the top need to be shamed. We can kill two birds with one stone by organising from the bottom and putting pressure on the top.

'Warrington did for the NGA. The union people looked at it as if it was their own bank balances. No union started with money. It started off with spirit and a willingness to fight.

'Shah is a political appointment backed by millionaires. They've picked the strongest closed shop in the country. If they can crack that then they've done us.

'We need the fund and organisation, more publicity, more information and communication. It will make the bosses tremble and give the members confidence.'

The NGA chapel officer at the *Sun* summed up the feelings of many: 'People are saying, "if we have to go down the Swanee then we're going to take Murdoch with us".'

The basis of Shah's plans, and his ability to attract rich backers, isn't just his determination to use the courts against the unions.

Shah also intends to use the very latest equipment for his 'electronic newspaper'.

This doesn't only mean single keying—the process whereby journalists key their copy straight into a typesetting computer. It also means laying out pages on the screen—a process which will also eliminate both the old style hot metal process department, and the newer process of 'paste up'.

Until recently managements, particularly in Fleet Street, had a lot of trouble getting the unions to accept the changes. Enormous sums of money have been forked out as the union officials literally sold jobs in return for concessions.

Newspapers like the *Financial Times* have spent huge sums buying equipment and then failing to get the unions to use it.

But things are changing rapidly. A number of departments on Fleet Street are gradually being revamped with the latest equipment. And the *Daily Telegraph*, for example, has recently signed a deal with the NGA which involves the introduction of single keying.

The situation is changing even faster in the provinces. Shah showed that the NGA can be shoved aside—that it isn't necessary for managements to take that much notice of the threats from the union.

As one NGA compositor (typesetter) in the provincial press said 'the technology is literally taking away my skills. I spent five years learning them, and now they aren't worth anything.

'Our strength in the composing room has diminished along with our skills. That plus the Tories offensive makes things very tricky.

'Attitudes have changed tremendously, particularly since Warrington. Management

**A WEEK of meetings,
discussions and debates
organised by the Socialist
Workers Party
5-12 July, University of
London Union, WC1**

★ DEBATES

- THE WAY FORWARD FOR THE LEFT with **John McDonnell**, **Ralph Millband** and **Duncan Hallas** (Tuesday 7pm at Friends' Meeting House)
- THE RELEVANCE OF TROTSKY TODAY with **Tariq Ali**, **Monty Johnstone** and **John Molyneux** (Sunday 7pm at Institute of Education)
- MARXISM AND WOMEN'S LIBERATION with **Ann Petifor** (Labour Womens Action Group) and **Lindsey German** (Saturday 7pm at University of London Union)
- IS GRAMSCI RELEVANT TODAY? with **Quintin Hoare** (*New Left Review*) **Alan Hunt** (*Marxism Today*) and **Chris Harman** (Monday 7pm at University of London Union)

★ SPECIAL MEETINGS

- **Paul Foot** on RAMSAY MacDONALD (Saturday 7pm at Institute of Education)
- **Tony Cliff** on LENIN AND THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION (Wednesday 7pm at University of London Union)
- **Duncan Hallas** on REVOLUTIONARIES AND THE LABOUR PARTY (Thursday 7pm at University of London Union)
- **Ken Loach** on TV AND CENSORSHIP (Tuesday 3.45pm at University of London Union)
- **Nigel Harris** (author of *Bread and Guns*) on IMPERIALISM (Tuesday 7pm at University of London Union)
- **Ricky Tomlinson** (of Shrewsbury building workers and *Brookside* fame) on THE POLITICS OF SOAP OPERA (Sunday 7pm at University of London Union)

Marxism

★ 85

★ PLUS

- Bands include **Rent Party** (Saturday night), **The Men They Couldn't Hang** (Monday night) and **The Happy End** (Thursday night)
- **Cabaret with Skint Video** (Sunday night)
- Films include **1984** (Tuesday night), **Battle of Algiers** (Wednesday night) and **Blue Collar** (Sunday night)

The cost of Marxism 85, including entrance to all meetings, debates, entertainment, accommodation and creche is £20 for the whole week and £10 for the weekend. Day tickets are £4 (weekdays) and £6 (weekend); Session tickets are £2 (weekdays) and £3 (weekend).

For further details and registration write to Marxism 85, PO Box 82, London. Or telephone 01-729 0862.

don't think we carry the same threat as before, and neither do we. Before, if we stopped overtime nobody would step in to do it. But now people feel their skills have been taken away from them.

'Just the other day the manager was moaning about the quality of advertising copy from outside. He turned round to me and said, "This is one of the few skills you have left".

New technology isn't the real problem as such however. It's the union's response that's key. And up until now that's been disastrous.

The NGA itself has, on the one hand, 'done its utmost to keep out of the courts, and the bosses know that', said one NGA member at the *Sun*.

On the other it's 'been recruiting clericals. They lose a few thousand comps, and they make them up with clericals,' says one of the sacked NGA members in the *Wolverhampton Express and Star* dispute.

The provincial compositor says the same. 'A lot of people are very sceptical about the motives of the leadership, particularly over recruiting clericals. They see the officials substituting recruitment in other areas for fighting to defend jobs.'

When it comes to having to fight, the officials have shown no real strategy. 'At first the place was packed with officials,' says the sacked NGA member. 'Everyone left it to them to organise things. It was all quite understandable. They took the fight seriously, and we expected them to sort things out.

'But all the pushing has come from below. We've still had to organise and coordinate things. They've messed about so much that in the end we've said "oh well, we'll do it".

'Now the officials are being pulled out people are saying we should be organising ourselves. But we're 16 weeks into the dispute. We should have been saying that from the beginning.

'At first the officials were needed, but they took away our sense of self-reliance.

We've gone from one extreme to another. From mass picketing and fights with the police at Warrington to doing almost bloody nothing over Wolverhampton and Kent. There must be a middle road to go on'.

The response of the other two unions to the situation has been criminal. 'We've been really stitched up by SOGAT and the NUJ' says the sacked NGA member.

'The strength we thought we had in the press room isn't there anymore. Provided management have got a few NGA scabs—people like overseers and supervisors—then SOGAT will do the rest. We get locked out and SOGAT dive onto the presses.

'We have to go above the leadership and directly to the members' says Richard Page, NGA FoC at *The News* in Portsmouth. 'We have to make it clear that what we want is an extension of union organisation into the weaker areas. That we're not after people's jobs.

'What we want is a united fight to get a closed shop, equality of conditions, to ensure new technology doesn't attack our jobs.

'If going around saying we're a craft union gets up the noses of the NUJ and SOGAT then we should start making concessions in order to make a united front' says the NGA



chapel officer at the *Sun*.

'It is possible to unite' says the provincial compositor. 'It has to be around specific workplace issues first though. Things like the canteen facilities. At my place they are awful. Everyone gets pissed off about them. It would be possible to organise a joint fight to change them.

'If I was to go around saying "lets have a federated chapel' the others would say "oh, you're just saying that now cause you're in the shit", and I wouldn't get anywhere.'

Unfortunately time isn't on the side of newspaper workers 'Unity will come in time, but it could be too late' is a point raised by all those who spoke to *Socialist Worker Review*.

A united fight

The picture is bleak for workers in the newspaper industry at present. With NGA members locked out at Wolverhampton and Kent, and with no sign of them getting their jobs back, the problem of getting other NGA members to fight to defend their own jobs worsens.

This makes the task of trade unionists in the NUJ and SOGAT to pressure their leaders into a united approach with the NGA that much more difficult.

But unless that pressure is put the future for the NGA, and the future of the closed shop in the provincial press, is very dicey.

And the more battles that are lost in the provincial press the more difficult it will be to mobilise Fleet Street workers when the implications of Shah reach them.

Whatever is done now to support those NGA members locked out at Wolverhampton and Kent will lay the ground work for organising to defend jobs in the

future.

As has been said by many newspaper workers, the will to fight is still there if a clear lead is given. While the officials batter each other round the ears the likelihood of a clear lead coming about is remote.

But there are chinks in the gloom. At both the *East Anglian Daily Times* and the *Brighton Evening Argus* the NUJ and NGA chapels have either agreed, or are about to agree, on a united approach to management over new technology.

Such initiatives are having repercussions in other newspapers where management are intending to introduce new equipment.

As Dave Glanz, NUJ FoC at the *Evening Argus* says 'If the leaderships are intent on battering each other, then we have to try and sort things out from the bottom upwards. The only thing I'm worried about is the NUJ officials scuppering the *Daily Times* deal before we get ours signed.

'We want to be a position where we can tell Ecclestone to piss off. We can't do that on our own'.

As Ross Pritchard, London Regional Committee, NGA says 'while the NUJ and the NGA are fighting there's no hope'.

That said, however, NGA members shouldn't stop pressuring their own leadership into not only constructive talks with the NUJ, but also into providing a clear fighting strategy around the Kent and Wolverhampton disputes—a strategy that NUJ and SOGAT militants can be organising around now.

In the meantime the onus is on NUJ and SOGAT members to be campaigning around defending the NGA, and ensuring their leaderships stop condoning the scabbing going on at the two current disputes. ■

WOMEN

and the Marxist tradition

Lindsey German looks at the connection between Marxism and women's liberation

DOES the Marxist tradition have anything to offer women? The argument has been debated hotly since the early days of the women's movement. On balance, most feminists would answer no, or not much.

Their arguments range from the ridiculous and moralistic—that Marx was a patriarch who oppressed his wife—to sophisticated and serious analyses which either dismiss the Marxist tradition out of hand, along with all other socialist traditions, or which assert that other traditions like anarchism or utopianism have more relevance to the women's movement today.

The argument has resurfaced in a number of writings over the past few years. Michele Barrett's *Women's Oppression Today*, Lise Vogel's *Marxism and the Oppression of Women* and Barbara Taylor's *Eve and the New Jerusalem* are all influential books which cover the subject in different ways. And a recent article in *New Left Review* by Elizabeth Wilson and Angela Weir also takes up the argument.

And while some writers, notably Wilson and Weir, are prepared to acknowledge the importance of Marxism in developing theories of women's liberation, the general implication of most of the writing—and certainly the 'common sense' of the women's movement—is that the ideas of Marx and Engels are at best outdated, at worst too immersed in patriarchy and an obsession with class to have any relevance to today's women's movement.

To test the truth of these various assertions we need to look at two areas. Firstly, at what Marx and Engels actually said on the question of women. Secondly, at concrete examples of how those standing in the Marxist tradition have tried to organise women.

Marx's theory of revolution was based on the ideas of scientific socialism. His ideas contained similarities with many other socialist ideas of the time, but also one important and fundamental difference. The difference lay not so much in the aims of the socialist project, but in how it would be achieved.

The Communist Manifesto spelt out that: 'The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle.' Capitalist society created—as did other class societies—fundamentally antagonistic classes. But, unlike in other class societies, in capitalism the exploited class, the 'gravedigger of capitalism', had the power and the organisation to overthrow the system which created it.

'The proletariat alone is a really revolutionary class. The other classes decay and finally

disappear in the face of modern industry, the proletariat is its special and essential product.' The working class could achieve socialism precisely because it was forced to act collectively.

'The proletarian movement is the self-conscious independent movement of the immense majority, in the interests of the immense majority.'

Unlike the utopian socialists, Marx believed that socialism would not come about by right-minded people simply getting together and changing their ideas. This was what Marx described as idealism, because it started with the ideas in people's heads, not with material conditions which gave rise to those ideas. In order for the working class to change its ideas, it would have to struggle against its exploitation, and thereby create the conditions for the struggle for socialism.

That was why Marx referred to the proletariat as the revolutionary or universal class. And it is in this kernel of his theory that many of the initial confusions among feminists arise. The common and sometimes wilful misinterpretation is that Marx only talked about workers, that he wasn't concerned with personal relations, or that he dismissed the notion that struggle could come from anywhere but the working class. All of these to a large extent miss the point.

When Marx placed the power of the proletariat at the centre of his theory of revolution, he wasn't making a moral judgement that this class was the most exploited or oppressed. He was making a political judgement (and one which has been vindicated over and over from his lifetime to the present day).

He saw that the working class is the only class which has the revolutionary potential and organisational coherence not only to fight capitalism—many different sections of society can do that—but actually to beat it too.

WHAT then was Marx's attitude to the oppression of women? He and Engels had very advanced ideas for their time. *The Communist Manifesto*, written in 1848, talks about a socialist future where women will not be treated as property, and where the family as we understand the term would be abolished in favour of free, collective relationships.

The family was an institution of class society, based on private property. The proletarian family was a complete mockery, with men, women and children living and working in horrendous conditions.

The bourgeois family too was a mockery of a different sort. It mirrored prostitution, where women were bought and sold as property, and was crucial to preserving the inheritance of the ruling class, ensuring the preservation of their property. Engels believed that the working class family would disappear because it was not based on property.

On this he was clearly wrong. He didn't see how the family was to become for the working class the 'heart of the heartless world'—the area in which so many workers placed their aspirations.

Nevertheless, his *Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State* provided a materialist analysis which for the first time gave a coherent explanation of the oppression of women in class society. It located the rise of the family with the beginnings of private property, and it pointed the way to the abolition of women's oppression through the ending of class society which had created their oppression in the first place.

The theories of Marx and Engels were not abstract schema. Both understood from close study the hideous reality of family life for working people in England. *Capital* and *The Condition of the Working Class in England* paint a picture of slum housing, infant mortality, crippling working hours and conditions.

The answer to the barbarity of a system based on accumulation was for Marx and Engels nothing short of proletarian revolution. They had no doubt that either the working class would emerge victorious, or it would be crushed by the capitalist class and its state. The answer to the problems of women's oppression lay in women organised and fighting as part of the working class. This was in marked contrast to the utopians. Although some utopians shared many of the ideas of women's equality, all too often their plans for a prefigurative future rested heavily on the labour of women in the home or commune.

This insistence both on the working class organising as a class and on the necessity of a revolutionary road has laid the ideas of Marx open to much criticism from feminists. The pull of the individual solution and the dominance of moralism are so strong in the women's movement that talk of women organising as part of the class is all too frequently regarded with hostility. And the socialist feminists in the movement are clearly dominated by reformist ideas.

Michele Barrett in a *New Statesman* article written last year has indeed suggested that Marxism and feminism are mutually opposed because feminism is about 'political emancipation'—a fight for equality under capitalism—whereas Marx wanted to liberate the whole of humanity through socialist revolution.

There are two points about this argument. Firstly, it implies by sleight of hand that Marx and those who support him were never concerned with the everyday struggles of women—all they want to do is wait for the 'big bang' of revolution. This argument is current in the women's movement as: 'The revolution is all very well, but what about the here and now?'

Secondly, the argument shows how the women's liberation movement is prepared to accept the ideas of reformism—and how the movement has changed. In the late sixties the term 'women's liberation' denoted both a far reaching personal liberation for women *and* an identification with liberation struggles such as that in Vietnam. The idea of a total transformation of society was accepted by large numbers of women's liberationists.

The fact that today Michele Barrett reduces women's liberation—now called feminism—to legal equality under capitalism is a sign of the abandonment by her and others of the liberation of the vast majority of women—the working class.

In this sense, Marxism and feminism are opposed. Not because, as she puts it, Marxists aren't interested in women's equal rights. But because to limit the struggle for women's equal rights is to simply fight for reform of the existing system.

Marx did not oppose such reform, or abstain on the struggle for political emancipation. As a later revolutionary, Rosa Luxemburg, put it, 'Revolutionaries are the best fighters for reforms.' And Marx clearly defended the rights of those unequal or discriminated against to be equal. But, unlike present day feminists, he saw that a fight for equality in bourgeois society would at best still only produce a sham equality.

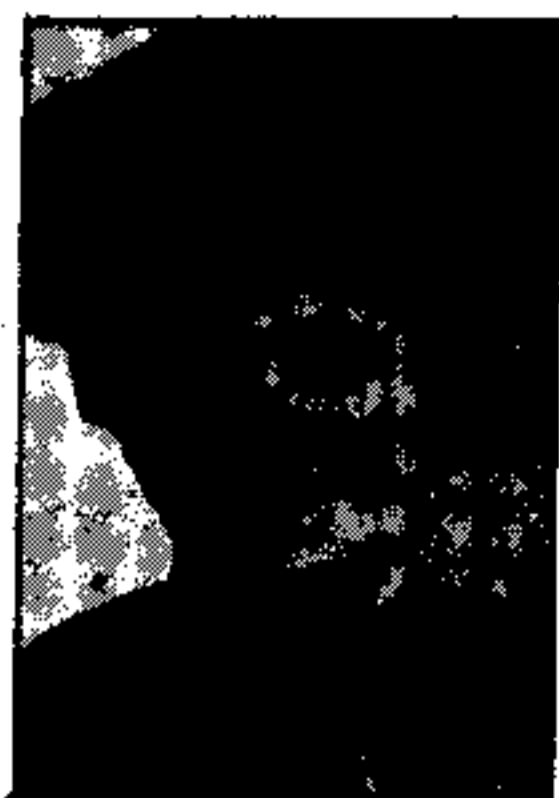
HOW were Marx's ideas on women put into practice? For much of his later life, the potential for class struggle was low. It was shortly after his death that his youngest daughter, Eleanor, tried to apply some of his ideas in her work as part of the socialist movement and in organising round the new unions of the unskilled—including many women.

Up until 1888, only a tiny percentage of British workers were in unions. These were restricted to the craft trades. The unskilled men, women, and Irish immigrants were excluded. A number of strikes changed that. The East End match girls struck against worsening conditions. The London dockers took action over pay. The gasworkers organised into a union (of which Eleanor Marx became president) and won the eight hour day. Workers in dozens of industries joined unions. Eleanor Marx, as well as being instrumental in forming the gasworkers' union, also agitated among women and men in a variety of industries.

In this she was in marked contrast to many of the feminists agitating at the time. They tended to treat women workers as victims to be pitied and cared for, rather than people who could fight for themselves.

Annie Besant, the key agitator round the match girls' strike, believed victory for the strike lay in winning respectable public opinion, such as the backing of *The Times* newspaper. There were, however, those even worse than Besant. Millicent Garrett Fawcett, a well known feminist, actually had shares in the Bryant and May factory.

Union membership swelled dramatically. As



Clara Zetkin:
unionised women

Tony Cliff has noted, 'The female membership of all trade unions increased from about 37,000 in 1886 to nearly 118,000 in 1986.' Marx's theories about the working class emancipating itself began to have a resonance. Unfortunately, however, the Marxist organisations which existed at the time were not able to take advantage of this upsurge in struggle. True, this was in part because they were tiny, but their size was a reflection of their sectarianism and inability to relate to day-to-day struggles of workers.

Even though a number of the leading figures who built the new unions considered themselves Marxists or were influenced by Marxism, they, like Eleanor Marx, tended to act as individuals, and not as part of a socialist organisation. That meant that, when the employers once again went on the offensive in the 1890s and the union movement ebbed dramatically, there was no organisation which could consolidate what gains had been made.

The Second (socialist) International, which Eleanor helped found in 1889, had more long term success in organising women.

The biggest party of the International was the German SPD. It organised women both into a party section and into the trade unions in very large numbers. By 1914, 175,000 women were members of the SPD. The leader of the German women, Clara Zetkin, saw her main job as agitating to get women into and active in the unions. The party produced a women's daily, *Die Gleichheit* (Equality) and was committed to universal suffrage.

They were also committed to the idea of equality through the theoretical writings of Engels in *The Origins of the Family* and of their own theoretician on the question, August Bebel. Unfortunately, however, lots of the valuable work done by Zetkin and others meant very little. This was due to the nature of the SPD itself. The party was one which increasingly talked socialist revolution in the abstract, but acted in a reformist manner. This practice was enshrined in the notion of a minimum/maximum programme. Socialist rhetoric was wheeled out from time to time, but the day-to-day practice of the party had no real connection with the struggle for socialism.

Women's liberation, like socialism, could safely be consigned to the far distant future, and divided from the idea of day to day struggle. The party's true reformism was demonstrated in the crisis of 1914, when the bulk of its leaders supported the imperialist war.

Along with the abandonment of revolutionary politics went an abandonment of women's liberation. In the aftermath of the war, after the SPD had been instrumental in drowning the revolutionary movement in blood, the SPD backed a policy of women being thrown out of work before men. In the 1930s, it was the Communists who campaigned for free abortion, not the SPD.

Such policies were not a consequence of Marxism—but a sign of the complete abandonment of Marxism. Yet at least the SPD had attempted in the years before 1914 to organise women as part of the working class to fight both

for socialism and for political equality under capitalism.

Whatever its faults, it had a much more impressive record than its non-Marxist counterparts. This is true if one looks at the British movement—a movement where Marxism never had a toehold and which was dominated by the ideas of Labourism.

The biggest women's movement in Britain—the suffragettes—was dominated by upper class and upper middle class women. Although many of these women were under the influence of left Labour ideas, they tended to lose these ideas as the movement progressed. Even the best of them, Sylvia Pankhurst, regarded campaigning for the suffrage and the other activities she took up as a left wing form of social work.

Not only that. The suffragettes campaigned for votes for women on the same basis as that of men—in other words on the basis of property. This would have excluded the bulk of the working class. Such an idea was anathema to the German and Russian socialists, who always fought for universal suffrage.

THE best known example of Marxism and women's liberation in practice is the experience of Russia in the years following the Russian Revolution. The Russian Marxists—the Bolsheviks—had been committed to organising women before revolution. In 1913 they established the paper *Rabotnitsa* (Woman Worker) in response to the large number of women workers taking action. After the revolution, equality at least at a formal level was on the agenda. Marriage and divorce became simple, non-religious affairs. Childcare was deemed the responsibility of society. Nurseries were provided. Communal restaurants and laundries were introduced. The right to work and to control over their own bodies was for women enshrined in law.

In short, the Russian revolution heralded the most important step forward for women's liberation ever seen.

There was no part of the world where anything like these reforms had been achieved. Indeed most of them are still not freely available today even in countries like Britain, where the functions of the family remain almost totally privatised.

But the reforms could not survive in isolation from the rest of the revolution. As it deteriorated, so the gains that women had won were destroyed or hampered. One of the most telling ironies of the Stalin period is that not only were these reforms rolled back, but the old image of woman as wife and mother was glorified in order to serve the needs of Russian accumulation.

Why were the Bolsheviks able to achieve so much in such a backward country, while far more advanced capitalist countries achieved nothing? Because they attempted to put into practice ideas developed by Marx. The workers did make their revolution, took over their industry and seized power. In the process their ideas changed drastically. The old ideas about women being in the home and not having the



*The match girls:
not just victims, but
fighters*

right to equality began to disappear as women took an active part in the revolutionary process.

The examples of Russia and Germany, and others which vindicate the Marxist tradition, are either ignored by feminists or are dismissed as inadequate. They do not fit in with the idea that the only way women can struggle is separately.

WHAT does all this mean in terms of a Marxist theory of women's liberation? The key factors which Marx located still exist. The unit of reproduction under capitalism is still the privatised family. Women still suffer oppression in class society. Even some of the most basic demands for women's equality—like free childcare—cannot be met by a crisis-ridden capitalism. That same capitalism tries to place ever more burdens on the working class family.

Late capitalism has seen a huge increase in women workers. Despite the recession, there seems no sign of this trend being reversed. Women are joining trade unions at a faster rate than men. They are now much more centrally part of the working class—and therefore much more capable of fighting to change the world—than ever before.

At the same time, capitalism itself has developed and has changed women's personal lives. Advances in technology mean that housework is much less the heavy manual work it used to be. Contraception has led to a constantly declining birth rate in the advanced capitalist

countries. These factors have freed women from the old drudgery. True, they have freed them to be exploited by the capitalist class. But this at least gives women the potential to fight back together, rather than remain atomised in the home.

The theories which Marx began to develop nearly 150 years ago are, if anything, even more relevant when 46 percent of workers in Britain are women.

There is much to deal with today that Marx and Engels did not deal with. Arguments about abortion and contraception have moved on since their time. Women's patterns of work have changed beyond recognition. Women have had the vote for over 50 years and have nowhere near won political equality.

But Marx and Engels were products of their time. They could no more have dealt adequately with them than they could have theorised the trade union bureaucracy or imperialist war—developments which only became fully apparent after their deaths.

It is their method, and their general theory of revolution which can be applied to understanding how the present day world works and how it can be changed. And that theory has far more to contribute to ending women's oppression—through ending class society—than all the theories of feminism.

That is why the key to fighting for women's liberation lies in fighting to implement the socialist ideas which Marx and Engels developed.

Crisis at the chalk face

SINCE the beginning of this year the main teaching unions in England and Wales have been taking industrial action over a pay claim. Last term alone 30,000 NUT members were involved in strike action in over 1,700 schools and a majority of all teachers are continuing to refuse to carry out traditional duties for which they are not contractually bound.

The dispute looks set to continue into the new academic year.

This new militancy amongst a traditionally 'middle class' group has a number of causes. Since the Houghton award of 1974 (which gave a massive 29 percent increase) the real value of teachers' wages has fallen by 34 percent. Furthermore one solution to falling real wages, individual promotion up the salary scales, has been blocked as teacher numbers have fallen due to cutbacks in education spending and falling school rolls.

Presently something like two-thirds of all NUT members are stuck on the bottom two scales with little chance of promotion.

The latest School Inspectors' report has ably documented the results of the cuts. Many school buildings are badly in need of repair, facilities are inadequate and basic equipment is in short supply.

Accompanying the financial attacks has been a consistent ideological attack on education which was launched by the then Labour prime minister Jim Callaghan back in 1976. Both in the popular press and in parliamentary debate, the 'failures' of education are regularly blamed on those at the 'chalk-face' for not doing their job properly.

Teachers are frequently blamed for society's ills—unemployment, football hooliganism, drug addiction and anti-social behaviour of every kind. Joseph's remedy is to weed out the 'incompetent' teachers by bringing in teacher assessment and linking pay to results, a proposal which would serve to 'divide and rule' the workforce and re-introduce the idea of teacher professionalism. The employers want to further control teachers by making all kinds of duties part of the normal contract.

The very processes of education are also under attack. The assumption that standards are falling has led the right to call for the re-introduction of selective education.

Also, the new 16 plus exam and the 'national criteria' for subjects are not as innocent as they appear. They serve to centralise control over the curriculum and allow the government to dictate its content. For example in Social Science subjects the DES is prescribing the syllabus content, insisting on introducing Tory concepts such as 'market forces' and 'free enterprise' and losing the important elements of criticism and analysis of social conflict (like the miners' strike) which many such courses have for a long time included.

Student profiling is another new vogue which has sinister implications. The profiles, intended to help the school leaver with find-

ing employment, contain, among other things, value judgements about punctuality, attendance and attitude—all helpful in allowing employers to identify potential 'troublemakers' before they are given a job.

Finally, there has been a steady encroachment into the school curriculum of those vocational subjects pioneered by the MSC and extended by YTS. Secondary schools are being slowly turned into training centres where those not capable of academic 'success' (in other words the vast majority) are given mediocre practical 'skills' which may fit them into their eventual menial office and manual jobs or at least show them how to fill in a dole claim form properly!

Withdrawal of goodwill

It is against such a background that the NUT executive initiated the salaries campaign in January after a 4 percent offer from the employers had been rejected. In fact, most teachers probably don't believe they will get a £1,200 increase out of this dispute. The withdrawal of goodwill and the local strikes simply provide an excellent opportunity to collectively say 'sod it' to all the pressures that have been mounting over the years!

However, as the summer term draws to a close, many NUT members must be wondering about the possibility of achieving any success at all in the campaign when so little movement has occurred in the government and employers' position. The responsibility for this state of affairs lies with the tight control the executive have maintained over the campaign, and the strategy they have pursued. The withdrawal of goodwill and the selective strikes have done nothing to dent the government's intransigence.

Despite the overwhelming response from teachers when called upon to take action, the overall effect of the strategy has been to keep striking teachers isolated and impotent, away from the largely passive majority—using teachers as a stage army to politically embarrass the Tories and win over public opinion.

Consequently, in the weeks after the NUT conference at Easter where delegates were promised an escalation of the dispute, the executive exempted from strikes those local authorities who signed a declaration of support for the teachers' case.

Almost immediately, as the left and not-so-left Labour councils lined up to sign the document (which doesn't commit them to anything), those areas which have some of the strongest and most militant union groups were not allowed to strike, even to the extent of previously arranged strikes being cancelled only hours before they were due to take place.

In such a situation, the actual number of teachers on strike becomes a poor indication of the overall strength of the action. Most of the union militants are isolated in terms of their effect on the dispute at a national level.

The union leadership have been able to give the impression of putting up a militant fight without leading the kind of action that could have won the full claim.

Of course there was an alternative strategy which could have had genuine success in moving the employers had it been adopted. Whilst a majority of teachers were not prepared to support an all-out strike, which would have been the only action that would come near to forcing a £1,200 rise, there were occasions, in the early weeks of the dispute, when strike action could have been escalated and extended to create the momentum for more sustained action. However, at each opportunity the NUT leadership decided to go in the opposite direction.

They refused to consider allowing the best organised areas to form some sort of vanguard and go out on indefinite strike, a policy which would have seriously escalated the dispute and allowed militants to go out and argue for similar action in the weaker schools, creating an effective momentum.

Later on in the dispute, the leadership argued against hitting the one target which would have provoked immediate response, the summer public exams, because they were fearful of adverse public opinion.

These points need stressing because of the currently fashionable arguments from sections of the left, after the miners' defeat, which contend that unions should look to winning public opinion and not to militant industrial action as the way forward. The current failure of the NUT strategy shows the fallacy of this argument.

The scale of the employers' and government offensive and the possibilities of organising some sort of resistance at a local level make it both possible and vital that the left in the NUT is reorganised into one broad organisation. It is to this end that the SWP teachers issued a call for left unity in October last year, and have attempted to bring about more co-operation at a local and national level on a number of issues.

All this work should come to some fruition at the end of this month when there is to be a Unity conference, initiated by the Socialist Teachers' Alliance (with a lot of encouragement from SWP teachers), involving all the left groupings, to discuss the setting up of a national organisation—effectively a united Broad Left in the NUT.

All the experience shows that it should be possible to involve much wider numbers of teachers in such an organisation than those already committed on the left. The involvement in strike action and the operation of sanctions in the schools has served to help shift thousands of teachers away from the middle class notion of professionalism that has hampered trade union organisation in schools for decades. The experience of the miners' strike has also had a particular effect.

It is likely that the 'crisis' in schools will intensify. Government cuts will put education under increasing pressure and the employers' offensive on pay and conditions will lead many more teachers to seek resistance in collective action, as the road to personal promotion becomes increasingly narrow. ■

Mike Stirland

What do we mean by.

Working class

NOTHING is more fundamental to the politics of the Socialist Workers Party than the working class, because only the working class can get rid of capitalist society and bring about socialism. This was the central point of Marx's theory, and since Marx it has always been a major concern of ruling class ideology to deny it.

Within the labour movement itself, there are reformists who may believe that the working class will benefit from socialism, but deny that workers can act as a class to bring it about. Today even many people who call themselves Marxists claim that the idea of working class revolution is outdated, and some even say that the working class is disappearing.

Opponents of Marxism have always found it useful to define the working class in ways that make it seem that Marx was wrong about working class revolution. It is necessary to say very clearly what we mean by the working class, and what we do not mean, because the term is used in so many ways that have nothing to do with Marxism.

It is often said, for example, that the working class is defined by a set of *attitudes*. A recent letter in the *London Evening Standard* from a businessman carried this to its furthest extreme. Class, he wrote, is 'due to an upward-looking suspicion.' Workers on the factory floor perpetuate it by refusing to trust or be friends with managers like himself. 'Class', he concluded, 'is the observation of the workers, not the managers.' According to this view, class divisions, like fairies, would just disappear if only workers would stop believing in them!

Values and lifestyle?

More seriously, most sociology defines class as a set of *values*, a whole outlook on life which distinguishes the working class from others. So we read, for example, that working class people spend money as soon as they get it, do not think ahead, and are not ambitious to plan a career for themselves but regard work as an unpleasant necessity.

But, in so far as working class people do have some or all of these 'values', they are a consequence of the conditions they live in—low pay, insecurity and bad working conditions—rather than something existing only in their heads.

In quite different quarters, it is even fashionable to define the working class by their ignorance. The *Class War* anarchists, for example, argue that socialists cannot appeal to the working class because they talk about Marxist theory, or know what happened in history—some of us even discuss art and literature! Real working class people, they claim, just say Bollocks to all that.

Some Marxists do cut themselves off from

the working class by their academic approach, which seems to make theory the exclusive property of experts with a couple of philosophy degrees. It is also true that the way most working class people are educated denies them any real understanding of the world, limits their ability to express themselves (especially in writing) and deprives them of art and literature.

But it is surely an insult to the working class to suggest that they find their true identity by *remaining* ignorant and inarticulate. Gut reactions might take you as far as smashing up the Henley regatta or hating opera, but to smash a whole social system and a state knowledge and understanding are necessary.

If the working class is not defined by ideas (or lack of them), it is sometimes defined by *lifestyle*. There is often nostalgia for the way working class people lived 50 or 60 years ago: a lifestyle of poverty, when neighbours borrowed cupfuls of flour or sugar, working class homes had no modern conveniences, and holidays consisted of the occasional trip to the seaside.

Nowadays supermarkets, hire purchase, television and a fortnight on the Costa Brava are more likely to be part of the definition of a working class lifestyle. These things are often disparaged, though it is hard to see why, as they are (however shoddy in many cases) material gains for the working class. The main problem is, however, that any definition of the working class by lifestyle concentrates on what people *buy* (or can't afford to buy) rather than on what they *produce*.

It is production, not ideas or lifestyle, that lies at the heart of the Marxist definition of the working class. We can only know what the working class is by looking at the relations of production in capitalist society. This is a society in which one class owns the means of production—factories, machinery, raw materials and so on—and another, the working class, produces the goods. Workers in capitalist society sell their labour power and are paid wages for it, at a level which allows the capitalist to make a profit as well as enabling the workers to buy the necessities of life.

Workers do not control the conditions they work in, and they do not at any point own what they produce. A self-employed carpenter who makes a table may sell it or keep it for himself; but a worker at Thorns who tried to take home a television set for her family would get the sack. The whole class system revolves around these central facts, though it is obviously not limited to manufacturing industry.

For workers not only produce the goods in our society, they supply services as well. Some of these services are directly related to

production, to capitalist investment, or to the sale of goods. Office typists, bank clerks and checkout girls are as much part of the working class as factory workers.

Other services are less directly related to production but still essential to the system: transport of goods and people, for example. All wage earners who provide these services are part of the working class. So, too, are the majority of people who work in public services such as health, education and welfare. Their services keep the whole society going, and their wages are, like factory workers' wages, enough to keep them at the same standard of living as the rest of their class. Dustmen, nurses and home helps are part of the working class, no less than miners or steelworkers.

The working class also includes many individuals who are not actually working for wages: children and housewives, for example, who depend on an employed workers' wages. Unemployed and retired workers are also part of the working class, because at other times in their lives they have depended or will depend on earning wages for a living.

White, male and skilled?

The self-employed are not part of the working class, for reasons touched on above. Neither are managers, who make decisions and give orders on behalf of the ruling class. This is true whether managers are the offspring of bosses themselves, or have 'risen' from the factory floor, because it is not your parents' position that defines class, but your own (though young people who have not yet started work must surely belong to their parents' class).

Most professionals, such as doctors and lawyers, belong—like the self-employed and managers—to the middle classes. The position of teachers is perhaps more ambiguous, especially at the higher levels of the profession. A university is traditionally supposed to be a corporation of scholars; but the mass of primary and secondary school teachers are employed like any other skilled workers and have as little control over their working conditions as most office workers.

The Marxist definition of the working class is far from narrow, and certainly not limited to skilled white male workers, as Ken Livingstone and the 'soft left' are now claiming. Even the hard core of the working class, workers in manufacturing industry (the core because they are the model, hard because they are potentially the most powerful) are very far from being all white, male and skilled. Workers in public and private services—without whose labour also capitalist society would collapse—certainly include only a minority who are all three of these things.

A sociologist or a market researcher carrying out a survey could find many different values and a number of different lifestyles among the working class. A socialist trying to build a union or a party would find many different levels of class consciousness. But what defines the working class is none of these things. It is the material facts of the work they do and the wages they earn. ■

Norah Carlin

Whatever happened to Red Ken?

THE first few months of 1985 have marked a turning point in Ken Livingstone's career. He has finally assured himself a safe seat in the House of Commons after the next general election. He has broken with his former supporters on the hard left at *Labour Herald* and the GLC. He has emerged as perhaps the most famous of the left converts to Neil Kinnock's leadership of the Labour Party. And he has become a candidate for treasurer of the Labour Party, not as a left opposition but as a man who will modernise the Party's finances.

Livingstone is now an articulate advocate of unity behind Kinnock. Immediately after the ratecapping fiasco he told Beatrix Campbell in *Marxism Today*, 'The movement is not going to achieve anything without the coalition and agreement of all the various trends within the party together.'

As for those councillors who advocated breaking the law over ratecapping, Livingstone says they 'overlooked the strong element of principle in both wings of the party in the debate. It wasn't all heroic people on one side and scabs and traitors on the other.'

Left wing hero

In another year or two it will be difficult to recall the enthusiasm with which Livingstone was regarded on the extreme left of the Labour Party. Papers like *Socialist Action* and *Socialist Organiser* quoted him frequently with enthusiasm. Tariq Ali led the hagiography with some remarkable comments:

'Livingstone is the most gifted representative of the new Labour Left. He speaks a different language from the careerist Labour politicians...he has moved towards militant socialism rather than in the opposite direction.'

He continued in even more enthusiastic vein:

'...the alliances which need to be fought for and brought about are between the new breed of socialist politicians exemplified by Livingstone and the generation of Marxists brought up on the writings of Miliband, Mandel and Anderson.'

It seems doubtful that Tariq Ali will bring out a second edition of his book. Livingstone seems to have made the same sort of break that countless Labour politicians have in the past. His early radicalism has turned to concern about his own career.

Some of his former supporters argue he was always a careerist, using the left for his own ends, and ditching it when the going got rough. Others accuse him of betraying his own principles. Neither explanation is adequate.

The radicalism of the earlier Livingstone was a real response to the failure of the Labour Party in government in the period 1974-9. Both the radicalism and its abandonment are products of the same political

development. They are two sides of a coin minted in the political confusion of the Labour Left in the early 1980s.

The starting point for Livingstone's career was Harold Wilson's leadership of the Labour opposition in the early sixties. The corruption and failure of the Macmillan government, the appearance of Sir Alec Douglas Home as Tory prime minister drove thousands to look to the dynamic new leader of the Labour Party.

When Wilson finally became prime minister in 1964 the promises turned to dust. Livingstone says that by 1966 (when Wilson won a second election with a very big majority) he was already disillusioned. He held off from joining for two years. But the date he did join is of some importance.

Livingstone finally became a member of the Labour Party at the beginning of 1968, when the campaign against the war in Vietnam was already in full swing, just a few months before the riots and general strike in France. He joined at a time when most active socialists were leaving, as he soon found out.

'What I didn't realise when I joined the Labour Party was how totally debilitated it had become. I suppose 1968/70 must have been the absolute nadir in terms of active party membership... I joined thinking that there would be a really good chance in about ten years time of getting on the local council if I worked really hard... By the time I went to my second branch meeting I was chairman and secretary of the Young Socialists and on the local government committee. By the time I went to the third I was membership secretary of the party and on the executive committee. There was simply no one else around to do those sorts of things. Everybody else had left. At general management committees there were only 25 present...'

'Why did he stay? Anyone with an ounce of idealism was either immersing themselves in the trade unions or the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign or one of the revolutionary organisations that grew rapidly in 1968. Livingstone puts it down to his political understanding.

'There was no way you were going to build anything without the Labour Party. Perhaps because my interest in politics was geared to psephology, and things like that, rather than to pure ideology, it was more obvious to me than to others at the time. The solid attachment of millions of working class people to the Labour Party meant that it was this party that had to be taken over and changed. So I joined.'

Possibly this is why he joined, but it doesn't explain why he thought the ward GMC meetings he described were a basis for changing anything. Certainly he had no clear political ideas. He tells us:

'I've never been a theoretician. By the time I reached the stage where I wanted to read more theoretical works, I was

already on the council. That was in 1971 and ever since I've been reading council agendas.'

The Red Ken the *Daily Mail* has been obsessed by for the past four years hadn't emerged by the early 1970s. But then two events shifted Livingstone far to the left.

The first was the experience of the Labour GLC administration of 1973-7. Livingstone was appalled by the way it abandoned its election manifesto and started attacking the fares subsidy and housing policies on which they had been elected. Livingstone was at the centre of the revolts and arguments which went on until the Tories under Sir Horace Cutler won control back again.



Livingstone argues for unity with Kinnock

As early as 1979 Livingstone was prepared to push the right wing of the Labour Party out of control of the GLC. In *Socialist Organiser* he wrote,

'Those who have a commitment to a socialist GLC need to start organising now if this motley crew are to be prevented from discrediting the Labour Party in the eyes of the electorate for a second time in a decade.'

While Livingstone was shocked by Labour's record at the GLC, hundreds of thousands more Labour supporters were reeling from the impact of the Wilson-Callaghan Labour government of 1974-9. It was a disaster—unemployment doubled, real wages fell for the first time since the war, the last days of the government saw the Labour prime minister urging trade unionists to break the hospital workers' picket lines.

Livingstone's policy prescriptions became more and more radical.

'I think the reality for a socialist administration, given the things it wants to do,

is that it has to tackle the question of capital...I don't think you can duck the issue of taking control of banks and finance houses. That means taking control of the accumulated capital that exists and then starting to direct it.'

The pragmatism, the commonsense approach and his understanding of the sense of betrayal felt by many Labour supporters, put him on the left. But that same pragmatism enabled him to make numerous compromises, just as it kept him distant from any particular political grouping within the Labour left.

Finally, with his election as leader of the GLC in 1981, Livingstone found himself facing dilemmas that most of the Labour left didn't have to face.

As long ago as June 1981, talking with *Socialist Review*, he gave clear warnings about the way he was likely to develop.

'We try to avoid people rushing away with the idea that this is a revolutionary



council that's going to bring down the government or transform life in London...'

In the same interview, when asked about maintaining services without a rate increase, he replied,

'You mean the bankruptcy option. Clearly there are circumstances, if the life of the government is threatened... But short of that—no, because you're in a position where the government has all the cards in its hands. That bankruptcy option is credible when you've got trade union and mass support. But when the government isn't threatened with defeat, to take that option merely opens the way for the government to set you aside.'

At the very beginning of his days as GLC leader, Livingstone shook John McDonnell, one of the leaders of the hard left faction on the GLC, by blocking with the right wing and centre councillors to oppose granting the full wage claim being made by London Transport workers.

Next came the cornerstone of Labour's

policy—fare cuts. Once the original ruling that the cuts were illegal had been made, Livingstone and the GLC faced a simple choice—confrontation or compliance. The right and centre on the GLC ensured that the law was obeyed, helped by some Tory votes. Livingstone *said* he was for fighting.

On a second vote to implement the Law Lords' fare increases, however, Livingstone broke with the left and voted with the right-wing of the Labour Party. Staying in office, if not in power, to keep the Tories out, was the argument he gave.

John McDonnell describes his feelings at the time.

'To go to court, lose and then have your own side voting in favour of the ruling, plus Livingstone as well in the second vote, was catastrophic, quite honestly. It destroyed the credentials of the leadership for the hard left within the Labour group for a long period of time.'

But McDonnell too was caught. Livingstone felt trapped by the right wing, and was only prepared to go so far in defying the courts or the government. McDonnell and the hard left might have wanted to go much further, but they were prisoners of Livingstone. They could no more break with him, until the final fiasco over ratecapping, than Livingstone was prepared finally to break with the right.

When faced with the reality of politics, Livingstone behaved like thousands of other Labour politicians. Maybe he didn't like it, but he carried on within the limits imposed by the system.

Minority groups

But while the central thrust of GLC policy after the collapse over fares was no different from previous administrations, on a number of issues Livingstone began to make an impact. On Ireland in particular his actions don't look at first sight like those of a rising left Labour careerist. No mainstream English politician has said the sort of things Livingstone has said about Ireland for 60 years.

'If you read anything of Irish history you read it with a sense of outrage... It's a most appalling record. It ranks with the way some of the Middle Eastern races have been liquidated by the Turkish Empire or the Russians. It rates worse than the way the Kurds have been butchered... It is the most appalling chapter. It spans 800 years, but it's as bad in those 800 years as what Hitler did to the Jews in six. It's only because it's spread over 800 years that we don't see it in such horrifying terms... If you read any of the detailed histories of Ireland you boil with rage. It is worse than all the Boers have done to the blacks in South Africa, which chills the blood of *Guardian* readers.'

For a man who wants to be treasurer of the Labour Party—and who knows what else in the future—his speeches on Ireland don't seem sensible behaviour, any more than his support for the lowering of the age of consent for gays to 16.

There is an explanation. Livingstone believes that in London at least there is no

longer a manual working class in any serious sense. A serious base for political change has to be built therefore among those who are clearly disadvantaged by the present system—blacks, gays, Irish, single parents and so on. The oppression these groups suffer makes them, for Livingstone, a base which has one simple power—they can vote. Since Livingstone believes that the Labour Party is the only conceivable instrument of social change and has taken on board some of the ideas about the working class of Professor Hobsbawm, his support for these groups isn't so surprising, even though his outrage on the issues is clearly genuine.

Kinnock and Wilson

Livingstone's lack of any working class constituency makes him vulnerable to shifting fashions and ideas.

Livingstone isn't bound to any particular set of political ideas—far less so than Tony Benn, Dennis Skinner or Arthur Scargill. The commonsense approach which he espouses lays him open to every pressure to shift to the right. 'Commonsense', wrote Gramsci, is the 'day to day ideology of the bourgeoisie'.

Neither his political base nor his political ideas made him secure in his positions. And so the shift to the right when it came was very fast.

And that is why his political resting place at present looks like being alongside Neil Kinnock.

In *The Guardian* recently, Livingstone announced, 'We have in Neil Kinnock a Labour leader who is infinitely open to persuasion.' According to Livingstone it is Kinnock's 'gut instinct' we should look to.

But why does Livingstone think Kinnock will be any different from Harold Wilson? His arguments are not very reassuring.

'Wilson became Prime Minister after 20 years in or close to the centres of power. Neil Kinnock on the other hand went from a very stable, secure family background in a small town in Wales, where there is still a strong sense of community, through grammar school and university and then, with a three year gap lecturing, straight into parliament... I think personality matters. However if you look at some of the positions he has taken on the miners and the NGA dispute, it seems likely that a Wilson or a Callaghan would have condemned the strikes quite shamelessly. There is at least a certain improvement here.'

Livingstone emerged on the hard left but always the question of getting Labour elected took precedence. There was no question of resigning from the GLC after the Law Lords broke the fares policy, there is no question of allowing past disputes to threaten the unity needed to win the next general election.

As a new 'reasonable' left emerges in the Labour Party to provide Kinnock with support all the way to Downing Street, Ken Livingstone will stand as one of its most prominent members. He will keep much of his support. His positions will still seem to smack of commonsense.■

Pete Clark

WORK PLACE NOTES

SWR spoke to two London postmen. A is a sympathiser of the Socialist Workers Party, B is a member.

A: AT OUR place there are two offices where people work, the head office and the delivery office half a mile away. The union is organised into an amalgamated branch with eight sections. The hub of the branch is the postman's section.

Each section is autonomous, selecting its own committee, chairman and secretary. The numbers on the committees vary. Ours has ten members.

The committees of the various sections are effectively the shop stewards. The only full timers are the secretary and chairman of the branch.

B: My office is divided into three branches and my branch covers postmen, cleaners, doormen, liftmen and the catering grades. We have an AGM and three quarterly meetings which are held on Sundays. We also have irregular kitchen meetings if anything crops up. The Sunday meetings are poorly attended, but you get more to the kitchen meetings because it's in work time.

Kitchen meetings are ones which are held on all three shifts, usually for information purposes.

The Post Office still has different grades identified by a letter like 'A' class or 'L' class. However, this means a lot less now than many years ago, when the Post Office was part of the Civil Service and had far more ex-military types in it. In fact, because the job runs on seniority, the longer you've been there the better job you can get.

In the olden days the senior men really felt the junior men to be inferior. My dad, who

'...BUT WHEN SOME SMALL ISSUE COMES UP, THEY DON'T STOP TO THINK ABOUT HOW POWERFUL THE TORIES ARE...'

works in the same office and has done for 35 years says that at one time the messenger (telegram) boys weren't allowed out until they had been inspected on parade and had their hands and nails checked to see that they were clean.

Our branch committee is made up of the branch officers plus about nine floor reps who are there for any member to go to with grievances. But because these reps aren't really accountable or representing any particular section of the office most people simply bypass or ignore them and go straight to the Secretary or Assistant Secretary.

I and a couple of other militants have discussed how the union branch can be made more effective by organising on a sectional basis, so that the floor reps would be more directly accountable. This might be more difficult to achieve where, unlike say a factory, there is less demarcation, less actual identifiable groupings.

Some of the drivers have been suggesting that we have regular meetings which is something that I obviously agree with. This would begin to achieve a better informed group of drivers and make the drivers see themselves as a force. Sectionalism would have to be argued against but the important benefit would be that they would set an example to the rest of the branch.

A: There are a lot of young blokes coming in. They won't do the job right unless you show them. For example a foot postman can only carry one sack on his round. To get round this some of the young blokes sometimes put an extra sackful in the boot of their car. We as drivers have to stop them doing it and carving up our job.

B: Over the last couple of years we've had quite an influx of youngsters too. It's the first job, the first taste of trade unionism for most of them. We've discussed how we can do something about the branch officers not organising them. We haven't come up with anything really concrete except for the idea of having one of us chat to them for about half an hour. The supervisors get onto the young ones, they're much more aggressive towards them.

The productivity deal that was passed at the recent UCW conference has been in operation at our office for a couple of years. Locally it has led to some divisions. One section gets £60 a week bonus whereas most of us get £5. There has recently been a row over overtime. This works on an aggregate system each month—the more you work in the first weeks the less you are entitled to later on.

Because we no longer have a closed shop agreement with the Post Office new entrants have to be convinced of the necessity of joining the union. Only one has left. Not because he is anti-union—in fact you could always rely on him to back you up. He left because he was disgusted with our executive and our Secretary over something and I feel sure he will come back.

Some time ago some of the right-wing people in the office were threatening to leave the union as soon as Maggie ended the closed shop. But none of them have.

A: Over the political levy ballot we didn't have any kitchen meetings called by the

branch officers till I created a stir about it. I had to speak at it because none of the branch officers could be bothered.

B: At the recent UCW conference Alan Tuffin, our General Secretary, argued that the Tories were too powerful to fight against.

Many members accept Tuffin's arguments. But when the issue of part-timers or some small issue comes up locally they don't stop to think of the powerful Tories.

A: The last big dispute we had was over the crown (high street) office closures late last year during the miners' strike. Union HQ sent out a branch circular only two days before the planned day of action instructing the postal officers to take 24 hour action.

The HQ directive said that the postal officers' picket lines shouldn't interfere with other grades.

Important victory

We put out a circular which countermanded the HQ one. Four out of the 21 branch officers were intending to scab. We decided to take the initiative. We instructed the drivers to treat them as closed.

Once the drivers returned eight or ten of them were taken upstairs to the Chief Inspector's office. He instructed them that they should work normally or face suspension.

When we heard about this we got all the drivers together and got them to endorse the policy. Then we went downstairs and contacted union HQ. The deputy General Secretary told us that we were well out of order and told us to instruct our members to work normally.

I was Branch Secretary at the time. I was flabbergasted. Following that we got all the drivers together. We told them of management's threats and what the union HQ had said. They decided to walk out if anyone was suspended. The drivers went out for the next collection. Two of them faced picket lines. One was suspended.

Four scabbed out of 500. Even now they are well remembered. People have very little to do with them.

The postmaster came the heavy. He tried to lock us out. We said we weren't moving and stopped in the union office anyway.

The Branch Chairman contacted a sister branch nearby. When I was speaking to one of the sub-offices word came through that the sister office had come out. 900 were now on strike. It was a great feeling. The postmaster shat himself and backed down.

The dispute was important because it proved we could win. It was the first victory we'd had for a long time. The geezers were jubilant.

B: I very recently became one of the drivers' reps. There hasn't been much to organise around but this could change with management's intention to revise the driving duties.

I am well known in the office as the local red or commie because of the way I argue and my sales of *Socialist Worker* which fluctuate. The most I've sold in a week is 21 although it probably averages about 14 or 15 a week. I've also managed to get a few people from work to attend SWP branch meetings and obviously hope they can be brought nearer to our politics. ■



A slice of life?

WHY should anyone bother to review one of the least known working class writers to come out of the 1960s? Alan Sillitoe and Stan Barstow are better known and better writers, with one important exception.

Like them, Hines began by writing about his class. Unlike them, he still does. His first book didn't appear until the mid-sixties, by which time the 'slice of life' novel had been well and truly established.

But while most other writers have since found out which side their slice of life was buttered on, Hines continues to focus on his working class origins. The narrative style is simple and straightforward.

You can never really get to grips with his characters, because he's more interested in the social environment they have to live in. Bills to be paid, work to be found, UB40s signed—workers never have the time to contemplate their navels. Making ends meet is too important.

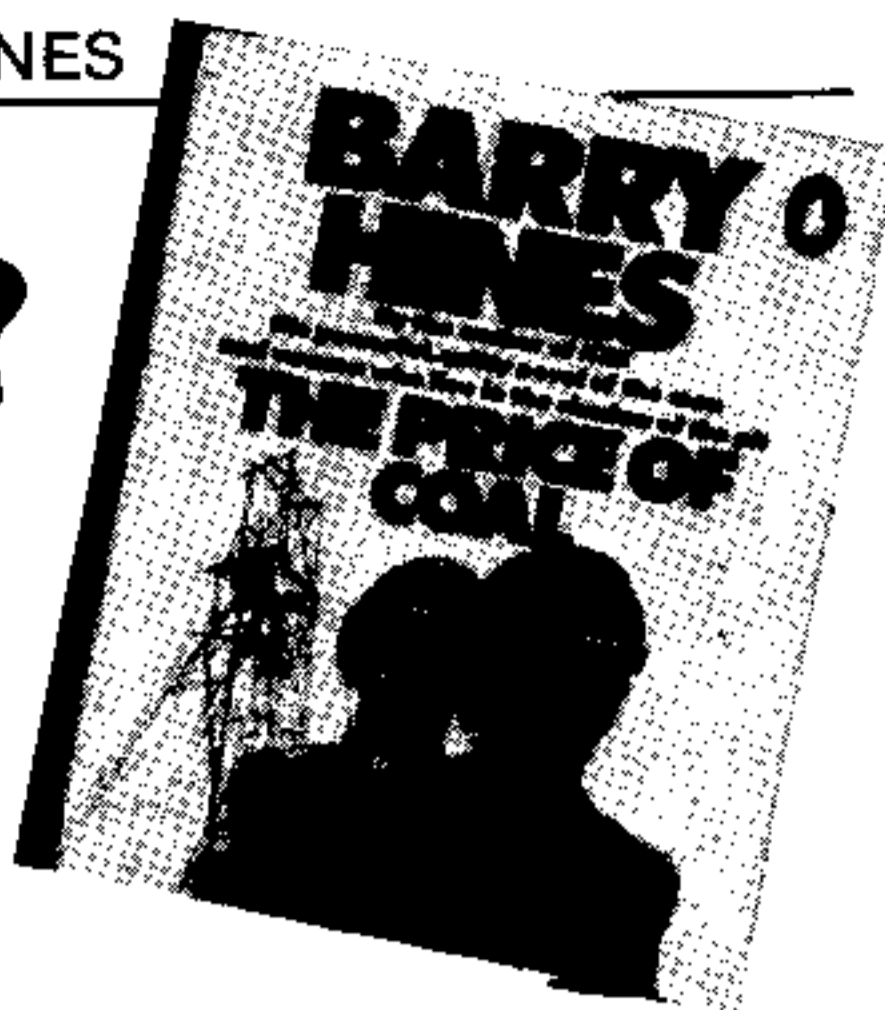
So, literary tastes aside, Barry Hines stands head and shoulders above the likes of Sillitoe, by virtue of the fact that he has retained an acute feeling for his class. That feeling has expressed itself in half a dozen novels. Three form a graph of working class moods over the last twenty years—*Blinder* (1966), *The Price of Coal* (1979) and *Looks and Smiles* (1982).

Starting from the bottom (or the top, whichever way you prefer), *Blinder* is set in Harold Wilson's white heat of new technology era. Lenny Hawk is the original golden boy. Whether it's soccer or scholarship, he can't touch anything without it turning into gold. Coming from a poor mining village in Yorkshire (like Hines himself), he epitomises the growing aspirations of working people in a booming system. No more poverty or unemployment, plenty for everyone and a couple of empty rooms at the top for go-getters.

Everybody wants to see Lenny do well. His parents need something out of their grotty life to make it worthwhile. His teacher is keen on at least one academic success from the 'vile multitude' in his classroom, and the local soccer boss is looking for a gifted striker to lift his sorry bunch of cloggers off the foot of the table.

So Lenny's got the world at his feet, but a chip on his shoulder. You never find out exactly what it is, but it's big and can't adjust to the demands being made on him. Without any focus for his frustrations he puts the boot into anything that moves and by the end of it has blown out on his glittering future. There's nothing more confusing than being a rebel without a cause, but what comes over clearly, is that for all the so-called opportunities on offer, they're on the bosses' terms. In short, keep your trap shut and do the business the way we want it done, and we'll reward you with a few peanuts.

By 1979, the peanuts had run out. The patrician regime now turns into naked aggression towards workers. *The Price of*



Coal is far and away Hines' most political novel to date. Set again in the South Yorkshire coalfields, it deals with the trials and tribulations of a pit about to be visited by Bonnie Prince Charlie.

Written at the tail end of the Wilson/Callaghan government, it paints a pretty accurate picture of the social con trick at work. Both the NCB and the right in the local NUM lodge fall over themselves to give big ears a royal welcome. Syd, however, is the odd militant out. He's none too enamoured with Labour or the royals:

'They're figure heads of a society that's still based on class and inherited wealth and privilege. They're symbols of it, and we didn't win in '72 and '74 and bring down a Tory government to have one of them parading up and down the pit yard and everybody bowing and scraping to him. It's irrational. They're all part of the same team can't you see that?'

Unfortunately nobody can, and Syd's left to grumble against the visit on his own. This is a central weak point in Hines' writing. The settings are authentic and the day-to-day crap is all there, but at the end of it you're left with a bloke who knows who's side he is on, but not how best to fight the battle. His is always asking the right questions and never coming up with the (revolutionary) left answers.

Hines articulates every militant's response when an irate miner daubs 'Arthur Scargill rules OK' on the pit gates just before the visit. Like most gut socialists, Hines is long on passion and short on politics, and where there is only a will then there must be a hero to show the way. Syd and Arthur Scargill are the same man. They have the same answers, climb up the union ladder and kick out the collaborators to get things right (sorry, left), but that's as far as it goes. It is also the reason that Hines' books are finally just observations of a sickness that never finds a cure.

Which brings us up to date with *Looks and Smiles*. From the brave new world of *Blinder* through the defiance of *The Price of Coal*, we end up back in a South Yorkshire littered with empty factories, run down steel mills and thousands of kids roaming the streets looking for work that doesn't exist. Gone are the overt politics of 1979. This is a straight forward story about a kid with no future trying to keep going after three years of Tory rule with the unions on the run. His mate, Alan, joins the army to avoid being a soccer hooligan and learns how to kill people with plastic bullets instead. Mick stays on the dole

with his girlfriend Karen.

In its own way, it's a very moving story about the waste of young lives. Mick's search for work takes him through a society where crisis has restored the barriers that the sixties boom briefly lowered a peg. Unlike his previous books, this one contains several hardened strands regarding the establishment.

The deeper the slump, the more nasty the state is in dealing with workers. The cops are no longer uniformed bystanders who plod the beat, but well paid warders who oversee the poverty. Tory cuts arise everywhere. His old man is to lose his job at the steel factory. The vacancy boards outside factories are empty and even the job centre is reduced to one harrassed woman trying to stay cheerful when talking to kids who she knows haven't got a snowball's chance in hell of finding work.

Northern Ireland gets a mention too. The creeping repression in Sheffield is linked in with Belfast when Alan returns on leave with exciting tales about how they treat the Irish. He describes kicking in doors at midnight and threatening people in the streets with shooters. More interestingly the press is seen as a funnel for Tory bunk:

'It would probably be the fault of the unions that the men were being sacked. It usually was. According to the papers, the unions were to blame for all the economic ills of the country.'

But as genuinely felt as it is, Hines is only offering an insight into the system and what it does to people. Mick and Karen, and even Alan, are being carried along in a current with no way of fighting back. Hines cites the unions as workers' ultimate defence against this. But the best means of defence is attack, and even the best unions can only push the bosses back so far before they come to the limits of their own existence. Which is under the boss and not over him.

It may be a bit hackish to slate someone for not being a dyed-in-the-wool revolutionary, but when you know the writer sees what's going on, you can't leave out what he doesn't see.

But to finish on a high note: if you're sick to the back teeth of hearing Tory neanderthals demand the death penalty for leaning on badly built walls in Brussels, then make a point of reading this book. It captures both the reasons for it and the hypocrisy of the condemnations in two scenes. One is when he takes his girlfriend to a match. He's an avid fan, and like all the other kids and workers, is so alienated and fed up with being broke that he needs to stand on a crumbling terrace each Saturday and watch eleven men kick a bag of wind about, just to feel part of something successful. At the end of the book he goes on a bike ride through South Yorks and this is what he sees:

'Police cars lurking in laybys. A derelict coal mine. Slag heaps. A deserted village. Company cars with leopard skin seat covers. New trading estates with FACTORY UNIT TO LET signs. Acres of new unsold cars. Litter in fields, woods, streets.'

Reformist or no, Hines fingers the real hooligans in society. ■

Sean Piggott

Closet cold warrior

A History of the Soviet Union
Geoffrey Hosking
Fontana, £4.95

THERE IS a problem with general histories of the Soviet Union. Until a member of the SWP writes one, it is very unlikely that we will find any that we agree with. Therefore the basis on which we judge such works has to be different. The only realistic criteria we can use are, does the book in question add anything to our knowledge or understanding of the subject, or is it so hidebound by its politics that it is valueless to us?

Hosking's book fluctuates between the two. At the level of *description* it has its uses. It is certainly more readable and less turgid than a number of other books on the subject. It also does a reasonable job in presenting a summary of some of the recent research, which many people would otherwise find inaccessible. It *describes* quite efficiently the degeneration of the revolution in the mid 20s, the bureaucratisation of the Bolshevik Party, its substitution for the working class decimated in the Civil War, and Stalin's growing stranglehold over it.

The strongest chapters are the ones on the Stalinist period. Hosking does a good job in conveying the full destructive force of the first Five Year Plan, forced collectivisation of agriculture and most importantly the creation of a new ruling class in Russia through the purges and the conscious policy of upward social mobility for thousands of new party members. All of them were then dependent on Stalin for their new social position.

The developing privilege and corruption of the new ruling class, locked into the contradictions and irrationalities of arbitrary state 'planning' of the economy, help to create a cycle of inertia, crisis and stagnation. The Russian working class are on the receiving end. Rather than perpetuate the myth that Russian workers are either passive or acquiescent in their exploitation, Hosking provides a long list of acts of collective working class resistance from the late 50s through to the 70s.

The most enjoyable incident is taken from the Budenny electric locomotive works in 1962 where an increase in piecework norms (ie a wage cut) coincided with a 30 per cent rise in dairy and meat prices in the town. The factory workers downed tools and draped banners

round the factory with the slogans, 'Down with Khrushchev' and 'Cut Khrushchev up for sausage meat'.

The book also provides the sort of detail on the restoration of the family as a traditional method of social control, and the consequently appalling position of women in Russia, that makes nonsense of the idea that Russia is a socialist society.

The real sticking point with the book now emerges. For Hosking all of this *is* socialism. For when it comes to analysis and explanation (if you can call it that) Hosking presents a fairly orthodox and unoriginal right wing argument. Lenin was a divided personality, impatient at the prospect of having to wait for the normal process of bourgeois revolution, capitalist development and then socialist revolution that most Marxists at the time argued was essential. So he developed a theory of telescoping the bourgeois revolution into the socialist one to save time.

At the same time he created a party that was simply geared to the seizure of power as an end in itself, which then went and seized power in 1917 as a minority, refused to share it with anyone else, and thereby set in motion an inevitable line of development that ended up in Stalinist totalitarianism, one-party rule and police terror.

Modern day corruption, stagnation and crisis in the USSR are therefore the end result of Lenin

jumping the gun and being obsessed with power. Hosking would appear to be a disciple of Schapiro (Leonard not Helen), one of the major cold-war historians. The analysis is trite and superficial but has a clear ideological purpose.

Hosking takes a lot of trouble to describe the creation of a new ruling class out of the chaos of the Stalin years. But he also takes a lot of trouble to firmly identify that class with all its crimes as a socialist ruling class. The conclusion clearly is that this is the inevitable result of revolutionary, insurrectionary socialism. Socialists turn their backs on parliamentary democracy at their peril.

This book is aimed at the A level and undergraduate text book markets. If you have to buy a history textbook on Soviet Russia you could do worse simply because it makes a fair amount of useful material accessible. If, however, you want something that explains the real dynamic of social forces that lay behind the October Revolution and its subsequent degeneration don't buy this closet cold-warmongering book. If you want something that really explains the triumph of Stalinism as an economic, social, political and judicial counter revolution and the subsequent development of state capitalism you still won't do any better than Cliff's *State Capitalism in Russia*. ■

Kevin Skimmer

Heaven beyond the world of work

Paths to Paradise—On the liberation from work

André Gorz
Pluto Press, £3.50

THIS IS a silly book. It consists of 'Twenty-five theses towards understanding the crisis and finding a left solution'.

Gorz argues that the onset of the world economic crisis came about 'through market saturation, labour shortage and exhaustion of the resources of technological progress', which means 'the rate of profit falls and a long downward cycle begins'. Workers' militancy encouraged by full employment is also cited as a significant factor.

In this he follows commentators such as Mandel, Rowthorn and Aghetta. But it was not shortage of resources or labour that *caused* the slump. Rather, the economic downturn meant that workers and materials could no longer be profitably employed. So immigration controls, repatriation of 'guest' workers and so on, only came to the fore after the crisis hit. Cause is confused with effect. Similarly, any explanation of the crisis which puts forward workers' wage demands as a central reason has to demonstrate why this didn't happen in the 1950s, when real

wages and profits rose.

What's missing is any sense of the dynamics of the system.

If Gorz's analysis is shallow and confused, at least he is clear that there is a crisis and one that will not respond to Keynesian remedies. However, at this point his feet, which are still just on the ground, begin to float upwards and his head disappears into the clouds. What we have apparently is not a crisis of capitalism but of industrialism.

Microtechnology and the automated factory take us 'beyond capitalism'. What we are left with 'is not the capitalist system but capitalism's system of control'. 'Products are no longer supplied to maximise flow and profit, but to maximise control and manipulation.' 'The fundamental aim of keeping full time work as the norm [is] to maintain the relations of domination based on the work ethic.'

The industrial working class is written off as a shrinking, conservative 'labour elite'. He even describes them as the ruling class! A cheery thought for when you next clock on. The left has been blinded from noticing all this by our 'productivism'. None of this is any surprise from an author whose best known work is entitled *Farewell to the Working Class*.

His conclusions are based on a completely abstract and unreal view of the trends in modern capitalism. How many totally automated factories are there in your town? The way Gorz talks you would think there was one on every street corner. And who builds the robots, or generates the power they use, or transports the goods they help to produce? The system rests on the labour of millions of workers—a workforce that has been spread worldwide by the effects of the long boom. It is the surplus pumped out from this flesh and blood that keeps capitalism going.

Gorz's dismissal of all this leaves him free to spend most of the book creating a neat picture of how post-capitalist society should be organised. A ten year working life to produce the necessities for a frugal existence with the rest spent on 'autonomous, self-determined, optional activity'.

Typically, the actual agency which could bring about this happy state of affairs is not even discussed. So what we have here is a utopia. Never mind. A utopia, particularly one dealing with the possible effects and uses of the micro-chip, could be thought-provoking and interesting. Unfortunately this isn't. The obvious rubs shoulders with the

nonsensical. Did you know that when a group of low paid French workers were asked, 'If you had a choice, would you give up your job?' a majority answered yes. Or that 'for years now the highest TV ratings have been achieved by DIY programmes dealing with thermal insulation, plastering, painting, wiring'? *Coronation Street* look out! And all this is dressed up in the most pompous and pretentious language imaginable. Reading it is like trying to wade through cold porridge.

There is a real path to paradise. It lies through the class struggle, workers' organisation and revolution; the smashing of the capitalist state and its replacement by a system of workers' councils; building on the technological legacy left by capitalism and developing over time a classless, stateless society which will inscribe on its banners: 'From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.'

These are exciting ideas, but you will find no trace of them in this book. Try Engel's *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific* or *The Revolutionary Ideas of Karl Marx* by Alex Callinicos—but whatever you do, don't waste your money on André Gorz. ■

Brian McDonald

The poor are always women

Working your way to the bottom—The feminization of Poverty
Hilda Scott
Pandora, £4.95

FOR THE first time in many years, people are shocked by the sight of queues at 'soup' kitchens in America and at the thought of many unemployed and low paid workers in Britain being forced, by government regulations, to sleep rough.

Lack of proper food and housing are only two aspects of ever rising poverty. As the recession bites deeper, so do its effects.

There are nearly 40 million 'officially' poor people in the United States, or 15 percent of the population. Seventeen percent of Britain's population are 'officially' poor, and one person in four lives 'on the margins of poverty'.

A new book by Hilda Scott looks at why poverty exists and argues for a serious examination of the 'feminization of poverty'—a phrase used chiefly to describe the economic vulnerability of women

who are the sole supporters of their children.

She argues that women are joining the ranks of the poor quicker than men, due to high divorce rates and single mothers, and that, across the classes, women are by and large poorer than men.

The effects of the crisis *do* hit unevenly. It would have been useful to have read a book which expanded, in a constructive manner, the arguments as to why this is and how it could be overcome. But overriding in her book is the idea that divisions in society lie across the lines of sex—and not class. The fact that it is working class women who suffer most—from the brutal oppression and exploitation of a rich class consisting of men and women—is never fully developed. Instead all we are treated to is a piece of romantic, reactionary nonsense.

Hilda Scott's book takes us from a historical—both social and economic—appraisal of women's position in society through to recent debates on the 'value' of unpaid work. It ends up arguing reformist

feminist solutions which leave working class women, and men, passively on the sidelines.

The book is vehemently anti-men. 'Misogyny pervades our history and our culture,' she says, and adds:

'On the left it is held that to talk about the feminization of poverty is to divert attention from issues of class and race, that women's poverty cannot be discussed separately from men's poverty. What I hear... is that there is nothing wrong with women that an employed husband could not cure.'

Family wage

Her patronising attitude, not only to the 'left' but to women, is twinned with the inference that women are passive observers of their fate. Even if many of her examples—of women being the economic lynchpin in some societies (a whole chapter) or of women fighting against their exploitation as workers (a few lines)—show differently, the conclusions she draws leave women at the mercy of men.

When discussing the rise of capital, she falls into the trap shared by many feminists—that of misunderstanding the 'family wage'.

'A major share of the responsibility for the marginalisation of women and the establishment of occupational segregation under industrial capitalism rests with the trade unions... They refused training to women, threatening expulsion to any member who instructed women in the trade. When women organised themselves national unions refused to admit them. The protective legislation for which they pressed effectively excluded women from many male occupations. Men preferred to fight for a "family wage" rather than extend their class solidarity to women who needed jobs.'

This is a distortion of why the 'family wage' arose.

The demand for the family wage—the idea that employers would pay male workers enough not only to feed and clothe themselves but their wives and children too—was one which, in the mid 1800s when the introduction of capitalism was literally killing people off, suited both working class men and women.

The development of capitalism, and with it craftism and a trade union bureaucracy, led not only to the exclusion of women from certain trade unions and industries, but of immigrants and unskilled workers too.

We are not shown in any way how this was fought against.

In her chapter on economics we are given a further insight into how rotten her politics are:

'As the experience of the Soviet Union and other Eastern European countries amply illustrate, however, after private property is overthrown male priorities continue to be anchored in the categories that are visible to men.'

You can almost sympathise with her views on patriarchy—if you believe Russia to be socialist.

We are given a tirade against Marx and Marxism ('He saw the world through the eyes of the male, working class...not enough to illuminate the economics of personal life') and on how awful and male-dominated revolutionary parties are.

Never does the book look at what women and men, as workers, can do to change the world around them. Even when she examines class—and she seems to recognise that working class women do get the worst deal—the overriding feature is that women bear the burden of 'unpaid work', housework, child rearing etc. This is true. No one can deny that this system treats women and men totally differently—and unequally.

More so, women and men of different classes are treated differently. The nanny, the maid and the boarding school have never been a feature of working class households. They are in ruling class homes and these features, among many, give rich women the escape from their position that working class women don't have.

But revolutionaries see some way out of the divisions that arise. When working class women and men fight alongside each other, inequality may not be automatically overcome, but it's a challenge to the divisions that exist.

This sees the basic division as *class*—unlike Hilda Scott's view. She does not look to the transformation of society by workers, of which women are an integral part, but that:

'A positive alternative could be put forward by a coalition of women, minorities, peace, and environmental movements and labour if they could agree on some common goals and immediate aims.'

In other words, a cross-class alliance to fight the results of a class society based on massive inequality.

Her sentiments, of women and men equally sharing housework, child rearing and leisure time, are not to be sniffed at—they are admirable. Her perspective for getting it is politically bankrupt. ■
Julie Waterson

A changing picture

Women in England, 1870-1950
Sexual Divisions and Social Change
Jane Lewis
Wheatshaf Books, £6.95

SO MANY feminist interpretations of the past depend on a superficial and highly selective reading of history. So it is a great pleasure to come across a book like Jane Lewis's, which packs into a reasonably priced paperback a vast amount of knowledge and discussion, based on a thorough survey of both primary and secondary sources.

The materials Jane Lewis uses include statistics, government reports, social surveys, autobiographies and oral history, as well as all the major contributions to feminist debates on this period. These are all put together to produce a fascinating and thought-provoking picture of women's lives from the maturing of industrial capitalism in England to the close of the Second World War.

The picture is valuable partly because the framework is good. The first part, on the family, is divided into sections on working class women and middle class women, so that the usual lumping together of quite different class experiences as 'the Victorian family' is avoided.

The vexed question of the working class family wage is dis-

cussed in the context of the evidence for actual working class incomes and standards of living, showing that married women's absence from paid employment did not depend on the assurance of a reasonable living wage being paid to their husbands. Women's contribution to family earnings by outwork, laundering and all kinds of casual work is also well documented.

The second part of the book, on women's employment, suffers from a certain obsession with the sexual division of labour. The author seems to be convinced that we need to discover a coherent, underlying reason why some jobs were regarded as women's work and some as men's. But she provides a wealth of information on the work women did, and on the major change from domestic service as the biggest category of women's employment to the much greater variety of service and manufacturing jobs in the twentieth century.

This book provides no dogmatic answers to the political questions that socialists and feminists argue about: do working class men benefit from women's oppression, does the unity of women as a group override class considerations, and so on. But it contains plenty of ammunition for these arguments, and should be essential reading for anyone who intends to participate in them. ■

Norah Carlin

The mask of anarchy

Marx Beyond Marx: Lessons on the 'Grundrisse'
Antonio Negri
Bergin and Garvey, £13.15

THIS book is something of a curiosity. Antonio Negri is one of the chief theoreticians of the Italian 'autonomist' movement which sprang into prominence in the late 1970s.

Imprisoned without trial in 1978 for his alleged involvement in the kidnapping and assassination of ex-Prime Minister Aldo Moro by the Red Brigades, Negri was only released five years later after being elected to Parliament on the slate of the libertarian Radical Party. He has been on the run since the Chamber of Deputies removed his parliamentary immunity.

This book appeared in Italy after Negri's imprisonment, but is based on seminars he gave at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris during the spring of 1978 at the invitation of Louis Althusser, of all people.

Negri first acquired any prominence as one of a group of intellectuals, some in the CP, some not, known as the 'worker-ists'. They developed a version of Marxism which focussed upon workers' resistance to capital within the process of production. Their approach was to some extent a generalisation of the strength and militancy of the Italian working class, especially during the 'May in slow motion'—the great struggles of 1968/9.

Autonomism proper flourished first during the rapid expansion of the Italian revolutionary left in the first half of the 1970s. Its distinctive features were a suspicion of organisation and leadership (an attitude well captured by *Lotta Continua's* slogan 'We are all delegates'), and a stress on the virtues of those forms of shopfloor resistance which Negri and his co-thinkers saw as amounting to the 'refusal of work'

What gave Negri's writings some-

thing of an intellectual edge was their ability apparently to cope with the collapse of industrial struggle in the later 1970s. Capital, he argues, is increasingly 'social capital', a unified subject and not a set of competing firms. The rise of Keynesianism is a sign of this transformation.

The result is that the contradictions between labour and capital within production has been displaced onto the whole of society.

The idea seems to be that the various 'new social movements' (youth, unemployed, feminists etc) have, in late capitalism, assumed the role of the proletariat. There is also the (not unfamiliar) implication that their forms of organisation must prefigure those of communism.

This weird leap in which 'workerism' ends up anticipating André Gorz, is in fact perfectly intelligible. Negri and Co first erected a general theory out of the experience of what were indeed very advanced workers' struggles, and then, when these struggles disappeared, sought refuge in the anarchist street-fighting and lifestyle politics which typified, for

instance, the student movement of 1977.

Hence the oddity of this book. Negri tries to wrench a justification for his politics from the writings of Marx. He does so by setting up an opposition between the *Grundrisse* and *Capital*.

He claims to find in the former work a version of Marxism in which capital is seen as a 'power relation', dominated by workers' resistance to their exploitation. *Capital*, however, 'served to annihilate subjectivity in objectivity', by focussing less on surplus value and exploitation than on the labour theory of value, 'a legacy of the classics and of the bourgeois mystification which we can easily do without in order to enter the field of revolution'.

Both dimensions

Now the *Grundrisse* is a far less finished, coherent and scientifically mature work than *Capital*. But it isn't that unclear.

In it Marx distinguishes between 'capital in general' and 'many capitals'. The former is the exploitative relation between labour and capital, the latter the competitive interaction of individual capitals. The theory of value is especially concerned with the relation between 'many capitals', since it is competition which compels firms to sell commodities at the socially necessary labour time required to produce them.

Both dimensions are essential to understanding capitalism. Competition imparts its dynamic to the system, compelling capitals to accumulate and thus to bring down the rate of profit. Without the 'laws of motion' inherent in the accumulation process the relation between labour and capital would be incomprehensible, as it is for Negri.

He treats workers' resistance as a constant, and is therefore unable to explain what allows the balance of forces to shift in capital's favour, as it did in Italy (and more generally) in the late 1970s with the onset of mass unemployment. The capitalist drive to exploit and to accumulate is merely, for Negri, a will to power, lacking any context in capitalist relations of production.

Beyond this central failure to understand Marx are numerous other distortions. I shall mention just two. Negri grossly misrepresents Marx's theory of wages, and, quite absurdly, attributes to him the view that communism is the abolition of work (in fact Marx in the *Grundrisse* is very rude about Fourier for thinking that communism wouldn't involve hard work).

Negri writes with admirable passion and vigour, and one sympathises with him, persecuted by the Italian state with the CP's complicity. But why dress up everyday anarchism as Marxism? ■
Alex Callinicos

Much effort but little reward

Antonio Gramsci
Selections from Cultural Writings
Lawrence and Wishart, £15.00

THIS IS the fourth major volume of Gramsci's writings to appear in English. We now have a fairly clear picture of the work of one of the founders of the Italian Communist Party. Gramsci's legacy is a contested one: he is claimed by the Eurocommunists as one of their chief theoretical inspirations, while we would wish to argue that he can only be understood as part of the revolutionary period of the Communist International.

This book will not settle the argument, and it would be unreasonable to expect a series of fragmentary notes, mostly on Italian writers of literature, to fulfil that task. There is a very severe difficulty with the book, as the following sample shows:

'For a general exposition of the principal types of reviews, one should remember the journalistic activity of Carlo Cattaneo. The *Archivio Triennale* and the *Politecnico* should be studied very attentively (and alongside the *Politecnico* the review *Scientia* founded by Rignano).

The passage is not atypical and it seems to me that it is very difficult to make much sense of it, even given the extensive notes that the editor has provided, without a detailed knowledge of Italian culture. Certainly I find the above, and a lot of the book, almost impossible to understand.

There are, however, parts which I

think I do understand and some of these are of interest. They concern Gramsci's relationship to the Italian idealist philosopher Benedetto Croce and the related question of why some sorts of culture are popular.

Croce wrote, in his *Guide to Aesthetics*, that:

'The obvious assertions regarding the nature of art, which are heard daily either accidentally or intentionally, are themselves solutions to logical problems, such as they appear to this or that individual who is not a philosopher by profession, and yet who, by virtue of being a man, is himself a philosopher too, in some measure.'

Practical consequence

Gramsci took this idea over lock, stock and barrel, and some of the things for which he is best known, like the claim that 'all men are intellectuals', are obviously direct borrowings.

There is, of course, nothing wrong with learning from bourgeois thinkers, even idealist philosophers: Marx did set an example in learning from Hegel, after all. The trouble is that one of the things Gramsci borrowed from Croce was the idea that art was 'lyric intuition'. The practical consequence of this was to draw a sharp division between art and other forms of culture and to privilege literature, and poetry in particular, as the central art. This leads Gramsci to write off all sorts of

things as 'not art'.

One of the things that Gramsci argues in this book is that the Italian reading public preferred French novels to Italian ones. The French novelists were popular because they succeeded in writing about things which were of serious concern to the largely petit bourgeois readership. The Italian writers had failed to become what Gramsci called 'national-popular'.

This might be true with regard to novels but it obviously won't do for other things, for example opera, which was, in the person of Verdi, intimately linked with aspects of the unification of Italy. Gramsci could duck out of this problem because, for him, opera was not really art. He wrote: 'How can one combat in Italy the operative taste of the man of the people when he comes into contact with literature, especially poetry?'

In fact, if we drop the prejudice that our own pet interests alone are what make up 'art', then we can use Gramsci's insight into the question of popular taste to help understand all sorts of modern problems. For example, why is *Dallas* so popular?

This is a difficult, fragmentary book. The editor has made a serious effort to help guide us through it. But in my view the combination of Gramsci's attempts to hide what he meant from the prison censors, and the detail of Italian culture he refers to make the effort of ploughing through it just too much. That is a pity, but the rewards are too small. ■
Colin Sparks

Sins of omission

The Idea of the Modern State
Eds: Gregor McLennan, David Held and Stuart Hall
Oxford University Press. £6.95
State and Society in Contemporary Britain
Eds: Gregor McLennan, David Held & Stuart Hall
Polity Press. £7.95

TEXTBOOKS are generally awful and these two are no exception.

Clearly any trend of thought, passing as Marxism, which junks the notion of the working class as the agent of socialism, which is even suspicious of any talk of *class* outside the economic sphere and which anyway denies the existence of objective class interests, is sooner or later going to be compelled to revise Marxist thinking on the state.

This is the main aim of *The Idea of the Modern State*. First into battle is Stuart Hall who, in a 20-page discussion of what the state is, omits to provide any explanation of the origin of states and introduces such concepts as 'power', 'coercion', 'legitimacy' and 'civil society', but not those of class, exploitation and struggle.

This omission is not without its consequences. In considering the relation between the state and society Hall comes out with some

right nonsense: 'But the state has been vested by society with the ultimate power of supreme rule and authorised to stand above society and govern it.' Not only does this transform society into a mystical body wholly autonomous from the individuals and classes composing it, but it also, to put it mildly, possesses no critical content whatsoever.

The other two editors take up similar tacks in their contributions. Gregor McLennan, a Euro-communist member of the CP and adept at unmasking the crimes of reductionism, idealism, dogmatic Marxism and insurrectionism, wants what he calls a 'pluralistic Marxism'.

Why? Because, as he confidently assures us—on the basis of a few dubious authorities—the working class is in decline, it offers no prospect of revolutionary struggle against the state or the capitalist class and is therefore confined to electoralist (reformist) politics which, given its supposed decline, requires it to find allies.

This, McLennan believes, isn't such a bad thing anyhow, since the working class, contra Marx, is not driven by its position in society to challenge all forms of oppression (is not, in other words, a 'universal

Spain's great clash

Revolution and War in Spain
Ed Paul Preston
Methuen. £6.95
The Clash
Arturo Barea
Fontana-Flamenco. £3.50

BOOKS for socialists, especially historical books, should inspire and motivate us. They should draw out the lessons of the past for use in the future. Two books on recent Bookmarks Club lists do so in rather different ways.

The first, *Revolution and War in Spain*, edited by Paul Preston, is short on inspiration but full of useful detail and argument. The central theme running through the collection of short pieces is that the Spanish civil war was not a single struggle between left and right, rich and poor, exploiters and exploited, but more complex.

The editor argues that the uneven development of capitalism in Spain led to unevenness and contradiction in the struggle. Each chapter deals with a separate aspect of the period, for example, 'the role of the church', 'the situation in Catalonia', 'the organisation of farm labourers' and 'the financing of each side'.

The separate chapters are not really drawn together at any stage

and so the book is not recommended as an introduction to Spain and the civil war.

There are, however, a good account of the Asturian miners' revolt and a useful piece on the debate on the republican side between those who said that it was necessary to win the war before proceeding with the revolution and those defending the necessity of winning the war by revolutionary means.

An entirely different book covering the same period is *The Clash*, the third part of Arturo Barea's autobiography. It describes, through the eyes of the author, events in Spain leading up to and during the civil war. Why the workers fought and how they fought. The heroism and self-organisation together with the waste, inefficiency and political infighting.

Almost without effort Barea raises the central political questions of the day: arming the workers or a workers' army, popular frontism or workers' appropriation, sexual freedom or personal conformity. If at times Barea allows his own fear and hatred of war itself to intervene, the book is so well written that it is a pleasure to read. ■

David Sellers

class') and because the capitalist state isn't really capitalist at all—it's more of an only slightly dishonest broker.

On the question of honesty, McLennan reassuringly informs us that:

'Neither Marx in his writings on the Paris Commune nor Lenin in *State and Revolution* were naive about the strength of the state. But they tended to see it as an instrument of capitalism which *might be taken over* by the insurgent workers ...' (my emphasis)

McLennan has, of course, missed out a rather important *not* here. The idea of the working class taking over the hierarchical, bureaucratic, military machine of the capitalist state and wielding it for its own purposes is pure reformism. It's also fantastical, as fantastical as that of the working class taking over the Papacy or the Stock Exchange and putting them to its ends. Such institutions, like the capitalist state, are what they are only by virtue of their ability to

exclude the vast mass of the people and therefore keep them in subjection to their monopoly of spiritual and economic and coercive powers. That's why the state, to quote both Marx and Lenin, 'must be *smashed*' and replaced by new institutions of democratic workers' control.

The second book, *State and Society in Contemporary Britain*, contains analyses of the British state in areas such as health care, economic planning, the family, etc. Some of these, like Paddy Scannell's piece on the early years of the BBC, are informative and raise questions about the power of the capitalist state which revolutionary socialists should take seriously. Even here, though the rotten politics of the editors have had their effect and contributors seem obliged to employ any term other than that of the 'ruling class'.

Over all, the chief impression this book leaves, as before, is that of the bourgeois state as the vehicle for socialist advance. ■

Rod Hudson

MUSIC

Politics with style

'THE STYLE COUNCIL would like to train the youth—in the art of revolution. It's laid out in 'Internationalists', a song about standing proud in the world. No, it's not a privatised club for intellectuals but a state of mind for all those who refuse to submit to the way our world is run. Stand fast and firm people for when they tell you that inequality is the way of the world or that a natural order has to exist, it is only their self made lies for justifying their own means and ends.'

—Paul Weller from the sleeve notes of The Style Council's new album, *Our Favourite Shop*.

Well, whether The Style Council are revolutionaries or not remains to be seen. What we can be certain of however is that *Our Favourite Shop* is one of the most political albums ever to reach the LP charts, never mind to go straight in at number one.

Lyrically, it's stunning.

Take 'Homebreakers'—a truly heart-rending tale of how Tebbit's 'on yer bike' philosophy affects one particular family. Dad's been made redundant after 30 years with the same firm and blames 'all except the real enemy'. While one son takes Tebbit's advice, another takes it one step further.

*'Father's in the kitchen,
counting out coins.
Mother's in the bedroom,
looking through pictures of her boys.
One is in London, looking for a job.
The other's in
Whitehall—looking for those responsible.'*

'All Gone Away' reflects how that same callous philosophy

affects a community—the town becomes a mere shadow of itself when the pit/factory/steelworks (delete as applicable) closes, but

*'Somewhere the party never ends,
And greedy hands rub together again—
Shipping out the profits that they've stolen.'*

Lenny Henry comes in on vocals for 'The Stand Up Comic's Instructions'. It's the concert secretary telling the comic which jokes go down the best.

*'Tell Irish jokes and you can't miss,
Do the building site one and how they're all thick.'*

Just in case the idea backfires Weller makes it absolutely clear to the most naive fan that those jokes are not on.

'But as the comic's stand up instructions *really* tell us—these targets aren't funny! The misery and oppression the Irish have suffered for centuries, the crap heaped upon the shoulders of fellow Englishmen like the Blacks and Asians, me, I don't find it funny *at all*.'

Weller doesn't make the mistake of thinking that music, even as radical as this, is going to change the world. It takes more than that and he knows it. A quote from Tony Benn is on the cover: 'But, as history teaches us, time and again, it is not enough to speak or write, or compose songs or poems about freedom if there are not enough people who are ready to devote their lives to make it all come true.' A vast improvement on most chart records. ■

Bernie Wilcox

Abortion: the stark choice

CLAIRE Gray is correct in stating that 'abortion raises fundamental issues for socialists' (June *SWR*). But her emotive arguments appear to have clouded her analysis of the wider class struggle involved.

In suggesting that revolutionary socialists now stress individual rights, as against collective/social responsibility, she misses the point entirely.

And in attempting to draw parallels between a woman's individual right to control her own body and a scab's individual right to cross picket lines, she slips into dangerous liberal notions of individual freedoms in a class society.

Women's abortion rights are part of the class struggle against exploitation under capitalism. The woman who defends the right to control her own body is at one with the striker who defends his or her job and working conditions. The pro-abortionist stand is not simply a stand for a woman's right to choose. It is also a stand against women being removed from the labour force, against women being forced back into the home and against state manipulation into low paid jobs with lousy conditions.

The pro-abortionist's class interests and the scab's 'individual rights' are poles apart!

Equally spurious is Claire Gray's implication that Health Authorities and medical staff may have 'individual rights' to refuse to participate in abortions. To go along that road opens up an alarming range of options. Do we allow doctors and nurses a veto on blood transfusions, heart transplants, hysterectomies and the like, because of their personal beliefs? Would we sanction a health service carved up along religious, sectarian lines, as well as the present class divide?

On a more serious note, revolutionary socialists must address themselves to Claire Gray's anxieties about 'the inevitable move to the much stronger demand of abortion up to the moment of birth'.

Clearly, if we are to avoid the very real traumas of late abortions, our demands for women's abortion rights must be coupled with demands for improved facilities. We must condemn the current situation where, despite limited abortion legislation, most working class women have no rights whatsoever.

Thatcher's cutbacks have created lengthening queues for NHS abortions. The ruling classes can buy their abortions in Harley Street with no worries about waiting 'up to the moment of birth'. But working class women get sick to the stomach watching

the weeks go by, while being told there are no beds available on the NHS. If they can't scrape the money together for an abortion at one of the charity clinics, they're faced with the stark choice of unwanted pregnancy, or the butcher's knife on the kitchen table.

Working class women don't need to be reminded by Claire Gray that a 30-week old foetus is a 'thing fully identifiable as a baby that can be destroyed'. We are well and truly aware of the 'sanctity of human life'.

What we are demanding is safe, legal abortion on demand, with the whole weight of modern medical technology behind us. ■

Maggie Mariscotti
Walthamstow

ANYONE who has been involved in the campaigns against the Powell bill and Gillick case will be aware that there is a need to debate and discuss the issues involved in fighting for the rights of women to control their own fertility. Indeed it would be good to see the pages of the *Review* opened to such a debate.

However, to attempt to stimulate discussion by the uncritical publication of a blatantly anti-abortion letter (June *SWR*) was both counter-productive and insulting to readers involved in the pro-choice movement.

Far more helpful would have been a contribution from someone who has been involved in campaigning, or has tried to raise the issues at work. That way experiences and ideas could be shared. We need to debate *how* we fight for women's rights, not whether or not we should be fighting for them.

This means we do not enter into debate on the grounds of the anti-abortion movement. They are always keen to debate the status of the foetus rather than the needs and rights of women. We must not make that mistake.

At the very least the letter should have been followed by a comment on why *SWR* disagrees with the views expressed in the letter. To publish it 'straight' implies that there is a debate to be had with the anti-abortion movement. ■

Eileen Cook
Dundee Abortion Campaign

CLAIRE Gray (June *SWR*) does not identify where she stands on abortion. She *does* however spend her entire letter creating a spurious debate against the motives of pro-abortionists. I also notice her sympathies for anti-abortionists.

Surely we have heard her arguments before? The right use them on every platform, not to debate abortion, but to categorise it as 'immoral', 'murderous' and so on.

It is because the anti-abortionists are, both men and women, creatures of reaction that one must take a stand on this issue. We are pro-abortion. We must debate, but not on platforms of reaction. We want freedom to choose—as does Claire Gray I'm sure—whether and when we have our children. ■

E Hall
Cambridge

Don't snipe at the syndicalists

PHIL Taylor's article about syndicalism (June *SWR*) expresses views which are now quite widespread within the SWP. It seems perverse that the SWP, of all organisations on the left, should distort what syndicalism was all about. While the SWP is of course not syndicalist, it is clearly the one organisation which has learnt from the positive aspects of syndicalism.

Phil Taylor says, using Trotsky as his authority, that syndicalism was a revolutionary tendency inside the working class movement, very close to Marxism, but far from fully developed. But the pretence that syndicalists were not quite Marxists is a pretence which he cannot keep up throughout his article.

For example, he says Marxist education was important to many syndicalists—which would be very peculiar if syndicalists were not Marxists.

Syndicalism was not a non-Marxist type of socialism. It took Marxism as its starting point. Indeed, in the countries where syndicalism flourished—such as in Britain in the early part of this century—all the best Marxists were syndicalists.

What distinguished syndicalists was their belief that socialism would only be achieved through industrial struggle, and their obsession with transforming unions to become the organisations through which the working class could defeat capitalism and then run society after the revolution.

The two syndicalist strategies influential in Britain were the industrial unionism associated with Tom Mann and, later, the shop stewards' movement in engineering during the First World War. As far as the syndicalist strategies went, there is nothing that the SWP could disagree with.

Phil Taylor says that syndicalists failed to grasp the real nature of trade unions and in particular the problem of the class collaboration of the union bureaucracy. This is an extraordinary statement. The SWP's distinctive view of the nature of trade union bureaucracy, and what to do about it is not taken from Lenin and Trotsky, but from syndicalists in Britain.

The principle that you should support trade union leaders in so far as they represent and act in the interests of workers, but be prepared to act independently when they don't, originates from a group of syndicalist shop stewards in Glasgow at the time of the First World War.

Phil Taylor says that syndicalism failed to provide an alternative to reformism because it was not political. But in one sense it was a reaction against the Second International socialism which increasingly identified politics and the achieving of socialism with electioneering. In this sense most syndicalists were not 'political' but neither would the SWP be.

It is just wrong to say that they only occupied themselves with wages and conditions, and that they did not understand the power of the capitalist state. One example is Tom Mann's 'Don't shoot' campaign, aimed at soldiers used to break strikes.

There was of course a major problem with the syndicalists in that they had no conception of a Leninist revolutionary party. But this was not peculiar to the syndicalists. It was part of the limitation of all pre-1917 socialists—even the very best like Luxemburg and Trotsky. Lenin was building this new type of organisation in Russia, but the significance of this was not apparent to anyone before 1917.

After 1917 syndicalism had a very limited life. The Bolsheviks won the key argument about the need to build a revolutionary party. Syndicalism is not a current within the working class today and there is no need to set it up as a bogey man. The sort of people Phil Taylor wants to pin the label on are not even Marxists or revolutionaries, let alone syndicalists.

What was good and positive in syndicalism—the emphasis on industrial action and organisation and the analysis of the trade union bureaucracy—has become part of the traditions of the SWP. This inheritance should be acknowledged and not distorted. ■

Bernard McBreen
Liverpool

More right than left

I'M WRITING to take issue with some of the points made in Pete Goodwin's article on the Communist Party (May *SWR*). In particular I'm not sure about the characterisation of the two factions—Eurocommunists versus Stalinists or traditionalists—as being equivalent to the soft left in the Labour Party.

While I agree that the Stalinists are much more akin to the soft left than many people realise, Pete underestimates how right wing the Eurocommunists are. They are more equivalent to the Labour centre and right.

He also overestimates the importance of Russia in the debate. The underlying debate is more to do with the nature of the popular front. Both are for a popular front. The Stalinists favour one in the mould with which we are all too familiar. But the Eurocommunists are looking to a popular front that extends beyond the Labour right and SDP/Liberals to wet Tories.

In other words, it is a similar debate to that going on inside the Labour Party between the right and centre, and the soft left—which is why the CP row has been so closely followed by them.

It is also a debate which is happening throughout the European CPs, causing splits in Spain and rows in France and Italy. ■

Noel Halifax
North London

Revolution without a party?

IS MANSON raised some important issues in his letter (June *SWR*) in response to my review of *Emma Goldman: an intimate life*. I agree that the anarchism of Goldman is not the anarchism of every anarchist. In America alone when Goldman was active there were a large number of different anarchist groups operating in different ways. Some of these had a much stronger orientation on the

working class than Goldman.

However, there are characteristics that most anarchists share and most Marxists disagree with. Manson refers to the revolutionary party as one area of disagreement. He writes, 'In power the revolutionary party becomes the ruling party and takes over all the tools of coercion.' He describes the Russian revolution as 'the coup d'état' of the Bolshevik Party.

The SWP's analysis of the Russian revolution leads to an opposite conclusion. The fact that the soviets, which were organs of working class power, were able to defeat the provisional government was due to the leadership of the Bolshevik party. Subsequent revolutions in Europe, particularly Germany, showed clearly that when the working class was not led in this way, defeat was all too likely. And defeat in a revolution is not pleasant. It costs most of the leading communists, plus thousands of working class activists their lives.

Unfortunately, although the working class was successful in seizing power in Russia, it was to be destroyed during the civil war. Lenin was faced with a desperate situation. Russia was under siege from all directions, the cities were starving and the working class was being destroyed. In this situation the revolution had to take desperate measures to hold onto power. Presumably Manson would have preferred the White armies to be successful?

The Kronstadt rebellion has to be seen in this light. By 1921 more than three-quarters of the sailors were of peasant origin as the original sailors were mobilised to fight the Whites. The sailors blamed the Bolsheviks completely for all the ills afflicting the country. Lenin saw the events as a sign of the enormous gulf separating the peasantry from the proletariat. To argue that the Bolsheviks should have allowed a revolt to go unchecked ignores the effects of the destruction caused by the civil war and the allied intervention and blockade on Russia. On top of that the revolt would actually have helped the counter-revolutionary forces.

Lenin and Trotsky were very clear that if the revolution was not successful in the more advanced capitalist countries of western Europe then it would not succeed in Russia. They relied on the spread of the revolution beyond the Russian borders which did in fact take place. Unfortunately the working class was defeated in country after country.

This failure of the revolution in the rest of Europe, combined with the situation in Russia, meant the party increasingly had to take the place of a decimated working class. It was these objective historical circumstances that led to the emergence of Stalin, not the theory

and practice of the revolutionary party.

The whole question of the revolutionary party is tied to the question of the state. This is the main area of disagreement between Marxists and anarchists. There is agreement that the capitalist state has to be smashed but profound disagreements over how this is to be done and what is to replace it.

Lenin and Trotsky, in their debates with anarcho-syndicalists stressed that a trade union would not be able to smash the state. Because of its size and composition it would embody the unevenness inevitable in the working class as a whole, rather than overcoming it. The Bolshevik party, however, was able to do just this.

Marxists recognise that the state is an instrument of class rule and can therefore only be abolished after classes have disappeared. After the proletariat has seized power it must destroy the old state machine and replace it with a new one made up of the armed workers.

The anarchists rejected this revolutionary dictatorship which is at the heart of Marx's polemics against them. They opposed any form of authority after the revolution, including the dictatorship of the proletariat. This dictatorship is necessary for the suppression of the bourgeoisie who do not give up their possessions willingly. As Engels wrote against the anarchist anti-authoritarians: 'A revolution is certainly the most authoritarian thing there is; it is an act whereby one part of the population imposes its will upon the other part by means of rifles, bayonets and cannon, all of which are highly authoritarian means. And the victorious party must maintain its rule by means of the terror which its arms inspire in the reactionaries.' ■

Lesley Hoggart
East London

Blue collar blues

EACH month I've waited expecting the situation to change, but now after nine months I've had enough. Why on earth are all the *Workplace Notes* from manual workers? I'd lay odds the readership is less manual than white collar.

So if the purpose of the column is not just for interest but for 'lessons to be learnt', then most readers need to hear office experience at least as often as manual. I can't see any reason why you can't put this balance right. ■

H Williams

Marxist or mechanist?

WHILE I am far from offended that Alex Callinicos should find my views on Christopher Hill 'outrageous', I should like to set the record straight as to what I did and did not say about Hill.

I never said that reading *The World Turned Upside Down* would put anyone off being a Marxist. I did say that Hill's reputation as a leading Marxist historian (like Hobsbawm's) discredits Marxism and prevents many people from taking it seriously.

Many non-Marxists have written exciting and informative books which add greatly to our understanding of history and provide plenty of useful material for the construction of Marxist arguments. I have reviewed one such book for *Socialist Worker Review* this month, and I believe that *The World Turned Upside Down* is another. It is certainly the best book Hill has written, and one that I believe every socialist should read.

What outrages me is that Hill's various theoretical pronouncements on the nature of the English bourgeois revolution should pass as the best that Marxism has to offer. His view can be said to have 'evolved' (Callinicos) only if a chameleon evolves when it adapts itself to the prevailing colours; or if a skeleton, like Hill's underlying mechanical interpretation, evolves by occasionally rattling in the cupboard.

Hill's rambling, shambling apologies for a Marxist theory of history are something that A-level students can be taught to refute in the regulation 45 minutes of exam script and go out into the world believing that they have 'disproved Marxism'. Surely Marxist historians can do better than this!

But I suspect that Alex does not take the need for Marxist theory in history seriously. Theory is for philosophers, knowledge is distinct from experience and all we historians need to remember is that the economic level determines everything 'in the last instance', as Althusser says. Fortunately, I think that real Marxist historians will not accept any of this, but will continue to develop Marxist theory through history so that we can better understand the nature of class consciousness and class struggle.

I still believe that the tendency for historians to regard Marxist theory as something 'given' by writers such as Hill, something there to be defended rather than developed, is an obstacle to the spread and growth of Marxism. ■

Norah Carlin

Traitors' trump card

THE HISTORY of our century has too often been a history of failed revolutions. The opportunity for workers to take power into their own hands and change society has often been denied by critical failures of leadership at decisive moments.

The German revolution of 1919-20 is perhaps the most graphic illustration of the treachery of reformism in the midst of the struggle. This ultimate betrayal of the cause of socialism really began some four years earlier on the night of 4 August 1914 when the leaders of the mighty German socialist party, the SPD, voted to support the war effort of German imperialism and opened the way to world war.

Only a tiny minority led by Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht had the courage from the outset to declare their implacable opposition to this policy.

The carnage that followed on the battlefields of Europe was immense. For four years the costs of war were borne not by the official leaders of the working class, ensconced in self-important meetings with bosses, generals and politicians of the ruling class, but by soldiers in the trenches and workers in the factories. Gradually opposition mounted and spread into the ranks of the party. The leaders responded by driving out all who dared to question their wisdom.

Suddenly, in September 1918, the bloody military stalemate ended. The great German army, creator and lynchpin of the German empire, faced inevitable defeat on the western front. Panic swept through the ruling class.

Ludendorff's gamble

In desperation, the effective military dictator General Ludendorff decided to risk all on a last throw of the political dice. The official leaders of German socialism, he reasoned, had perhaps as much to fear from the coming revolution as did he and his like. If he offered them the poisoned bait of full power now, perhaps they could contain the upsurge of the masses who, in spite of everything, might still trust them.

Ludendorff's gamble worked perfectly. Friedrich Ebert, the leader of the SPD, was a perfect candidate for the role Ludendorff had cast. Ebert had risen to the top of the SPD through the ranks of the apparatus. He had played a prominent role in isolating the radicals in the party before the war and in confining the activity of the SPD to legal, parliamentary channels. During the war he had worked closely with the general staff and struck up a good relationship with General Groener, Ludendorff's number two.

Left to himself there is no doubt that Ebert would have wanted to retain the monarchy. 'I am a loyal servant of the Emperor. I have lost two sons for this Empire,' he told his predecessor, Prince Max of Baden. The masses,

however, had begun to move. On 4 November there was a mutiny in the naval port of Kiel. In the next few days, a wave of strikes and mutinies swept across Germany. Workers' and soldiers' councils were set up everywhere as the military and civil authorities capitulated, surrendered or fled. The old order collapsed.

By 9 November Berlin was teeming with thousands of workers and soldiers demanding the abolition of the monarchy and the setting up of a socialist republic. At lunch that day Ebert and his colleague Scheidemann sat brooding over their watery potato soup, besieged by anxious party officials imploring them to address the masses before the newly released and now hugely popular Liebknecht seized the initiative.

Scheidemann went out on the balcony and, pre-empting Liebknecht by only a few hours, declared Germany to be from that moment on a republic. 'The people have won all along the line,' he assured his listeners. Ebert's initial reaction was to rant and rave at him about legality, but when they had both calmed down they began to plot in earnest how to regain control of the situation.

The central issue was now the very nature of the state. To a bureaucratic reformist like Ebert the idea of workers running society directly, through directly elected and recallable councils, was appalling.

If the bosses were expropriated there would be no one there to negotiate with. If there was no parliament elected every few years, there could be no other parties to form coalitions with. He could use the support of his members to become chancellor, just as his union colleague Legien was finally obtaining due and proper union recognition from the employers' associations at that very moment. But revolution—that was unthinkable.

To stop the revolution was now Ebert's only concern. Fortunately he had two cards up his sleeve: On the one hand he still had a disciplined party machine. His officials now rushed furiously throughout Berlin calling on workers to trust their 'natural' leaders. The result of Ebert's consummate manoeuvring was that the crucial meeting of delegates from the workers' and soldiers' councils confirmed his proposals. More crucially, the delegates failed to address the question of who should have power: government or councils? Six hectic days later the congress of councils bowed to SPD pressure and voted to call a constituent assembly to replace itself as the supreme political power in the land.

Ebert's other card was his trump. A week earlier on the night of 9 November, unknown to anyone but his closest colleagues, Ebert had received a call on a secret telephone line from his old friend General Groener. They forged an alliance in a matter of minutes.

Ebert was to play for time while Groener would reassemble an effective fighting force out of the demobilising army. On the signal from Ebert, these troops would come in and put an end to the 'council nonsense', confirming Ebert and his projected National Assembly in power.

Their first joint effort nearly backfired. Just before Christmas the Berlin City Commander, Wels—another crony of Ebert's—withheld the pay of a radical group of sailors. Enraged, they arrested him and proceeded to surround the Chancellory. What they didn't know was that inside the building Ebert had his secret telephone which he promptly used to call the general staff. Major Schleicher on the other end of the line thought the moment had come. 'I shall arrange at once for troops loyal to the government to be sent in... Now we have our chance to strike a blow at the radicals.' The time was not yet right. The sailors stood their ground and repelled the soldiers.

Back at the general staff gloom reigned until Ebert's colleague Noske decided to take personal control of the loyal troops, known as the Freikorps. What must have given them fresh heart was the complete failure of the sailors and the left to seize their advantage.

Counter-revolution

On 5 January Ebert ordered the sacking of the Berlin police chief, a member of the left wing socialist party, the USPD. This carefully calculated provocation produced hurried but woefully indecisive discussions on the left and a wave of mass demonstrations throughout Berlin. The only trouble was that no one had got around to organising what the demonstrating masses might actually do. Ebert, Groener and Noske decided that now was the time to strike.

For three days scarcely armed and unorganised demonstrators were gunned down on the streets of Berlin. The leaders of the Communist Party (who had in fact opposed any attempt at a seizure of power at this stage) were hunted down. Wels and Scheidemann put a price of 50,000 marks on the heads of Luxemburg and Liebknecht. When they were tracked down their heads were smashed in with rifle butts and their mutilated bodies thrown in the river.

This decisive victory for the counter-revolution ended the first phase of the German revolution. For the next few months the Freikorps, under the 'socialist' Noske, were to rampage through Germany murdering radical workers and soldiers in an orgy of sustained counter-revolutionary violence.

In the end, of course, the social democrats got what they deserved. No sooner had the threat of revolution receded than the right wing began to spread the poisonous legend that it was the socialists who had really been responsible for the military defeat in the first place, just as Ludendorff had schemed.

Within ten years the wheel was to come full circle, as Hitler used this legend to come to power and destroy not just the communists but all opposition to his Nazi dictatorship. ■

Phil Spencer