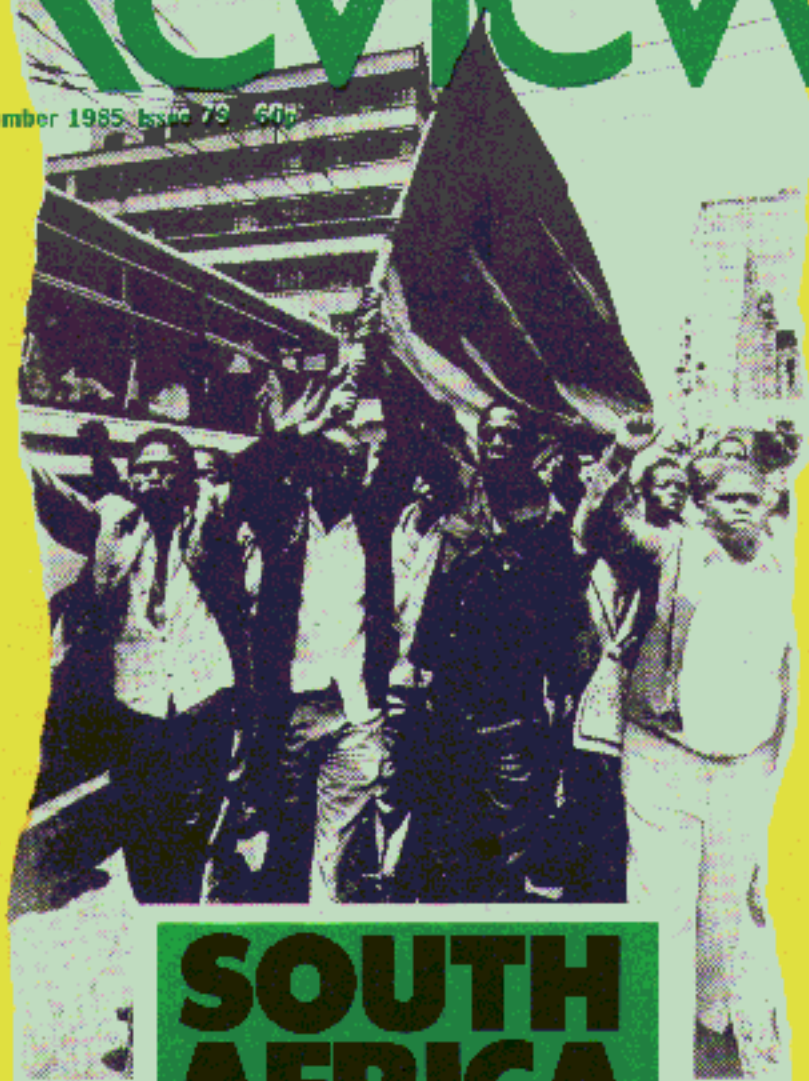


socialist worker Review

September 1985 Issue 79 60p



SOUTH AFRICA

Between reform
and revolution?

Special issue

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NOTES

of the month

BALANCE OF CLASS FORCES

The crisis of Thatcherism

WE'VE BEEN through a summer in which the government seemed unable to get anything right.

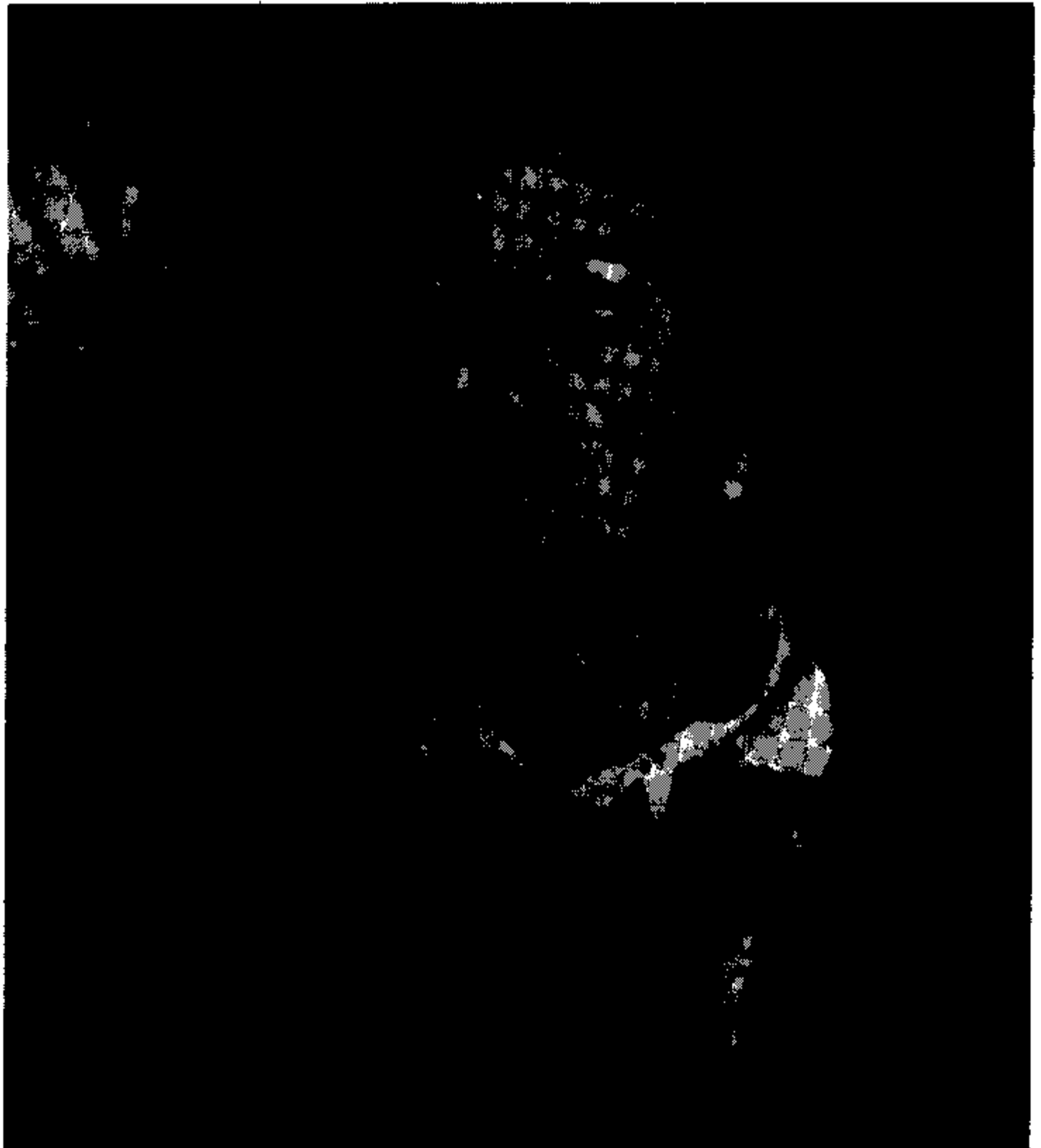
The row over top people's salaries was followed by an even greater row over the BBC. Thatcher's own personal standing in the opinion polls is down to its 1981 level—the lowest for any prime minister since 1939.

Yet Thatcher's problems certainly do not lie in any great militancy from the unions—as the unexpected result of the railway workers' ballot proved all too clearly.

Union conference after union conference has seen a resurrection of the new realism of two years ago—even if some of the left union leaders prefer to talk of 'pragmatism' rather than realism.

The tone was set at the NUPE conference, where a leadership which used to be associated with the 'hard' Bennite left in the Labour Party pushed a resolution calling for the expulsion of *Militant* supporters. And at the National Union of Railwaymen's conference Jimmy Knapp, whose election as general secretary two years ago was greeted by some as opening a new period of 'left advance' in the unions, rammed through acceptance of the balloting provisions of the anti-union laws.

The argument between the left led unions and the right led unions like the engineers and the electricians is no longer about the Wembley principle of defying the anti union laws. It is rather about the exact manner in



The most unpopular prime minister since Chamberlain

which the union bureaucracy submits to them.

Whatever else is afoot at the moment, it is not an assertion of union power by confident leaders.

Losing credibility

The series of petty disasters the government have suffered through the summer months are an expression of the way its belief that it could deal with the problems of British capitalism by crude monetarism is losing credibility among widening sections of the ruling class. The return to confrontation with the unions is Thatcher's attempt to

close this credibility gap.

There are two mistaken views of Thatcherism on the left.

The first is the Eurocommunist (or Euro-labourist) one that it is some quite new form of capitalist rule, in which an increasingly authoritarian 'strong state' has succeeded in building such widespread ideological support among wide sections of workers as to be able to threaten virtually to wipe out the old labour movement.

Such a catastrophist view leads straight to the most right wing of conclusions. The only way to stop Thatcher destroying all hope of progress lies, it is said, in conciliating with the right wing inside the Labour movement

NOTES of the month

and with the anti-Thatcherite elements outside it—including even sections of big business.

So Kinnockism is seen as the only viable alternative to Thatcherism, not just by the hard core Eurocommunists around *Marxism Today*, but also by a growing section of the Labour left.

The other view is held by those sections of the Labour left and the Communist Party who want to resist the Euro-Kinnockite position. They insist there is no such thing as 'Thatcherism', that all that Thatcher represents is a continuation of methods of capitalist rule.

They are absolutely correct—up to a point. Thatcher has *not* found some magical new ingredient for winning working class enthusiasm for authoritarian right wing policies.

However, if that is all that is said, you throw the baby out with the bathwater. For Thatcherism does have a strategy for dealing with the problems of British capitalism which is distinct in certain important respects from that followed by previous post-war British governments (except for the Heath government in its 1970-72 'Selsdon Man' period).

Incorporating the unions

These governments followed a set of policies which some ruling class commentators now describe as 'corporatist'. They combined a state capitalist interventionist approach to the economy (maintaining a sizeable public sector, using state money to bail out ailing private firms, giving the occasional stimulus to the economy to end cyclical fluctuations) with attempts to incorporate the trade union leaderships into the managing structure of British capitalism.

For such governments, controlling wages and raising the rate of profit meant going further along the path of incorporating the unions, with attempts to get the union leaders to police wage agreements, and an emphasis on building up the power of the national union bureaucracies at the expense of 'unofficial elements'. This was the case even if it meant, for instance, pressurising reluctant employers to make concessions to the unions over things like the closed shop



and facility time for workplace representatives.

The Thatcher government has turned to a rather different strategy. It has refused to take action to reflate the economy, relying on market pressures to weed out inefficient sections of industry. And it has relied upon the resulting high level of unemployment to discipline workers into accepting job losses, worsened conditions and reduced wages. Meanwhile, instead of wooing trade union leaders, it has sought to reduce the power of the unions themselves by carefully staged confrontations and a series of laws which lay down a restrictive framework for them to operate in.

It is this approach which is now in crisis. The reason is that its successes in damaging the working class movement—and they have been considerable—have not been nearly great enough to achieve the awesome task of restoring the profitability and competitiveness of British based industrial capital. Despite overseeing the closure of something like a quarter of manufacturing plant, it has not even succeeded in battering workers sufficiently to impose reduced real wages on most of those in employment.

And so Thatcher has been subject to increasing criticism from very important sections of capital. The heads of both GEC and ICI have recently criticised the government for not providing any boost for manufacturing industry, and a few big employers are now donating money to the Social Democrats.

The unease within the ruling class is not new. It was already present in the summer of 1983. Even then commentators were noting that the government seemed to have 'run out of steam', despite the size of its election victory.

The offensive against the unions in 1983-4—especially the attack on the miners—was meant to provide an answer to such criticisms. The Thatcherites believed they could win easy victories which would both restore the profitability of capital and scotch any talk of the need to return to the 'corporatist' approach.

Government victory

They quelled the disquiet within their own class so long as the strike lasted: the ruling class are not yet so divided that any section is prepared to give quarter to the class enemy in any all out confrontation. But the moment the strike ended, the complaints resumed.

For the direct cost of beating the miners was so great as to effectively scupper the rest of the Thatcherites' strategy of tax cuts. And, far from the attack on the miners leading to any immediate improvement in general profitability, other groups of workers had to be bought off while the strike lasted.

A fish rots from the head. A crisis of confidence in a government by sections of the ruling class can very easily translate itself into a general loss of confidence among those who work inside the state machine and the media.



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Signal failure

THE NUR ballot result has been the first real boost the Tories have had for some months. It gives them a free hand to cut the workforce on the railways. It is also a blow to workers elsewhere. For it shows quite starkly the lack of confidence within the working class.

The history of the railways over the past few years—especially the terrible defeats suffered by both ASLEF and the NUR in 1982—and the lack of a tradition of rank and file organisation meant that it would have been difficult to get an all-out strike.

But Jimmy Knapp's tactics of staying within the law and winning public opinion made a defeat far more likely. Instead of running a campaign to commit the membership to strike action he relied on the more general arguments about the dangers of driver only operation.

Many workers who opposed driver only operation felt that they could not win. Knapp was never prepared to call for an all-out strike and to explain what a powerful force railworkers could be.

The ballot effectively demobilised the fight. British Rail's sacking of 250 guards had caused a massive wave of bitterness. But this was then squandered as action was delayed pending the ballot.

Sections were told to stay at work. So when Queen Street in Glasgow asked to come out in support of guards at Central Station in the same city, they were told to

wait for the ballot. Only a rank and file fight against the leadership eventually succeeded in spreading the action.

There was strong feeling for staying out after the one day strike on the Southern Region, but workers were swung by the argument that it would be better to go back and wait for the ballot.

Knapp's dithering about what form industrial action should take, and rumours that he would call selective strikes rather than an all-out strike, knocked the confidence out of the guards. The memory of how ASLEF were beaten in 1982 after a series of selective strikes was still fresh.

Doubts set in

The tactics Knapp employed would have been wrong at any time. But in the wake of the miners' defeat they proved to be a disaster.

Confidence in the trade union movement can only be rebuilt when workers feel their own strength in struggle. Sitting at home waiting to vote in a ballot allows doubts to set in about your ability to win. Going on strike and then picketing out other workers can show you in practice that it is possible to take on the bosses and beat them. ■

Thatcher has made the malaise worse by her own reaction to it—her increasing intolerance of criticism from within the ruling class, her purging of almost anyone with any independence from the cabinet, her megalomaniac insistence that she can personally solve things like football hooliganism and drug addiction. But this merely means that quite minor questions from the point of view of capital, like local government reform or the salaries of top state employees, threaten to engulf the government.

Take, for instance, the row over 'government interference' in the BBC. Governments have been interfering in the BBC ever since it was created. But while there was some consensus within the ruling class as to what needed to be done, then the 'interference' did not lead to major rows. The BBC management meekly bent to the nod and the wink from the powers that be.

What is different this time is that there is the widespread feeling even among some ruling class circles that Thatcher, Brittan and the rest cannot be trusted, that they are messing things up and then using their executive power to prevent anyone doing anything about it.

So the scene is set for political crises which blow up at the most unexpected moments. They result from the lack of consensus within the ruling class. But this in turn is a product of the failure of Thatcherism to solve the central problems of British industrial capital. ■

A new book that sums up the miners' struggle and examines the strike's crucial turning points: Nottinghamshire, Orgreave, the police offensive against pit villages, the role of the trade union leaders.

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NOTES

of the month

The partners shake hands

EVERY year the TUC appoints a panel to sit in judgement on the merits of the various union journals, presumably with the aim of making them more 'professional'. The panel always manages to contain at least one splendidly representative trade unionist (this time the industrial correspondent of the *Daily Express*) and its comments rapidly pass into oblivion.

This year, however, the judges managed to hit the nail on the head. 'There were', they say, 'far too many photographs of pairs of men shaking hands with fixed smiles on their faces.'

Now pictures of men in suits doing the business for the benefit of the camera has always been a characteristic of official trade union activity. What is so different about 1985?

Over the past few months a series of agreements have been concluded and relationships cemented which form the essential background for a Labour success at the next general election. The leadership has gone much further, and with far less opposition, than they could have hoped for in such a short time. Shaking hands is far too restrained—they should be hugging themselves with glee.

There have been three major developments since the end of the miners' strike: the successful operation coordinated by the TUC on the political fund ballots; the development of a more coherent (though still unstable) centre-right in the union bureaucracy, with explicit backing for Hattersley and Kinnock; and finally the successful negotiation of a clear right wing platform for the TUC and the Labour Party, published under the title *A New Partnership, A New Britain*.

The main feature of the new policy is, almost literally, to make no promises. More correctly it does promise to 'repeal the present government's divisive trade union



Willis: he's making no promises

legislation and replace it with a positive legislation'; to 'recast the present Youth Training Scheme'; and to provide 'a strategy for fair wages'.

Note that even these limited commitments imply legal controls of one sort or another. The 'positive legislation' in question concerns union rights to participation in investment decisions and involvement in planning at national, industry and company level. The training proposals involve more role for the company/union Area Manpower Boards set up by the Tories and the introduction of 'joint training committees in the workplace'.

The strategy for 'fair wages' means the restoration of some legal rights removed by the Thatcher government.

None of this is particularly surprising. But the new policy does not even mention 'free collective bargaining'. Its proposals on planning are to the right of the 1966 National Plan (written by George Brown and agreed with the CBI).

The key words are fairness, cooperation, involvement, consultation, investment and planning. In short, it is a document which could certainly form the basis for some joint agreement with the SDP and/or Liberal Party, and even for some future National Government. ■

Ballot box blues

THE Tories have been terribly embarrassed by the ballots on the political fund. Conceived as a way of 'depoliticising' the unions, as part of the strategy of promoting US-style business unionism in Britain, the ballots have resulted in huge (80 to 90 percent)

majorities in favour of keeping the political fund.

The vote in favour of the political fund is a blow to the Tories, precisely because it affirms the right of workers' organisations to campaign on political issues.

But the political fund ballots have had other effects. Far from weakening the union machine as the Tories thought, they have strengthened it. The centralised strategy adopted, with a common approach on propaganda and an agreed order of balloting, has meant a considerable boost in the authority of the TUC and the Labour Party full-timers responsible.

Political role

The concerted approach on winning the arguments at grass roots level recalls the success they had in selling the social contract in 1975/76. Just as important, some unions at least set up a line of communications with each workplace, with a named individual responsible for the campaign in every office or factory. The establishment of a network for communicating with the rank and file is, to say the least, outside the normal experience of most union leaders—they have now done it, even if on a fairly minimal level.

Finally, of course, the prestige of union leaders, and their role in the Labour Party, has been enhanced by the campaign. The bureaucracy has reinforced its own political role, has made itself even more indispensable to Kinnock and Co and even more of an effective counter-weight to those troublesome constituency Labour Parties which sometimes try to rock the boat.

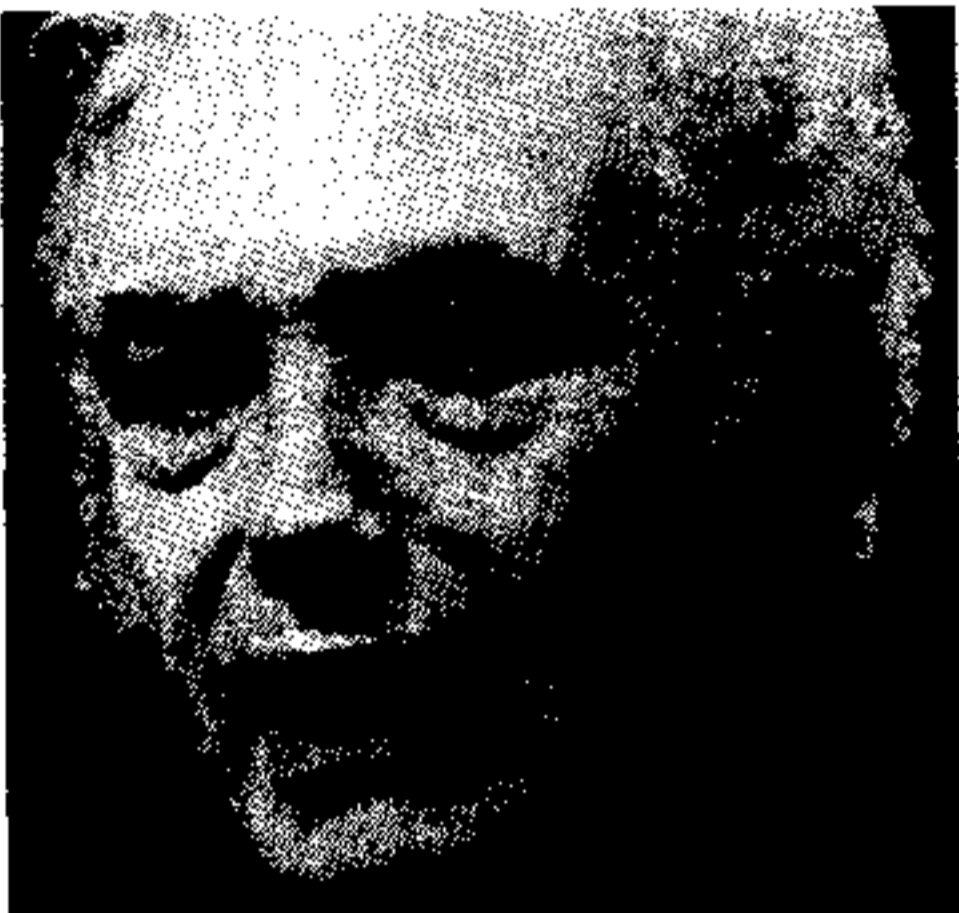
It is almost tempting to see the whole thing as the work of some Labour mole inside the Tory Party. Certainly an inquest is going on in Tory ranks about what to do next. It is worth pointing out that the outcome completely contradicts the notions put about by

Eric Hobsbawm and various co-thinkers.

In fact the political fund ballots confirm the predominance of traditional, lowest common denominator, Labour politics and their role in establishing a right wing Labour hegemony.

There is, of course, another side to this hegemony. It not only works politically against the Tories and the Alliance as they attempt to detach the unions from Labour. It also works against those of us who try to turn the *feeling* against Thatcher into *action*.

That was why those commentators who argued—before the result of the railworkers' ballot was known—that by abiding by the terms of the King Law on balloting Jimmy Knapp and the NUR were being very clever were wrong.



Jimmy Knapp

This, of course, is the other side of their argument that not taking a ballot was the miners' great mistake.

But a very important point is missing from this argument.

Ballots tend to get a yes vote when the issue is relatively simple and people do not think it will mean they have to take action. So it is relatively easy to vote in favour of the political levy. Similarly, in the US where a yes vote in a ballot is simply a ploy to strengthen the union's hand in negotiations and hardly ever leads to strike action actually occurring, the union leadership usually gets the result it wants.

But things were rather different with the guards—they knew a yes vote was likely to lead to a bitter confrontation. This, of course, would also have been true of those voting if a national ballot had been held at the beginning of the miners' strike. In that case, it would have been a question of voting for action. In addition, the media were telling many of those who would have had a vote—for instance those in the 'superpits'—that the Coal Board's plans would never threaten their jobs.

That is why we argued throughout the miners' strike that a ballot would have been full of dangers. Workers who will support action when they are pulled into it by the activity of other workers who picket them out will, nevertheless, respond quite differently if they are asked to put a tick on a piece of paper.

The railworkers' ballot is proof of how right we were and how wrong were the Labour right, the Eurocommunists and others who called for a ballot. ■

The new centre-right

THERE is an important further stage in the process of consolidation of the right wing. At the same time as the left of the Labour Party has moved right (at varying speeds, in general consistent with varying ideas of dignity) significant groups within society have moved towards the centre from the right.

In part this is the result of the last period of the miners' strike, when the miners and their communities were seen by a large number of people as the victims of government intransigence. The new Labour programme seeks to capitalise on this with its emphasis on getting away from the Tory 'policy of confrontation in industry'. Perhaps the clearest example of all this is the teachers' dispute.

From the point of view of activists within the NUT and of those trying to strengthen the action (or at least prevent it from vanishing altogether) the teachers' dispute has been a virtual non-event. There has been a considerable lack of organisation and agitation in the most militant areas, excluding Scotland, which is a slightly different case.

However, in previously very backward areas, with little or no history of union activity let alone serious disputes, the mood has been very different. The two right wing unions, AMMA and NAS/UWT, have been (relatively) far more militant than the NUT. Large numbers have been involved in local stoppages in rural areas such as Gloucestershire or Sussex.

One result of this has been a rising tide of resentment in Tory areas—and a substantial climbdown on pay from the government at the beginning of August. From the point of view of the new Labour consensus it has brought some surprising reinforcements.

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NOTES of the month

Usually the NAS/UWT is to be found well to the right in TUC debates, with an anti-political, pro-Tory stance. This year its TUC motion 'rejects the duplicity of the present government' and, more surprisingly, calls for support for a government committed to establishing 'a body comprised of unions, business and government' and policies of 'increasing competition in industry', 'monitoring technological change' and 'promoting industrial democracy'. Change the clichés just a little and you have Labour's *New Partnership*.

One should not underestimate the important obstacles in the way of establishing the dominance of these ideas which the Labour and TUC leaderships need before the next election. For one thing, the failure of class struggle to lie down and die means that huge strikes can threaten to break out.

But stage one in the construction of a new, and far more right wing, social contract has been completed. The second stage is under way. Those arguing against it and warning of the consequences of another reactionary Labour regime have to point out and resist every shift to the right.

We also have to support and promote all opposition (however token) to the present government, in order to win those alongside us to opposing the next one as well. ■

•Additional notes by Dave Beecham, Chris Harman and Ann Rogers.

**WHY
THE
WORLD
ECONOMY
IS
IN
CRISIS**

by Peter Green

The upward spiral

IT IS a safe bet that the unemployment figure for September will show a sharp rise as this year's school leavers are finally allowed to sign on. Officially there will be approaching 3,400,000 without work in Britain.

Tom King, Tory Minister for Unemployment (if he hasn't been reshuffled by then), will appear on television and say, yes, it's all very unfortunate but there are seasonal adjustments that have to be made. The number of vacancies is going up, and anyway, if only those in work were willing to accept lower wages...

He won't of course mention that on the old method of counting, which the Tories junked, the figure would now be 3,700,000—and in reality, with married women, those on YTS schemes etc taken into account, well over four million.

By the standards of the slump of 1980-82, the last two years have not been so bad. The number of people in work has risen since 1983. In 1984 there was a net increase of 187,000 part time jobs and 19,000 full time jobs for women. But the number of men in

work fell by 60,000.

The number of jobs available is still two million less than in 1979, despite three years of 'recovery' in economic growth. More redundancies, especially in the public sector—coal, railways, civil service, local government—are in the pipeline. Another slump in world capitalism is looming.

As an article in the *Financial Times* put it recently:

'A total of more than 30 million people are now jobless in the main industrial economies. Youth unemployment is particularly acute: in Britain a quarter of 18 and 19 year olds are jobless. In some European countries the figures are still worse.

'Few economists are willing to forecast much improvement. Many believe unemployment in Britain and elsewhere will be at current levels or even higher, five and even ten years hence.'

The Tory answer to this will be familiar. As a Treasury propaganda sheet put it in January 1985: 'If people in work were to

accept lower pay rises, more people would have jobs.'

Or as Nigel Lawson said in his budget speech in March:

'Jobs are created by firms that are competitive, efficient, profitable and well-managed. This in turn requires a workforce with the right skills, one that is adaptable, reliable, motivated and prepared to work at wages that employers can afford to pay.

'Too much of the benefit of economic growth is currently being enjoyed in higher living standards for those in work; too little in the form of better job prospects for those out of work. In a free society the remedy lies in the hands of those responsible for collective bargaining throughout the economy.'

After six years of trench warfare with the unions, the Tories have still failed to break through. Real wages for most workers are still higher than they were in 1979. But for Thatcher and Lawson there is still no alternative. What they care about, of course, is not the misery and hopelessness of those on the dole, but profits. Even at the cost of £7.5 billion a year in benefits, it's better they think, to leave people rotting on the dole if no profits can be made out of employing them.

The argument stinks of hypocrisy. While school leavers are dragooned into YTS schemes for a pittance, while the wages councils which offer minimal protection to the lowest paid are threatened with abolition, 'top people' are rewarded with pay rises of 50 percent plus. The rich, it seems, need incentives to 'work' harder while the poor will only get work if they're paid even less.

Falling wages

But as an explanation of why unemployment is so high the argument is feeble. Looked at internationally British wage levels have been falling relatively for the last 20 years. Wages are much higher in West Germany or Sweden, where unemployment is less. Far lower wages in Brazil and Mexico have not helped the 40 percent of the population in those countries without regular work.

Falling profit rates lie at the heart of the global crisis of the last 15 years. But these cannot be explained, in Britain or elsewhere, simply by rising wages or trade union power. To select just one set of figures from many: between 1962 and 1972 what is termed the 'real product wage' (the hourly cost of labour to an employer, including National Insurance contributions etc) rose on average, each year, by 2.9 percent in Britain. In that period unemployment rose only slightly. From 1972-82 the average rise was 1.7 percent—yet unemployment more than trebled.

Profit rates fell primarily because of the massive accumulation of capital, the piling up of the capacity to produce things of the years of the long boom of the 1950s and 1960s. Hence massive overproduction in key industries such as steel, vehicles and ship-building. Hence the endless wave of closures of factories, mills and yards—not because

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they were worn out or useless in most cases, but simply because they were not profitable enough. Hence also the devotion of new investment not to building new factories but to computers and robots, throwing even more on the dole.

However it is important to understand that the capitalist drive to cut wages is not just the result of greed on the part of the bosses, or hatred for the unions on the part of the Tories. The crisis itself has led to ferocious competition for shares of stagnant world markets.

Every firm, every state, is under pressure to cut costs and attack their workers. If they don't, their rivals certainly will. The losers will either be forced out of business, or find themselves in the claws of the bankers and International Monetary Fund who will insist they exact the necessary sacrifices from the labour force anyway.

Austerity rule

It is, in theory, possible that British capitalism could cut wages sufficiently to be able to increase its global competitiveness, and attract investment from multinational capital. Jobs would increase if that happened. The problem is that in every other industrial country the same attacks—the same attempts to reduce wages, cut welfare benefits and union strength—are taking place. Whether it be conservative governments as in Denmark and West Germany or social democratic regimes as in France, Spain or New Zealand, austerity policies are now the rule.

But if every capital and every state cuts wages and seeks to reduce government spending, the effect on the world economy as a whole is what the economists call 'deflationary'—a lowering of the level of demand for goods. Actions which make sense for the individual capital, actions which are forced on them by the pressures of competition, undermine the stability of capitalism as a whole.

There are some countries (Japan is the obvious example) where years of high investment have made their products highly competitive on world markets, and kept unemployment low. There are others (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait or, in Europe, Norway) where the bonanza of oil has made massive state spending and job creation possible. There are others again (South Korea, Singapore) where a combination of low wages and investment have enabled a rapid growth of exports despite the crisis. None of these options is available to British capitalism.

Even if wages were slashed by the 20 percent dreamed of by the *Economist* and profits increased, it would take years for British capitalism to catch up with the Japanese level of capital per worker. The oil revenues have been spent on the dole queues on the one hand, and on a massive export of private capital on the other—and by 1990 oil production will be declining.

To turn Britain into a cheap labour offshore island, like Singapore which Thatcher admires so much, would require a reduction of wage rates to a comparable 75p an hour!

Margaret Thatcher's fantasies aside, Tories such as Nigel Lawson have in recent

months been looking to the United States of America for inspiration. There, it is claimed, 'flexible labour markets' (in other words having less than 20 percent of the workforce organised in unions which have in turn made dramatic concessions or 'givebacks' over pay, conditions of work, bargaining systems and jobs) have been responsible for the creation of nearly seven million jobs in the years since the slump of 1982.

It is true that in the United States there has been a steady rise over the last decade of very low paid, badly organised jobs in the 'service' sector—in hospitals and hotels, restaurants and fast food chains like McDonalds, as well as a growth in the number of maids and gardeners in the homes of the rich. That is the 'American model' which the ruling class here finds so attractive (a letter in the *Financial Times* recently suggested that tax allowances for those taking on servants would help solve the unemployment problem!).

But wage cuts in the core industrial sectors of the American economy have not saved jobs. Time and again workers have made concessions—in steel, in the auto industry, in trucking, on the airlines—only to find their position even weaker when the next round of redundancies is demanded. The number of workers required to produce a ton of steel or a motor car is falling with new technology. Only if the demand for steel and cars rises sufficiently will the employers take on more labour. Yet falling wages contributed to the fall in demand and the devastating American slump of 1980-82.

If the American economy emerged from that slump into a recovery which uniquely in the western world has cut unemployment sharply, it was not because of wage cuts but because of Reagan's exploding arms budget, financed by massive borrowing. Yet even in the United States that recovery is now fading. As the American economy sinks back into stagnation under the impact of soaring deficits and intense international competition, the rest of the world will soon follow.

So what is the alternative? In the wake of the miners' strike, and the continued inability to lower wages, sections of the ruling class have been voicing their concern.

Monetarism has failed. Unemployment is proving too costly, economically wasteful and a threat to the 'social fabric' and 'political stability' of the country. Some sort of 'reflationary' package to increase demand, with more public sector investment and more makeshift jobs schemes for the longterm unemployed is, they all agree, now necessary.

Despite the impressive array of politicians and economists lined up behind such bodies as the Employment Institute and its Charter for Jobs, there is a simple objection to what they propose. It's all been tried before—and failed.

Indeed few versions of this 'alternative' expect it to make any substantial difference to the numbers out of work. An optimistic projection is that unemployment could be reduced by a million by 1990. Even that assumes, implausibly, that the world economy does not enter another serious slump in the meantime.

Some jobs are better than none, may come the reply. Certainly it is possible for the state to build a few more roads or houses and employ people in the process. But for any expansion of demand by the state to be acceptable to capital, the benefits will have to go to profits, not wages. Under the banner of fighting inflation that means, as all concerned—including the Labour leaders—agree, an incomes policy.

There are, of course, versions of an alternative strategy still being hawked around the Labour Party which do not involve an incomes policy. But otherwise what people like Benn and Heffer offer is much the same only more—more public spending, a bigger government deficit, more state intervention in the economy, more nationalisation. What they do not understand is the necessity of a complete break with the existing system, the overthrow of capitalism and the capitalist state.

No government operating within the rules of the capitalist game and subject to the pressures of the world market is in a position to solve the crisis. If the American government, relying on arms spending and its financial muscle, cannot sustain an unstable boom for more than a couple of years, no one else stands a chance. Mitterrand's 'left wing' version of a reflation package in France lasted barely a year before being squeezed between soaring deficits and the demands of the global money lenders.

Unemployment in France did fall slightly for a short time. It is now rising even more rapidly than in Britain. In France, as in Britain, the imperatives of profitability, the overwhelming pressures of cut-throat competition, are forcing waves of redundancies in steel, engineering, the car industry and coal. The prospects for a Kinnock led government, given the weakness of the British economy, are even worse.

Yet unemployment is not inevitable. Those who argue that new technology is making necessary a different sort of society, in which it is possible to produce far more in a much shorter working week, are perfectly correct.

Marx foresaw this when he spoke of socialism as the passage from a realm of necessity to a realm of freedom, the liberation of the mass of humanity from the necessity of backbreaking or mindless toil for most of their lives. A rational, planned society under workers' control, putting an end to the subordination of production to competition for profit, could easily end unemployment.

Such a society is not going to evolve peacefully out of the crazy system in which we live today. Even the most marginal reductions in the working week, for example, were resisted bitterly by employers in West Germany last year, on the grounds that they would cut into profits and undermine competitiveness.

Given the logic of capitalism, that was inevitable. Socialists therefore must have no illusions. We have to fight that logic, oppose like the miners every redundancy, and even if that fails prepare for the necessity of revolution. ■

Pete Green



NIGEL HARRIS

Frontiers of control

The popular picture of the right wing orientation of government policy sees it as the result of the coming to power of Mrs Thatcher in this country and President Reagan in the United States.

We know this is not true since the real change occurred in the preceding administration—under Callaghan and Healey in 1977 in Britain, and under Carter in the United States.

Indeed, in general, major changes of economic policy do not coincide with changes of government. All major changes since 1945 in Britain have taken place in the mid term of governments, not between them. That is because such changes are the result of change in the objective circumstances facing the whole ruling class (changes in external competition, war rivalries, the domestic class struggle). The rhythms of the economy do not coincide with the timing of elections.

But the shift to the right in economic policy is not just a matter of timing. A major change in the dominant economic theory has also occurred over the last fifteen years.

That has coincided with a long drawn out change in the policy standpoint of almost all the governments in the world. In retrospect, the Chilean coup can now be seen as the beginning of that change.



Wilson couldn't prevent devaluation

The most dramatic change is in economic theory. Forms of Keynesianism dominated almost totally in the fifties. By the seventies it was neoclassical economics (of which Friedman's monetarism is one variety).

Economic theory is a sensitive reflection of the combination of the objective evolution of the system and the changing policy options facing different dominant interests—governments, national ruling classes, sections of the world capital. A

major shift of opinion of the kind that has occurred suggests either a simultaneous change in the dominant factions within most of the national ruling classes of the world, or a change in the structure of the world system affecting most governments in similar ways.

The change is most easily seen in economic policy. This is especially so in the Third World which remained committed far longer than the industrialised countries to the strongest forms of Keynesianism (hardly distinguishable from Stalinism in many cases). What are some of the issues?

In the fifties, it was universally believed that it was impossible for the Third World to export manufactured goods. They could only develop by depending on the domestic market and excluding imports.



Thatcher, unusual rhetoric

Today, there are hardly any governments not committed to the most rapid growth of manufactured exports. Note that this changes the target, 'economic development' from being a fully diversified national economy depending on its internal market, to a highly specialised contributor to a world product.

Foreign capital in the fifties was seen as 'capitalism' and solely exploitative. Today, most Third World governments are hotly competing in bribes to foreign capital to induce investment. The most dramatic cases are Vietnam and North Korea, among the front runners in offering concessions. The Philippines government has defeated the constitution by making land exclusively available to foreign businessmen. Mexico has effectively ended the rule that foreign business can hold only up to 49 percent of Mexican assets.

Foreign borrowing used to be anathema, but is today universal. In the early eighties, the Indian left protested vigorously at the terms of India's borrowing from the IMF.

Not many had read the sixth Five Year Plan which, long before the loan was considered, had laid out the same terms, as Indian government policy.

In the fifties imports were to be reduced to the bare minimum. They are now seen as the only spur to improving domestic output so that exports can be increased.

In the fifties, the state could be an unlimited substitute for private capital, and could guarantee certain services regardless of cost. Today, everywhere public welfare and health systems are under attack. The Chinese are privatising both health services and housing. And most governments are selling off or planning to sell off major parts of public sector industry; privatisation is the universal fashion. There is a general campaign against subsidiaries, a shift from direct to indirect taxation, and a subordination of all elements of working class consumption to the 'market'.

There are many different routes and stages in the change—the violent coups in Chile and Turkey, the slow reform in India (accelerating in the sixth and seventh Plans), the faster pace in China. Financial crisis is forcing Mexico and Brazil in the same direction. Declining oil prices are pushing Indonesia and Nigeria.

Others have resisted (like Egypt, made possible by dollar subventions). Yet others have been major failures—Chile, Uruguay, Argentina, Philippines.

In the fifties, the commitment of the Third World to state capitalism was embodied in a legion of local 'socialisms'—Arab, African, Cambodian, Burmese, Indian. Every new ruling class had its local variant. It is still a slight shock to hear that Tanzania is socialist, but encouraging 'capitalism', or that what is still the 'socialist republic' of Sri Lanka is busily bribing multinationals.

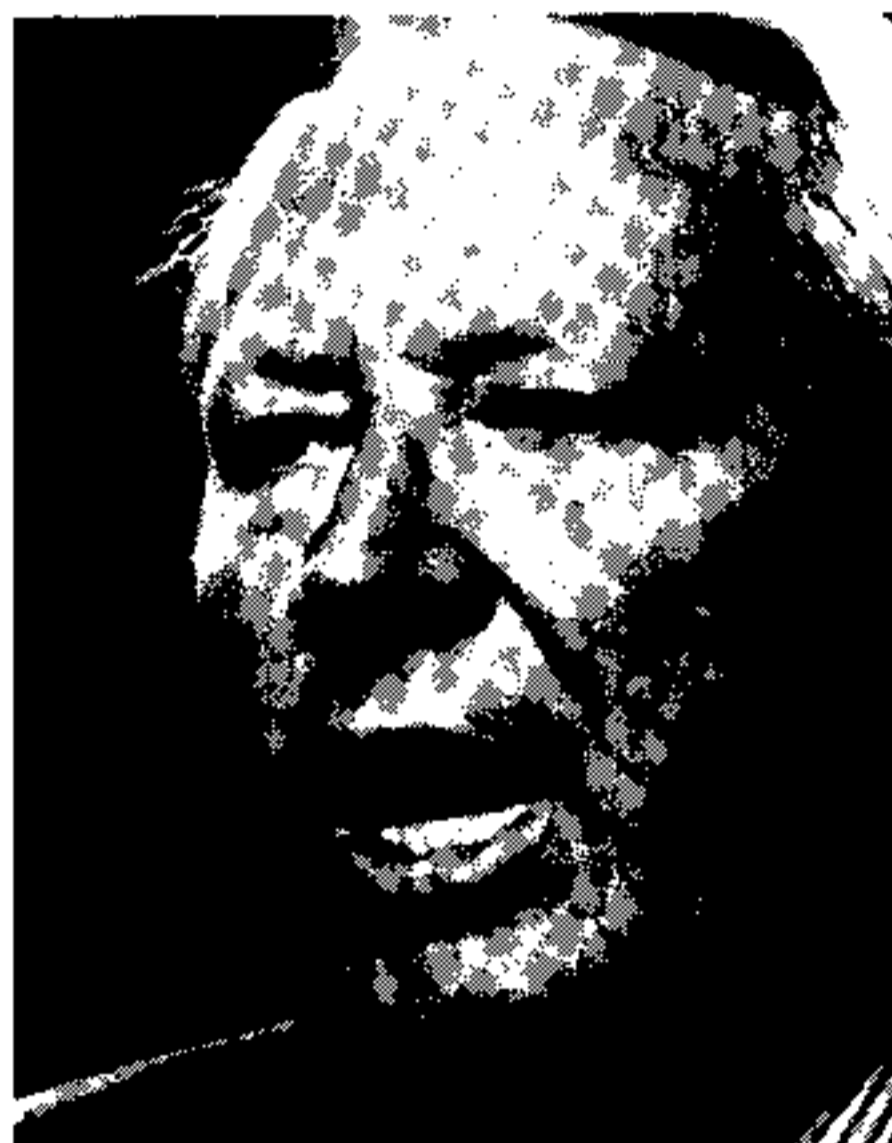
The shift to the right in economic



Healey led the change

thought is part of a much broader change. The great interwar slump—and the military rivalries that culminated in the Second World War—pushed most of the world into one or other form of state or managed capitalism. From Roosevelt's New Deal to the Nazi organisation of the German economy, ruling classes everywhere could see their only defence as state intervention.

In Britain, the Tories in the thirties were committed to the control of imports, currency and the organisation of state monopolies in major industries. They nationalised airways, electricity, and even tried to take over the coal mines. This commitment to state direction remained intact until the fifties when a new and quite unanticipated boom began the erosion of controls (what had been a defence against slump now appeared as inhibiting growth), including making sterling convertible.

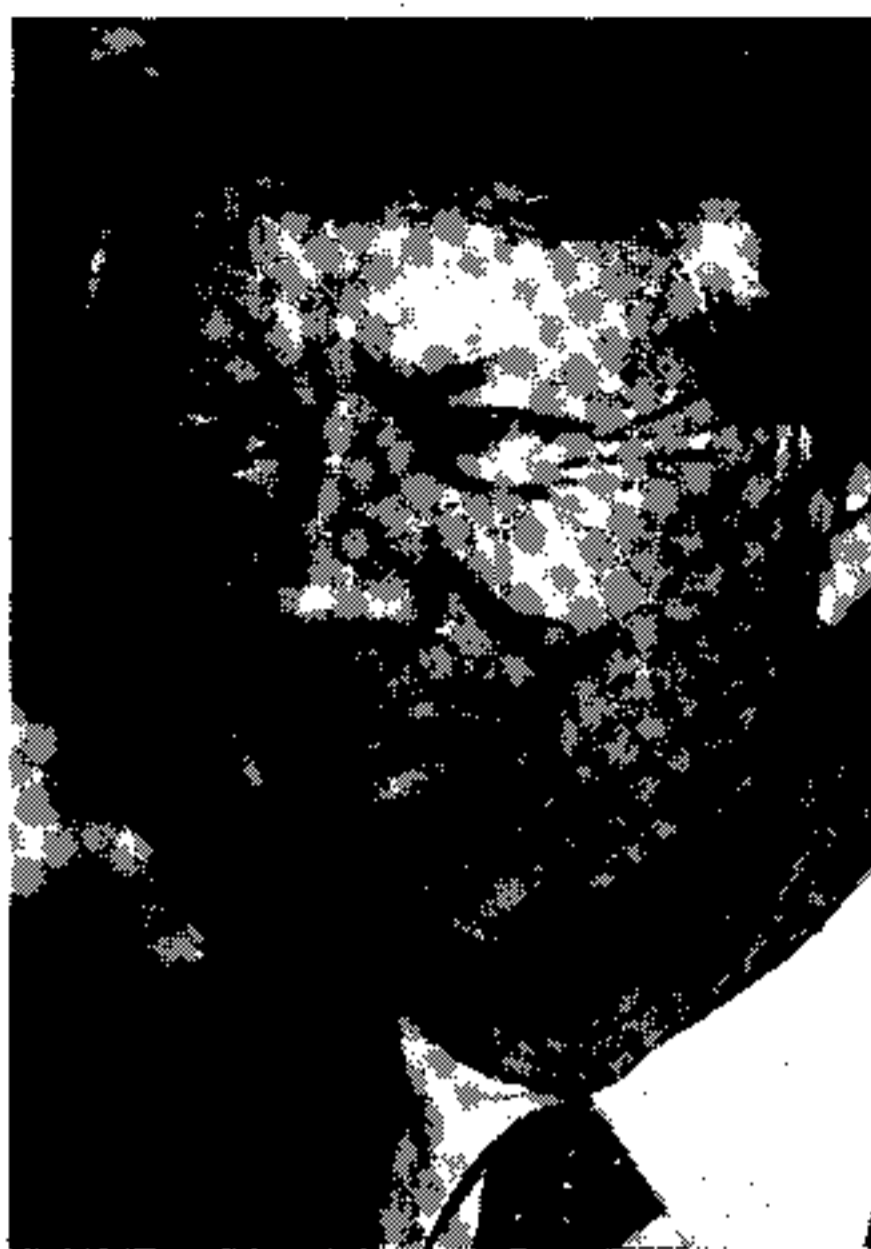


Heath was blocked by workers

The unwinding of the structure of controls took a very long time for different political interests had grown up around them. Heath came to power in 1970—a rehearsal for Mrs Thatcher in 1979—on a programme of all-out assault on restrictions to the market. He was politically defeated. But Labour had learned lessons. The failure of the Wilson government in 1967 to prevent the devaluation of sterling vividly illustrated to Labour's leaders that a 'socialist Britain' could not control its currency.

Working class confidence blocked Heath's attempt to derestrict the economy, but once that confidence weakened (and the scale of objective problems grew even greater), it was a Labour government that returned to the task—with Healey's commitment to monetarism in 1977.

In the Third World, the process was more mixed. Four Asian countries—South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore—demonstrated the possibility of successful manufactured exports in the sixties, but they did so with an opportunistic mixture of state capitalism. There were a host of imitators, but it took the economic crises of the seventies to push



Carter paved the way for Reagan

most governments to begin the changes.

Mrs Thatcher's rhetoric is unusual in the Tory tradition, which has always stressed the importance of a strong state for the defence of the ruling class. The change is reflected in her fringe militants, the university students who lean towards a utopian anti-statism. This is very different from the old crypto-fascist right who believed in a powerful state.

The same shift—from the traditional authoritarian and statist right wing of Europe, to the new 'let the market decide everything' can also be seen in France where the Gaullist right has swung very sharply against the state and for markets. There is a contradiction in the militant position, for they are also aggressive nationalists, racialists, and for nastier prisons: that is, they need a powerful state to hit foreigners, blacks, women.

What does the change in economic policy in the Third World represent? First, the arrival of new national capitals that, through the forced capital accumulation of the fifties and sixties, are now in a position to compete in the world market. The Third World countries with significant manufacturing are now crossing over from a defensive state capitalism to an offensive private capitalism (albeit, still employing much support from the state). Sections of business in particular countries resist the shift for they lack the confidence to compete, but the trend is against them.

Second, the system has changed. In the fifties, the market in the industrialised countries was defended against imports, and most Third World countries had not developed the capacity to produce competitive goods. By the eighties, the markets were opened, the capacity developed.

Third, the slump—and the need to increase export revenues to purchase imports and service loans—has driven all to market. They are urged on by the World Bank, the IMF and sundry others, but this would not be effective if it did not go with the grain.

Fourth, the more developed are using

access to their market as a bargaining lever to gain access to Third World markets.

Finally, but of greatest importance, the world system has become integrated to the point where the effectiveness of national economic policy is increasingly in doubt except where it conforms or exploits the world market. It is this change in structure which has forced both the change in economic theory and in economic policy, and which means that the trends are likely to continue. The shift to the right is not simply rhetoric, nor a function of eccentric individuals.

The new right thus reflects a new phase in the system, world capitalism, or rather, does so in its economic thought. The social and political components are, however, archaic, reflecting a past world of state, empire and race.

The contradiction reflects the contradictory position of a national ruling class. On the one hand, it is obliged to integrate economically in the world as the condition for survival and growth. On the other, it is dependent upon one national group, one population, the ideological cement of which is aggressive nationalism and racialism. An adventure in the Malvinas is part of the strategy of assuring international capital its assets are safe in Britain—nationalism is the guarantee of internationalism.



Mitterrand's 'good old days' gone

There will be no return to the past, to the good old days of Wilsonite social democracy, the green years of Mitterrand. Whether Mrs Thatcher is defeated in the next election or not, it will not put the clock back for the world has already moved on. The crisis for the left is thus not about this electoral battle or that, but about the crumbling of a whole world of theory.

Those who called themselves socialists have been allied to the imperatives of state capitalism for many decades, but that is now being superseded. For many it is frightening. Yet it makes possible a real rethinking about what socialism was supposed to mean—the self-emancipation of the working class, not the liberation of the state. ■

Whose fortress now?

A STRIKE by council workers in Islington, north London, which has run for a month as we go to press, is probably the first strike by both black and white workers against racism in Britain. The issues behind the strike are clear.

Islington Labour council has a reputation as one of the hardest of the hard left councils. As such they were regularly vilified by Fleet Street. But for the past month, the councillors have found themselves on the same side as the gutter press. Both have been attacking over 400 NALGO members striking against racial harassment of black workers.

The roots of the dispute go back several years. A group of staff in a section of the housing department have systematically harassed black workers, driving every single black worker from the section.

This was widely known across the council, and in April the council finally conducted disciplinary hearings against five of the section. However the councillors only raised a minor charge: that a black colleague had not been invited to an Xmas party.

Well documented evidence of racial abuse, the throwing of rubbish on black workers' desks and threats of violence to black workers and white workers who stood up to the racists, was ignored.

Nevertheless, three people, Irene Pledger, Steve Heaney and Vi Howell were found guilty of racial discrimination.

Pledger and Howell were advised by Lady Birdwood, a veteran of the extreme right. Lady Birdwood found Pledger and Howell a lawyer to represent them at an appeal which upheld the original charge.

In addition, witnesses to the disciplinary hearing were threatened, had their cars attacked and one witness found a man sitting outside her home for six and a half hours sharpening a knife.

This intimidation, together with the racists' choice of advisors and legal representatives should have convinced the councillors that they were dealing with serious, committed racists.

Nevertheless, the council pressed ahead with the transfer of Vi Howell to the Quadrant neighbourhood office where she would have direct contact with the public. The workers there made one simple request of Howell—that she give a verbal undertaking not to repeat her racist behaviour. She refused.

This refusal led to the strike which has affected most Islington neighbourhood offices during August.

The reaction of the councillors to the union's demands on Vi Howell was extraordinary. Sally Gilbert, who chairs the Personnel Committee accused the union of 'harassment, albeit of a different sort'. Maurice Barnes said 'the holding of "kangaroo courts" by the unions was totally unacceptable'.

The councillors told Islington NALGO to work with Vi Howell, whom they said would be sent on a 'racism awareness course'.

NALGO members, despite many bitter disputes with the council in the past, were stunned by the reply. They believed a council with a much vaunted anti-racist policy—telling anti-Irish jokes is a disciplinary offence—would welcome the fact that trade unionists were no longer prepared to tolerate racists in council offices.

Not so. In fact the Labour group on the council did not meet during the first four weeks of the strike. Deputy leader Alan Clinton, whom until recently called himself a

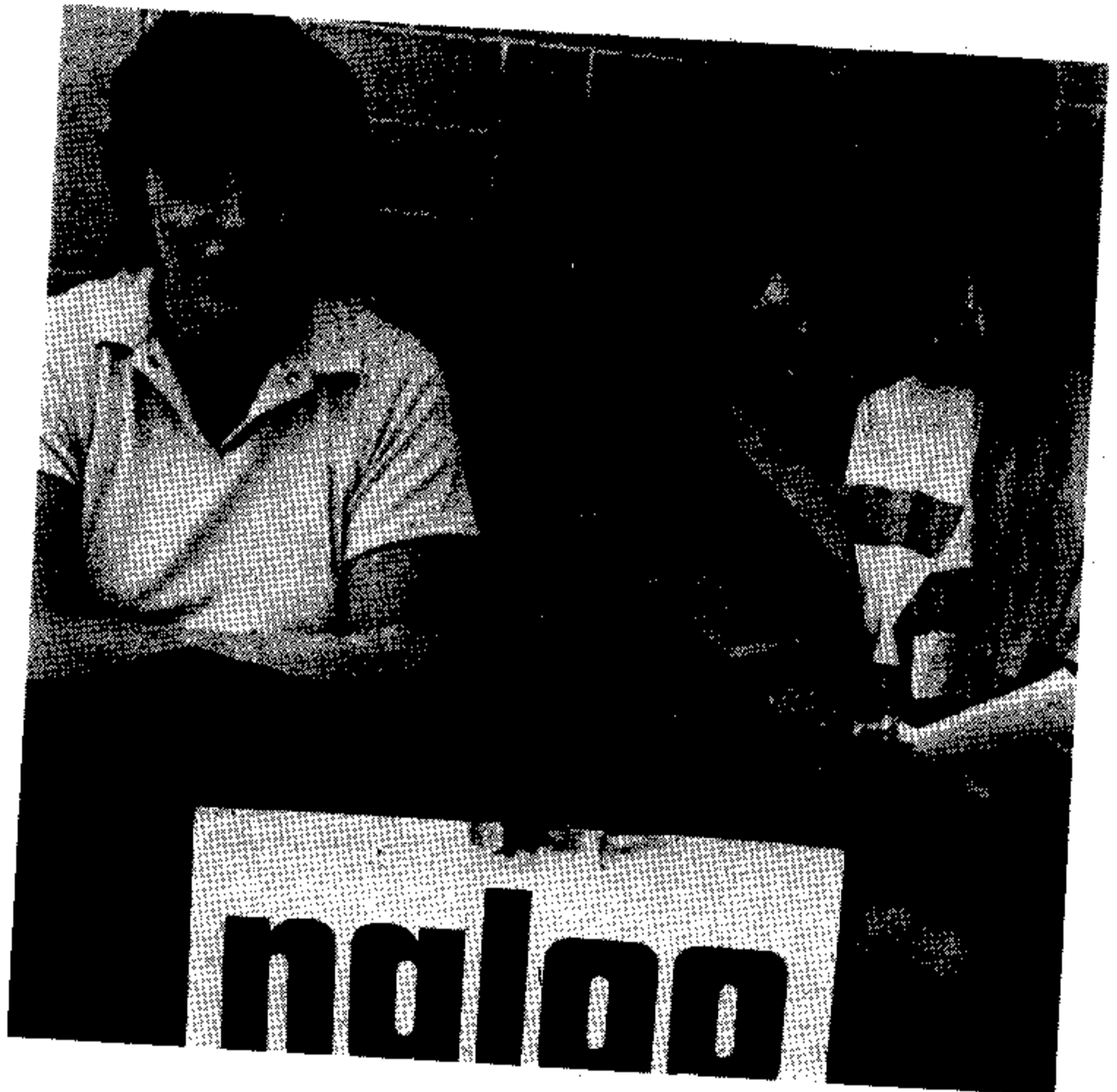
services were called bureaucrats because they said it would mean worsening conditions for their members. They also pointed out that decentralisation could not overcome the problems caused by the cuts.

The council then took on the borough's nursery workers, involving them in a long and bitter strike over lousy wages, poor services to the public and proposed staff cuts.

Now, the councillors are effectively saying that their workforce have no right to take political action.

This is the logic of socialism from above. A belief that a few committed individuals whether in Westminster or Islington Town Hall, can improve the lot of workers, becomes twisted and distorted by the discovery of their powerlessness. Until, in the end, when a section of workers fight and threaten to expose the reformist castles in the air, they are denounced as enemies.

That is exactly what the Islington strikers



revolutionary socialist even accused the strikers of anti-racist posturing!

How can a left wing labour council find itself in this position? Certainly, many local Labour Party members are appalled, and Islington MP Jeremy Corbyn spoke at a strikers' rally after a borough wide 24 hour strike by NALGO on the issue.

Unfortunately the councillors have not made some inexplicable and terrible mistake that can be quickly put right. Their position is the logical outcome of their attitude to the unions since they took office in 1982.

The council have all too often seen the unions as the enemy. Union members objecting to planned decentralisation of council

have done. They have shown that three years of pious anti-racist rhetoric from the councillors means very little, even inside the council's own workplaces.

They have also shown exactly how to fight racism. The strike has isolated the hard right in Islington council.

Whatever the final outcome, the strike has been a triumph in one important sense. It has shown black workers that white workers can be convinced to take action over racism. It's also given black workers the confidence to turn to the union for support, and that is worth a thousand resolutions and good intentions. ■

Mike Simons

SOUTH AFRICA

Between reform and revolution?

The wave of black township risings which began a year ago, on 3 September 1984, has created an unprecedented crisis for the apartheid regime. *Socialist Worker Review* looks at the options facing the regime, and the forces challenging it.

IS SOUTH Africa entering a revolutionary situation? Lenin said that a revolution happens when the ruling class can't go on in the old way, and the masses won't. By this criterion the question of revolution is at least posed in South Africa today.

The last time the regime was forced to impose a state of emergency was after the Sharpeville massacre in March 1960. But it faces a far more dangerous challenge now than it did a quarter of a century ago.

The township revolt which began, again in Sharpeville twelve months ago, has now spread throughout the country. Two developments in August confirmed this. Riots erupted in Durban. The area has been quiet over the past decade largely thanks to the political machine of Chief Gatsha Buthelezi, ruler of KwaZulu Homeland, which incorporates most of the city's black townships. A curfew was imposed in Soweto, hitherto quiescent since the great 1976-77 uprising.

However, what qualitatively distinguishes the present situation from 1960 is the strength and militancy of the black working class, increasingly organised in the independent unions. The two main union federations, FOSATU and CUSA, participated in a two day stay-away by 800,000 black workers in the Transvaal last November.

By the time this *Review* appears an even more significant event may have occurred. The black National Union of Mineworkers is threatening to call out its 200,000 members on strike in support of a pay claim. If the strike comes off it will be in

far more favourable circumstances for the black miners than their last great strike in 1946, which was fairly easily crushed by the state. So the mass movement in South Africa has reached unprecedented proportions.

WHAT about the other side of the equation, the state of the ruling class? President P W Botha's speech to the Natal Congress of the ruling National Party on 15 August was highly revealing.

The speech received huge advance publicity, largely thanks to the promises by Foreign Minister Pik Botha to western governments and journalists that it would announce major reforms.

From this point of view it was a damp squib. Botha stuck to generalities, but firmly ruled out majority rule, continued to endorse the policy of conceding 'independence' to the tribal Bantustan regimes, and refused to release Nelson Mandela.

What was striking about Botha's speech was its defensiveness. There was no ringing defence of apartheid, no pretence that it is a viable way of running South Africa. Botha conceded that the swelling numbers of urban blacks have no representation in the present political system, and that 'a solution will have to be found for their legitimate rights'.

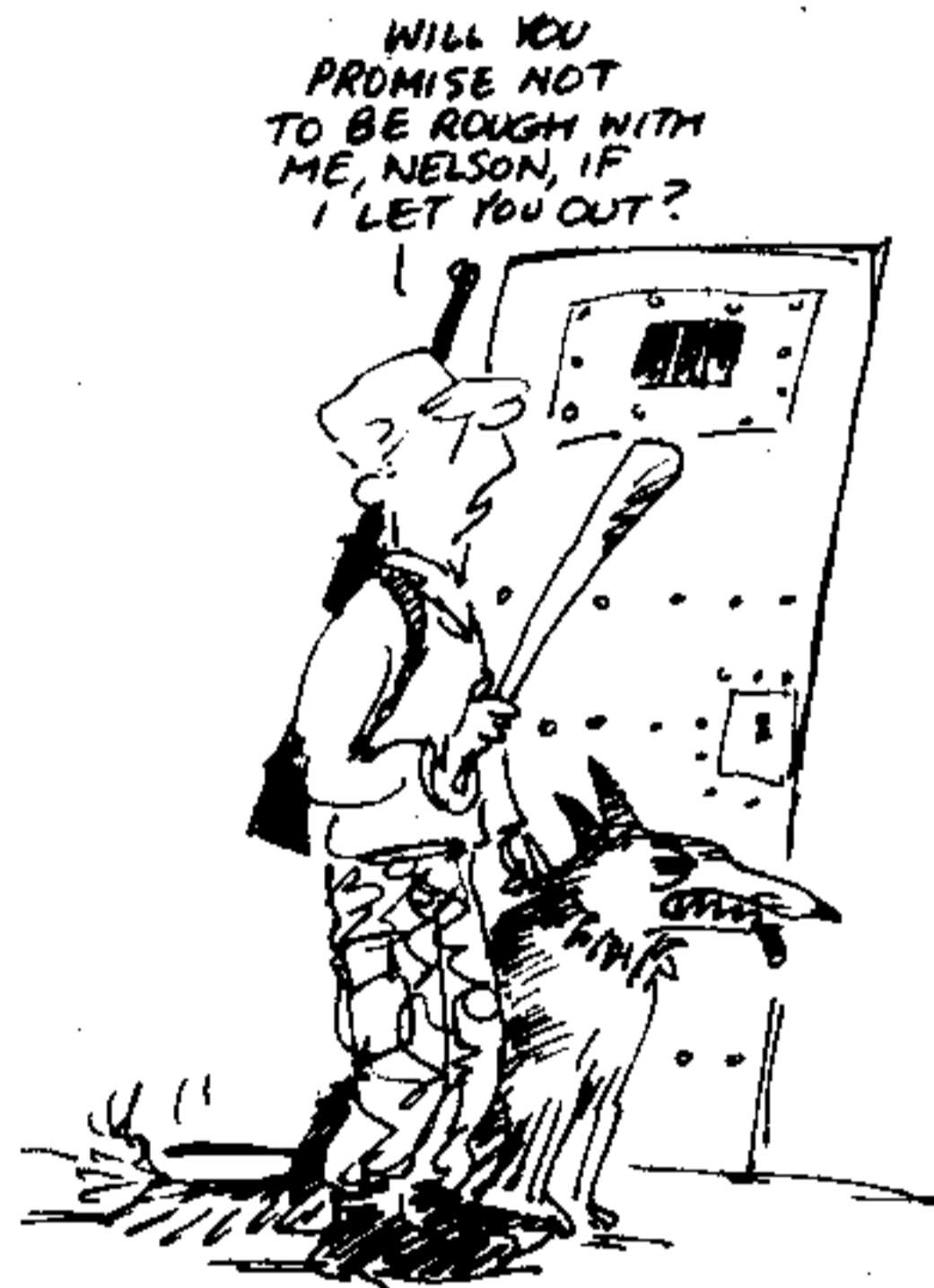
The regime no longer believes in the ideology of 'separate development' which has guided its policies for the past 37 years. It is forced therefore to offer reforms, however inadequate, if

by Alex Callinicos

only to stave off the threat of revolution.

This situation—mass revolts, ruling class disarray—reflects the deep-seated structural crisis of South African capitalism. South Africa has failed to become a significant exporter of manufactured goods.

Its relation to the world economy remains that of a producer of primary commodities (above all, gold) while it depends on the western bloc for the capital and technology without which its industries could not survive. At a time of acute



trade rivalries, South African firms are under increasing pressure from foreign competitors. This explains the flow of capital, both local and western, out of the country.

At the same time, capitalism in South Africa is increasingly reliant on a black working class which can no longer be confined to the lowest paid, least skilled jobs best performed by migrant labourers. Even in the mining industry, heart of the migrant labour system, blacks are moving into jobs hitherto monopolised by whites. The legal colour bar banning them from skilled work in the mines is being abolished, while some owners have moved towards employing a settled workforce housed with their families rather than all male compounds.

The greatly strengthened *objective* position of the black working class is the fundamental cause of the upsurge which began with the Durban mass strikes of 1973 and has now attained such a colossal scale. The crucial question is how much room for manoeuvre the regime has in dealing with this very acute crisis.

The ruling class in South Africa retain one decisive advantage, succinctly stated recently by the *Economist*: 'The whites have the guns, the

blacks do not; and Mr Botha's army and police force, though they have a growing black component, will not turn their guns on the big white chief.'

Although some townships, especially in the ultra-militant Eastern Cape, may have become effectively 'no-go areas' for the security forces, the white monopoly of armed force has not been seriously dented.

A sobering fact which every opponent of apartheid should remember is that South African capital has proportionately a much larger popular base than virtually any other ruling class in the world. The five million middle and working class whites' huge material privileges are inseparable from white supremacy. Apart from the massive private ownership of arms by whites, all adult male whites are closely integrated into the South African Defence Force. The state therefore has considerable repressive resources which it has scarcely mobilised.

The regime's military strength means that in all likelihood it will ride out the present crisis. But even much greater doses of repression will only buy Botha a limited amount of time.

The Soweto uprising was finally broken by mass arrests and bannings which smashed the black consciousness movement in November 1977. Within less than three years a new wave of strikes and school boycotts erupted, to be followed after an interlude by the struggles of the past year. Repression alone cannot save the regime.

THIS explains all the talk of reforms. While the tempo of change has become much faster as a result of the township risings, P W Botha has made the 'modernisation' of the regime his main policy plank ever since he became leader of the National Party in September 1978. What is at stake in the various concessions touted around in ruling South African circles?

The migrant labour system at the core of apartheid evolved at the end of the last century to provide the gold mines with the ultra-cheap workforce their profitability required. Apartheid proper, introduced by the Nationalists after 1948, was a response to the emergence of a militant urban African working class during the Second World War.

The entire black proletariat was to be reduced to the status of migrant labourers with no citizenship rights in the 'white' areas which made up nearly 77 percent of South Africa. The creation of black 'states' in the remaining 13 percent—the Homelands or Bantustans—provided a spurious rationale for this set up. Urban Africans would be citizens of their respective Homelands, even if they had never set eyes on them.

The struggles of the mid-1970s blew this system to bits. The Durban strikes and the Soweto uprising showed that the urban black working class could not be treated as 'temporary sojourners' in white South Africa. As one government commission acknowledged: 'Black workers are a permanent part of the South

African economy.' Botha sought to evolve a strategy based on recognition of this fact.

A variety of concessions were made to urban blacks, notably the legalisation of African trade unions. The aim was to divide the urban proletariat between the 'section tenners'—the usually better paid and more skilled workers with the right to live in 'white' cities—and the mass of unskilled migrant workers. Influx control—the system buttressed by the pass laws which controls Africans' movements—was tightened up.

At the same time a number of political concessions were made to the black middle class. The minority Coloured and Indian communities were each given their own chamber of parliament and ministerial posts. Africans (73 percent of the population) were not offered any share in central government. However, new town councils with increased powers to run the black townships were set up. The general thrust of Botha's reforms was to preserve white supremacy while incorporating privileged layers of middle class blacks and labour aristocrats.

This strategy is now largely in ruins. It is now acknowledged, even by Botha, that urban blacks

what extent can capital secure the cheap labour it needs without the apartheid institutions?

ONE major issue is influx control. The basis of current policy is the 1979 Riekert report, which argued that 'control over the rate of urbanisation is, in the light of circumstances in South Africa, an absolutely essential social security measure'. The pass laws have been used to keep unemployed and underemployed in the Bantustans, which have functioned in practice as dumping grounds for 'superfluous' Africans.

One wing of the ruling class now wants to scrap influx control. It is identified with the Urban Foundation, headed by two key capitalists, Harry Oppenheimer and Anton Rupert. The Foundation's researchers estimate the pass laws would only reduce the urban black population projected for the year 2000 by two million, a relatively marginal amount. Why antagonise both the black masses and foreign opinion by holding onto a set-up which no longer makes that much economic difference?

The bulk of South African capital still takes a much more cautious line. But big business is united in demanding reforms from the government. The two main employers' organisations issued a joint statement after Botha's speech, expressing regret that 'at this time of crisis, the state president...was not more specific in pointing the nation more positively in the direction of reform and national reconstruction'. Adverse reaction to the speech by both local and western capital pushed the rand down at one point to the all time low of 38.5 US cents.

The sticking point for all wings of the ruling class remains African majority rule. They fear that black rule will mean the dismantlement of capitalism. Professor Jan Lombard, a leading Afrikaner intellectual and key government adviser recently appointed Deputy Governor of the Reserve Bank, spelled it out:

'If an unqualified one-man one-vote election was held today in the Republic, a non-white leader with a communistic programme would probably attain an overall majority on a pledge to confiscate and redistribute the property of the privileged classes.'

What alternative is there to such an unpleasant outcome? Here the ruling class seem generally agreed in advocating a federal system which would respect what Botha calls 'the multi-cultural and polyethnic nature of South Africa's population'.

A recent article in the excellent *South African Labour Bulletin* argues:

'...regionalisation-federalism...could provide the basis for a long-term strategic offensive aimed at reconstituting the relations of exploitation and domination in South Africa.'

Already government planners have redrawn the country into eight 'development regions' which are soon due to replace the four provinces into which the country has been divided since Union in 1910.

YOU'RE PARANOID,
MAN! THAT'S NOT
MINERS - ITS
JUST A FEW
KAFFIR GRAVEDIGGERS



have somehow to be incorporated within the political system. The question is how to do this without threatening the survival of capitalism in South Africa. More specifically, the institutions of white rule have served to create a low wage economy. The economic crisis places enormous pressure to reduce labour costs even further. To

These regions reflect the socio-economic patterns which have developed since the late 1960s. 'White' metropolitan areas have tended to draw specific Bantustans into their labour markets, with a rapid growth in the number of 'commuters', ie blacks living in Homelands who go to work daily in a 'white' area. The result is, the *SALB* article argues, 'the formation of regional proletariats'.

These developments provide the basis for multiracial regional governments incorporating, alongside white politicians and administrators, black Homeland bosses and urban petty bourgeois politicians. Jan Lombard advocated such a solution for Natal back in 1980, winning the support of both Buthelezi and the local sugar planters. What seems now to be envisaged is a generalisation of this 'KwaNatal' set-up, but with control over the state apparatus nationally still in white hands.

This sort of federal solution could only work with the cooperation of far more significant black leaders than have yet been prepared to collaborate with Botha. At the very minimum it would require the involvement of Buthelezi, very much a national figure thanks to his Zulu political movement Inkatha yeSizwe. He endorsed a 'KwaNatal' in 1982, but the political situation has changed dramatically since then.

Buthelezi has no desire to share the fate of the black mayors and town councillors burned to death as quislings. His price will be a high one, in all likelihood a share in the central government.

Even then Buthelezi is too shrewd a politician to accept a settlement which would allow him, like Bishop Muzorewa in Zimbabwe, to be outflanked from the left, pilloried as a black stooge. Already he is under pressure from young township militants—the Durban riots appear to have been sparked off by clashes between supporters of Inkatha and the UDF.

THIS raises the question of the African National Congress. There is considerable support in the ruling class for including the ANC in negotiations—an issue posed by the demands for Mandela's release. Tony Bloom of Premier group put it succinctly when he wrote in the *Financial Mail*: 'There is an historical inevitability about talking to the ANC—it is not a question of if, but rather when.'

The likelihood that the regime will eventually be forced to negotiate with the ANC poses the question of whether or not South African capital might not be able to co-exist with majority rule. The ANC is no more radical an organisation than ZANU-PF in Zimbabwe. Could there not be a South African version of the 1979 Lancaster House settlement which ended the Zimbabwean war?

The Marxist Workers' Tendency, a group of *Militant* supporters expelled from the ANC, are absolutely emphatic that this is impossible. In a closely argued document, *South African Perspectives: Workers' Revolution or Racial Civil War*, they declare: 'We cannot conceive of con-

ditions which would permit the creation of an ANC government on a bourgeois basis.'

The reasoning behind this analysis centres on two factors. First, the depth of the economic crisis means that the material basis for a peaceful transition to majority rule does not exist. Secondly, the interests of capital in South Africa, as elsewhere, depends ultimately on the repressive state apparatus, which is in this case inseparable from white supremacy.

Thus the ruling class:

'...are caught on the horns of a contradiction from which there is no escape...

'Because of the challenge of the black proletariat from below, the ruling class have to try to reform the state system; they have to try to change the state itself. But they cannot afford to weaken the repressive power of the state in the face of this black challenge.

'To the limited extent that they can "blacken" the state forces, they render the state potentially unreliable to them; and at the same time this drives to disaffection the reliable white forces they have.

'With everything in turmoil around them, they have no choice but to keep the snarling wolf-hounds of the white state apparatus in readiness for action, and again and again unleash their ferocity against the people.'

This analysis is undoubtedly a cogent one. It captures quite well the zig-zags described, not just by Botha, but by Anglo-American, whose bosses one minute are calling for reforms, the next minute calling in the police to break strikes.

Nevertheless, the MWT's assertion that majority rule is impossible on a bourgeois basis is far too unconditional. It is worth remembering that ten years ago the entire European revolutionary left argued that there could be no peaceful and capitalist 'rupture' with the Francoist dictatorship in Spain. We argued for precisely the same reasons that are now given out in South Africa's case, namely the economic crisis and the dependence of the bourgeoisie on the reactionary 'bunker' controlling the army and police. We were wrong.

The past few years have also seen the establishment of bourgeois parliamentary regimes across large portions of Latin America (Peru, Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay), at precisely the time when the debt crisis and IMF-imposed austerity programmes were immiserising hundreds of millions of people.

These examples underline the importance of not trying to read off political developments directly from the economic situation. Politics played the decisive role in all these successful transitions to something at least approximating bourgeois democracy.

The success of, for example, the Spanish bourgeoisie's liquidation of Francoism depended on two factors: a governmental team with the necessary skill and room for manoeuvre; and an opposition dominated by reformist parties who were able to short circuit working class militancy.

Are there counterparts present in contemporary South Africa? The ANC is considered in a separate article: suffice it to say that nothing in its politics or leading personnel rules out its participating in a settlement which would save South Africa for capitalism. To suggest, as the MWT do, that the logic of the situation will somehow drive the ANC to make a socialist revolution is to capitulate to the sort of vulgar Marxism for which the overthrow of capitalism is predetermined.

It doesn't follow that a Zimbabwean-style solution is certain, or even likely. The fact that the repressive power of the state depends on the white population does impose distinct limits to the ruling class's room for manoeuvre.

In the short term it has imposed on the regime the policy of piecemeal reform combined with large scale repression that has become Botha's hallmark.

The National Party depends for its parliamentary majority on the votes of the white working class and petty bourgeoisie. Botha, a veteran of 50 years of Afrikaner politics, must well remember the fate of the party's founder, General J B M Hertzog, who was outflanked on the right when he threw in with Jan Smuts' South Africa Party, the representatives of English-speaking capital. Ex-cabinet minister Andries Treurnicht and his breakaway Conservative Party are waiting in the wings for swelling white popular reaction to allow them to do to Botha what the Nationalists did to Hertzog.

The belligerence of Botha's Durban speech, its reassertion of Afrikanerdom's contempt for world opinion and opposition to black rule, were undoubtedly very much for domestic white consumption. It is difficult for the regime to offer more than limited changes at any one time, even if this alienates even the most reactionary black leaders.

The pressure of the white electorate on the regime has contributed to a longer-term

tendency to detach the state apparatus from any sort of parliamentary control. The new constitution, with its enormous concentration of power in the hands of an executive state president, has encouraged speculation that Botha is driving towards a Bonapartist regime in which he can balance between black and white masses, enforcing a programme of reforms from above.

BUT THERE are limits to this process. One of Botha's main bases of support is the military. Between 1966 and 1978 he was Minister of Defence. Since 1978 the State Security Council has largely replaced the cabinet as the key decision-making body.

Nevertheless, Botha and his generals could not impose black rule on South Africa through military dictatorship even supposing they wanted to, for the simple reason that their repressive forces are and will remain predominantly white. Any white political split which disorganised the armed forces would be catastrophic for capital, since it would give the black masses the opportunity to unleash a genuinely revolutionary situation.

The roads before both the ruling class and the black proletariat are, therefore, neither of them straight ones. The white state's monopoly of force will buy the regime time to pursue reforms. But at the same time, concessions which do not involve seeking a political accommodation with the main forces of the black resistance, above all the ANC, with all the difficulties which this involves, will not stabilise the situation.

It follows that, even though the regime will in all probability survive the present crisis, the respite will only be temporary. The immense problems involved in detaching capitalism in South Africa from apartheid put socialist revolution on the agenda in an exceptionally direct way. The need for a revolutionary party which could provide the political leadership in the struggle for state power is very urgent.



Politics of the ANC

by Alex Callinicos

THE main force in the black resistance in South Africa today is the African National Congress. Banned since 1960, its influence within the country is evident in the calls for the release of Nelson Mandela, in the rapid growth of the United Democratic Front since 1983, and in the activities of the ANC military wing, Umkhonto weSizwe (MK).

To say that ANC is the main resistance organisation is not to say that it is the only one. The National Forum Committee represents the other major current of African nationalism in South Africa—the black consciousness movement—which vigorously contests ANC/UDF hegemony. The independent unions, especially FOSATU, represent, albeit much more circumpectly, a political force independent of the ANC.

Nevertheless, ANC's relative ideological coherence, cadre organisation, and popular follow-

ing give it a strategic hold on the black resistance. How is it likely to exercise this influence?

The ANC's strategy amounts to a version of the stages theory of revolution imposed by Stalin and Bukharin on the Comintern in the 1920s. For the ANC, the struggle against apartheid is one for democratic rights and national liberation which is in the interests of the vast majority of the population and which can be achieved by a broad alliance of the black bourgeoisie, petty bourgeoisie and proletariat, and of white 'democrats'. Only once majority rule has been achieved will the question of a distinctively working class struggle for socialism be posed.

This strategy undoubtedly reflects the influence of the South African Communist Party within the ANC, which enjoys considerable support from the Soviet bloc. But it also corresponds to the interests of the African middle classes.

The black consciousness movement espouses essentially an identical view of change, with the incidental differences that it sees no role for white anti-racists and is willing to indulge in much worthless Marxist rhetoric: thus invocations of the black working class are undermined by statements that all blacks are workers!

HOW has the ANC responded to the past year's crisis? Previously it had relied largely on a strategy of armed struggle involving the infiltration of MK guerillas from neighbouring black-ruled frontline states. This approach suffered a very serious blow when President Samora Machel of Mozambique signed the Nkomati pact with South Africa in March 1984, and ordered the closure of ANC's important military bases in his country.

The township revolts, and the rapid growth of the UDF, very much a legal continuation of the ANC tradition, have revived the movement's fortunes, but there remains the question of how it should relate to the intensified mass struggles inside South Africa.

For the exiled ANC leadership, fiercely protective of their claim to be the sole embodiment of the South African people, this question is inseparable from that of how to ensure that they are not marginalised by forces inside the country. This concern sometimes assumes pathological proportions. ANC/SACP absurdly insist that solidarity with workers' struggles should be



Coffin covered by the ANC flag

routed through its trade union front, SACTU, nonexistent within the country, rather than through the independent unions which actually organise and lead these struggles.

The solution has been to attempt directly to link MK with the mass movement within the country. This has taken a variety of forms. First, the ANC consultative conference held in Zambia in June authorised MK to attack 'soft' targets—white civilians and black collaborators—as well as the government installations on which it had previously focused.

The second theme is well summed up by ANC president Oliver Tambo's new year message: 'Render South Africa ungovernable.' In particular, this means turning the townships into 'liberated zones'.

As Tambo put it:

'In the course of our mass offensive, we have, from time to time, and with increased frequency created the situation in various localities such that the democratic forces challenged the apartheid authorities for control of these areas, emerging as the alternative power. With regard to the perspective of people's war, this means we have forged the conditions for us to transform these areas into mass revolutionary bases from which Umkhonto weSizwe must grow as an army of the people.'

Thirdly, the ANC has called on the African masses themselves to wage armed struggle. 'The weapons are there in front of you,' one broadcast declared. 'They are in the hands of the policemen themselves... We should attack the police stations and army barracks and capture those weapons.' There have also been appeals to black soldiers and policemen to turn their guns onto their own officers.

This shift on the ANC's part undoubtedly corresponds to the mood of many of the best young militants—of the students who fled South Africa after the Soweto uprising and are now MK cadre, of the youth in the Eastern Cape carrying placards demanding that Tambo supply them with AK 47s. And armed struggle *will* be necessary, and the masses *will* have to be armed to destroy apartheid.

Nevertheless, as Engels said, 'Don't play at insurrection.' ANC's current strategy amounts precisely to that, since it involves advocating tactics which would only make sense if the overthrow of the white state were an immediate issue. As an accompanying article makes clear, this condition is not met: the ruling class continue to monopolise coercive power.

AT best, ANC's calls may lead to some townships, probably mainly in its Eastern Cape strongholds, becoming no-go areas for the white state. At worst, it could result in the lives of the best militants being recklessly squandered in heroic but hopeless armed confrontations with the apartheid state.

The crucial problem facing those seeking to overturn white power is political, not military. How to mobilise the full power of the black masses? More specifically, how to combine the

industrial strength of the black trade unions with the political militancy of the township revolts? So far the fusion of these two movements (whose membership of course overlaps) has been temporary and limited.

It is easy to overestimate the strength of the independent unions. In 1983 only 15 percent of the economically active population had been unionised. Given South African conditions, a class-wide movement is likely to develop only through a wave of mass strikes such as those in Poland five years ago, in which political and economic demands are combined.

Unfortunately, the ANC is not addressing the question of how to develop the strength and consciousness of the black working class. The conference confirmed the militarisation of the organisation, with the election of a War Council, the decision that all members should undergo guerilla training, the imposition of military discipline, and constant chants of 'Mayihlome'—'Let us go to war!'.

The expulsion of the *Militant*-aligned Marxist Workers' Tendency, who had protested against the subordination of trade union work to recruitment for MK, was confirmed by the conference. The MWT themselves present a far more adequate analysis of the situation than the ANC, based on the recognition that apartheid can only be destroyed by socialist revolution. However, they conclude by offering a South African version of the *Militant's* British strategy:

'The revolutionary workers' party and workers' leadership which is needed in South Africa can be created successfully in a struggle of organised workers and youth to build and transform for their purpose the ANC itself.'

THIS approach has some merits. It is better than the recent call made by *Socialist Organiser* for the independent unions to form their own party. Any such quasi-syndicalist strategy fails to confront the fact that the mass of black trade unionists are likely to look towards either the ANC or the black consciousness movement for political leadership. African nationalism can only be challenged politically.

But the MWT does not explain how the ANC, an organisation whose politics are based on nationalism and populism, and whose internal regime is highly Stalinist, can be won to revolutionary socialism. Surely the MWT's own unfortunate experiences inside the ANC should be of some relevance here.

The MWT's parroting of their British co-thinkers' opposition to 'sectarian splitting of the mass organisations' seems singularly inappropriate to a situation of such political flux as South Africa. The independent unions, many of whose best activists have strong reservations about the ANC/UDF, provide an arena in which support for an independent revolutionary socialist organisation could be won.

For such an organisation to be built, what Trotsky called the primitive accumulation of cadres is first necessary. The task is an urgent one.

Can the unions unite?

by John Rogers

ON the weekend of June 7 and 8 this year the main black trade union federation, the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU), attempted inconclusively to unite the badly divided movement.

A meeting was called intended to lay the groundwork for a new 'super-federation' to be launched this October. After two days of debate it had to be adjourned. It was held in Soweto, and brought together 200 delegates from 42 unions. The 600,000 strong movement is now divided into three main groupings.

FOSATU leads the 'unity unions'. They are so called because they have been the driving force behind the five previous gatherings of representatives of the black union movement. They have consistently attempted to achieve unity with other looser groupings of unions.

FOSATU itself has nine affiliates, the most well known being the Metal and Allied Workers' Union (MAWU). In February its membership stood at 118,000. It has stabilised its membership by a strategic policy of attempting to choose the ground upon which it fights. It encourages its militants and organisers not to enter into strikes until a solid base has been built for the union in the workplace.

The Council of Unions of South Africa (CUSA) representing eleven unions is the other main element in the unity unions' grouping. CUSA has doubled in size during the recession. This growth can be attributed almost solely to the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) which in three short years has become South Africa's largest union.

The NUM claims and the employers concede that at least a fifth of South Africa's 450,000 black miners are members although only about 60,000 are actually paid up. Of CUSA's unions the NUM is also the most committed to going ahead with the FOSATU unions in forming a super-federation. Four other unions based mainly in the Cape Town area are equally committed to the unity unions' grouping. The most important of these, the General Workers Union (GWU), has led protracted struggles to unionise the docks.

The second main grouping of black unions are affiliates of the United Democratic Front (UDF) and have thus become known as the 'UDF unions'. Most of the UDF unions are general workers' unions, such as the South African Allied Workers Union (SAAWU) based in the Eastern Cape, which organise workers on the basis of a geographical area, and not on industrial lines.

They are the leading organisers of the current

boycott of white shops in the Eastern Cape which is putting considerable pressure on the white business community with several bankruptcies already. The boycott campaign started in protest at Botha's state of emergency. SAAWU and the other UDF unions have been the object of especially vicious state repression and SAAWU's workplace base has at times been in danger of disintegrating.

The last and least significant grouping of black unions at the June meeting were the 'black consciousness' grouping. Nine such unions were represented as the Azanian Confederation of Trade Unions (AZACTU). AZACTU objected to the last of the five principles put to the meeting as the basis of a new federation.

This called for the federation to be formed on the principle of non-conciliation. The black consciousness unions objected, insisting instead that the new federation should accept the principle of black leadership since black workers make up the bulk of the membership.

The unity unions, which have a number of whites in senior positions, rejected this, arguing that it was up to workers to choose their leaders. The black consciousness unions were supported by some CUSA unions, which have a heritage of black consciousness, although crucially not by the NUM. Over the last two months since the meeting CUSA affiliates have met separately and it appears that the heat has gone out of their objections to non-racialism. The pressure of Botha's state of emergency has made even the black consciousness unions draw closer to the unity unions.

EVENTS have also forced the unity unions and the UDF unions into practical unity on the ground. Relations between these two groupings of black unions have been strained ever since the UDF was formed in 1983 to fight against Indian and Coloured participation in Botha's new racially divided parliament. Although the unity unions were equally opposed to Botha's divide and rule plan they refused to affiliate to the UDF, arguing that it was dominated by middle class blacks. The UDF was seen as a populist front. In practice most unionists in both camps cooperated in the campaign to boycott the elections. Only a minority of Coloureds and Indians voted and Botha's parliament was exposed as a sham.

Events came to a head in March and April this year when the unity unions refused to give their backing to a general strike call made by the Port Elizabeth Black and Civil Organisation

(PEBCO), a UDF affiliate. The call was made to coincide with the 30th anniversary of the formation of the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU), the trade union wing of the African National Congress. In the 1950s SACTU used to be the main black trade union federation.

The unity unions felt they were not given enough time to consult their members on such an openly political gesture of support for the ANC heritage. The UDF affiliates in the area felt that the consequent failure of the stay-away was the result of 'scabbing' by the unity unions and their members provoked some ugly confrontations.

When FOSATU approached the UDF nationally, the UDF apologised. FOSATU refused to accept the apology, insisting instead that the UDF order its Eastern Cape affiliates to meet the unity unions to sort out their differences. This has now taken place but debate within all the unions of the two groupings about the implications of the clash still rages.

FOSATU was attacked by the South African Communist Party (SACP) late in 1983 for its abstention from the UDF. It was accused of attempting to substitute itself for the only true representative of the black South African working class, the SACP.

TO a certain extent the proof of the pudding has been in the eating. It could be argued that the political breathing space in which the UDF was able to flourish in the last two years was created by FOSATU led militancy.

The first unity conference called by FOSATU in October 1981 resolved to organise political strikes against a bill going through the white parliament designed to restrict black workers' ability to withdraw their pension money at will. Workers used their pension money as social security during strikes. In the Natal area alone 62 political strikes took place against the pensions bill. The strikes were so successful that the Metal Industries Federation persuaded the white parliament to drop the bill.

In the following year FOSATU affiliates were in 145 strikes involving 90,000 workers as against CUSA organising thirteen strikes involving 10,000 and SAWU organising six strikes involving 2,600. This pattern largely remains the case today. In 1984 South Africa saw the highest ever number of strikes at 469. Of these 181 were over wages, 97 over dismissals or redundancies, 47 over union recognition and 44 over general conditions of employment. FOSATU conference reported that redundancy disputes were taking up more and more of the union's energy.

The bedrock of FOSATU militancy has been increasingly overshadowed by the growth of the NUM. FOSATU invited NUM general secretary, Cyril Ramaphosa, to chair the June 1985 unity meeting.

Ramaphosa is not a miner. He is a lawyer, a product of student radicalisation in the early 1970s and graduate of two spells in South Africa's prisons. His approach has been more measured and cautious even than FOSATU's.

The union follows all the procedures laid down by the law and more.

Last year the NUM leadership seemed overawed by their own ballot success. There was rank and file anger when the NUM called off the 1984 strike after only one day with only a minimal improvement on the wage offer to show. This year the NUM leadership did not move straight into action after the ballot result was declared but gave the mineowners three weeks until August 25 to improve their offer of 19% on an NUM claim that has already come down from 40% to 23%.

Already this year over 100,000 miners have been involved in unofficial go-slows and strikes and it is likely that the end of August will see similar tactics officially sponsored rather than all-out strike action. It remains to be seen whether the regime would stand by in such a situation. It did not intervene in April this year when the mineowners tested the resolve of the NUM by sacking nearly 20,000 miners for taking go-slow action. However there were several hundred armed police on the local golf course in full view of the main mine affected.

A full-scale miners' strike may result from the spontaneous spread of solidarity between miners at different pits. This did not happen in April but the stakes are higher now. The NUM emergency conference which gave the mineowners the August 25 deadline, also gave the regime an ultimatum to end Botha's state of emergency.

It will be a test of unity within the wider black union movement as well. The first widespread demonstration of political unity by the black unions was the 100,000-strong nationwide strike protest in 1982 after the death in detention of Neil Aggett, an official of the African Food and Canning Workers' Union.

Last November FOSATU and CUSA joined forces, in co-operation with UDF student and community leaders, to organise a highly successful two day stayaway in the Transvaal in protest against police raids on black townships. Between 300,000 and 800,000 workers downed tools in the heavily industrialised Pretoria-Johannesburg area.

More recently some 91,000 workers throughout South Africa—far more than at first reported—are reckoned to have either stopped work briefly or attended the funeral of Andries Raditsela, a black trade union leader who died from injuries received during police detention in April.

Joe Foster, general secretary of FOSATU, claimed that the short work stoppages, necessarily more public and less anonymous than the November stayaway, were 'of major significance in the history of worker opposition to police rule'. Chris Dlamini, president of FOSATU, said at the funeral: 'I think that we have reached a new stage now. The situation is pushing everyone to be involved in the political issues outside the workplace.' It remains to be seen if FOSATU can deliver solidarity for the miners.

Struggles against apartheid

1948 Nationalist government elected on a programme of apartheid (literally, separation).

1950 Suppression of Communism Act makes membership of Communist Party illegal.

1954 South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) formed to oppose new legislation against multi-racial unions, designed to control militant trade unionism.

1955 African National Congress (ANC) issues Freedom Charter calling for a multi-racial democratic state and the overthrow of apartheid.

1957 Boycott of buses in Alexandra after imposition of fare increases. June: one day general strike, part of the Defiance Campaign organised by ANC and allies.

1959 Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) splits from ANC, mainly over question of pan-Africanism and the role of white opponents of apartheid. The new Federation of Free Trade Unions of South Africa (FOFATUSA) formed and aligned to PAC.

1960 March: 67 protesters at Sharpeville massacred by security forces. ANC and PAC outlawed. Massive repression of the opposition.

1961 South Africa declares itself a republic and leaves the Commonwealth.

1962 The Sabotage Act extends repression and leads to the arrest of many union leaders. SACTU effectively destroyed by mid sixties.

1963 Mandela and other ANC leaders captured and subsequently sentenced to life imprisonment after show trial for treason.

1965 Ian Smith makes Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) in Rhodesia, after crushing internal opposition.

1973 Huge wave of apparently spontaneous strikes, often short but effective, hits South Africa, centred on Durban. Many lead to concessions, and unions start rebuilding.

1974 Revolution in Portugal.

1975 Collapse of Portuguese colonial regimes in Mozambique, where FRELIMO takes over, and in Angola, where South Africa becomes involved in war.

1976 June: Uprising in Soweto led by secondary school students spreads rapidly, but is crushed. August/September: one day general strikes in Transvaal and the Western Cape. 700 die between 1976 and 1977. Transkei becomes the first of the African 'homelands' to be given 'independence', later followed by Ciskei, Venda and Bophuthatswana.

1977 Suppression of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) and its associates, and the death in detention of Steve Biko. ANC initiates new urban bombing campaign.

1978 Muldergate scandal leads to the resignation of John Vorster, and P W Botha becomes prime minister. Black consciousness regrouped as Azanian

African People's Organisation (AZAPO).

1979 Seven month long strike at Fattis and Monis, a food company in Cape Town, leads to union recognition. White miners strike against opening jobs to blacks. Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU), bringing together several of the independent, mainly black trade unions, formed in April. Wiehahn Report recommends black unions be tolerated and hopefully absorbed into the system. Riekert Report recommends that Africans eligible under section ten of Blacks (Urban Areas) Consolidation Act should be considered permanent residents rather than temporary migrants. Both partly implemented. December: Lancaster House Agreement in London reaches accord on Zimbabwe. Wave of strikes begin in the motor industry, Fords and Volkswagen, in Port Elizabeth and Uitenhage, and continue into 1980.

1980 February: Mugabe and ZANU-PF win general election in Zimbabwe, to general consternation in South Africa. March: meeting of school students and parents in Cape Town sparks off a new wave of protest. June: 50 people killed by security forces in Cape Town. September: Council of South African Trade Unions (CUSA) formed, federating independent unions orientated towards all-black control. Government bans collection and receiving of donations for unions.

1981 Colgate-Palmolive boycott and threatened strike lead to union recognition. Government proposals to 'reform' pension schemes leads to wave of strikes. Scheme abandoned.

1982 National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) formed, and affiliates to CUSA. Strike defeated, but union survived. Strike wave in metal industry.

1983 August: United Democratic Front (UDF), a broad, anti-apartheid alliance, strongly ANC influenced, formed to fight the government's new constitutional proposals. November: successful boycott of elections to new local councils.

1984 March: Nkomati pact of non-aggression signed between South Africa and Mozambique, limiting ANC activity in the area. August/September: highly successful UDF campaign leads to virtual boycott of elections to new houses of parliament for Coloureds and Indians. September: Black miners hold first legal strike. November: 70 percent of black workforce in the Transvaal 'stays at home' for two days.

1985 March: 19 protesters shot dead at Uitenhage, East Cape, on anniversary of Sharpeville. UDF leaders on trial for high treason. State of emergency imposed in Rand and Eastern Cape on 20 July. Defence lawyer Victoria Mxenge shot dead in August. Black townships have become virtually 'ungovernable', and black councillors and police driven out.

Compiled by Jane Bassett



The myths of entrism

NEIL KINNOCK, the Daily Mirror and sections of the Labour left have launched an attack on Trotskyist entrism within the Labour Party.

As the witch hunt deepens, socialists are faced with the question: should they work within the Labour Party?

Many who claim to be revolutionaries within the Labour Party use the writings of Leon Trotsky in the 1930s to justify their position.

Then, Trotsky urged his supporters to join reformist parties.

Chris Bambery examines the background to Trotsky's position on France, where the Trotskyists first attempted this turn, and looks at how the lessons apply today.

IN 1934 French society was entering a deep crisis. In neighbouring Germany the Nazis had triumphed a year before. Now fascism threatened in France itself.

What could French workers do to avoid the fate of their German comrades?

Without waiting for a lead from the Socialist and Communist Parties, workers took to the streets to oppose fascism. Under pressure both parties dropped their respective policy of refusing to work together to announce they would unite to defend democracy.

But French workers were moving beyond that as a new wave of militancy swept the shopfloor.

By the summer of 1935 the Socialists and Communists had signed the Popular Front with the Radical Party. The basis of the new pact was maintenance of parliamentary democracy and French rearmament to deal with Hitler.

But as the Popular Front was being signed, mass strikes swept the ports of Brest and Toulon.

The election of a Popular Front government in the following May unleashed a massive general strike. Factory after factory was occupied. For a few weeks 'everything seemed possible', in the words of a popular slogan.

The exiled Bolshevik leader, Leon Trotsky, announced, 'The French revolution has begun.'

His assessment was correct. But the size of those revolutionary forces which stood against the Popular Front and for workers' power were dwarfed by events.

In 1934, the Trotskyists numbered little over a hundred.

Trotsky understood that the key was finding a way to win an audience for Marxist ideas among a working class which was moving leftwards.

The key worker militants were around the Communist Party. But Stalin's campaign against Trotsky meant that the Trotskyists found little audience for their ideas.

Faced with this Trotsky urged his supporters to join the Socialist Party.

A strong left wing existed within the Socialist party led by two groups, one close to the Communist Party, the other round Marceau Pivert which occasionally echoed Trotsky's arguments.

The left in the Socialist Party organised tens of thousands of supporters. It controlled the Paris region of the party and the Young Socialists. The latter was further left than even those like Pivert.

The proposal to enter the Socialist Party was opposed by many of the French Trotskyists. Trotsky patiently explained that political independence was a matter of principle for a revolutionary party organising even a small section of the class. This did not, however, apply to a small group seeking its first contact with workers.

Trotsky was not arguing for a long term entry. Some months later he wrote:

'Entry into a reformist party in itself does not include a long perspective. It is only a stage which, under certain conditions, can be limited to an episode.'

A new audience

The entry perspective was a short term operation designed to win new supporters to the revolutionary organisation. The Trotskyists were to maintain their organisation, openly organising as a faction which argued the need for a new revolutionary organisation, separate from the Socialist and Communist Parties.

Within a short period of time the Trotskyists had won a new audience. Within the Young Socialists they participated in publishing a paper which sold 80,000 copies. The key leader of the organisation was personally recruited by Trotsky.

The Trotskyists could soon boast 300 members.

But Trotsky had argued that there was a clear limit on the entry operation. Any success on the Trotskyists' part would be met with a witch hunt by the Socialist Party leaders. He argued:

'...what is necessary...is to free ourselves of illusions in time, to recognise in time the bureaucracy's decisive attack against the left wing, and defend ourselves from it, not by making concessions, adapting, or playing hide and seek, but by a revolutionary offensive.'

At the 1935 Socialist congress the leadership announced the expulsion of 13 leaders of the Young Socialists—who supported the Trotskyists. The Trotskyist paper was also ordered to be closed down.

The response of leftists like Pivert was to urge the Trotskyists to accept all this and stay in the party at any cost.

Trotsky urged an open fight around clear revolutionary policies and no such concession. In a letter to the French Trotskyists he stated:

'Is it or is it not necessary to speak openly



about the perspective of an independent party? How can it be avoided? You would certainly like to remain in the SFIO (the French Socialist Party) to the limits of its possibilities... We say openly to our friends: Defend your place in the SFIO zealously, but be prepared for independent struggle if it is forced on us—and it looks as though that will be the case. How can we avoid saying that openly?

As the weeks passed and unrest grew in the factories, Trotsky increasingly urged his supporters to quit the Socialist Party and set up an independent revolutionary organisation.

But tragically a large number of them argued the need to stay in the Socialist Party at all costs. They wanted close co-operation with Pivert and were prepared to accept expulsions and bans on sales of the paper.

Trotsky had to return to revolutionary principles, pointing out that 'Lenin and Liebknecht began by "isolating themselves" from the mass organisations'.

Increasingly Pivert, together with his new Trotskyist allies, urged unity.

Trotsky replied:

'When centrists, tailing the rights, begin to declaim too much about unity, the Marxist is duty bound to be on guard. Unity between whom? In the name of what? Against whom? Unless there is a clear definition of aims and tasks the slogan of unity can become the worst possible trap. The Marxists are for the unity of genuine revolutionists, for the fusion of militant internationalists, who alone are capable of leading the proletariat on the road of the socialist revolution.'

As the arguments continued within the Trotskyists' ranks the strike wave began. The Trotskyists were preoccupied by internal factional differences when an open organisation could have recruited worker militants who were breaking from the ideas of the Socialist and Communist Parties.

Tragically, the Trotskyists split. One group remained within the Socialist Party, increasingly making concessions to both Pivert and the right wing leadership.

Trotsky understood in 1934 that a turn needed to be made to build a revolutionary organisation. He was correct, urging a sharp entry into the Socialist Party.

But as the witch hunt developed he also understood the need for a new turn: to build an open revolutionary organisation which related to workers outside the Socialist Party. ■

What do we mean by.

Internationalism

AT ITS simplest, the idea of internationalism comes out of the nature of capitalism itself. If the basic divide in society is between the ruling class and the working class, it follows that British workers have more in common with French, Irish or South African workers than they do with British bosses. The existence of capitalism as a world system implies the need to fight it on a world scale. Internationalism is not a moral, but a practical necessity for socialists.

As Marx put it in the Rules of the First International:

'...the emancipation of labour is neither a local nor a national, but a social problem, embracing all countries in which modern society exists, and depending for its solution on the concurrence, practical and theoretical, of the most advanced countries.'

In Marx's day modern society comprised only Western Europe and the United States—today it has grown to control literally the entire globe, creating a world economy to which each national economy has become subservient. Shipyard closures on the Clyde or the Tyne are blamed on competition from Japanese shipbuilding, whose position in the world market is now threatened by Brazil and South Korea. The commodity markets of Chicago, London and Frankfurt determine the world prices of

coffee, tin, soya beans and a hundred other raw materials. In the process they also determine whether millions of workers and peasants will eat or starve.

The Chinese state discovers that to carry out its modernisation plans, it not only has to buy steel plants from West Germany and Japan, but iron ore from Australia to feed those plants—and shares in the Australian mining industry to ensure their supplies!

As capitalism has spread across the world, it has created a world working class, which discovers over and over again that the basic methods of class struggle are common to workers the world over. This year alone, there have been general strikes in Denmark, Jamaica and the Sudan (which led to the overthrow of the military regime there), while in South Africa black workers have come to be the most powerful force fighting to overthrow apartheid.

At the highest points of class struggle, it spills over national boundaries to take on an international dimension. When Solidarity arose in Poland in 1980, their name and their banner were taken up by groups as diverse as American air traffic controllers, Chinese engineering workers and Zambian copper miners, as a symbol of militant trade unionism. International solidarity in the miners' strike meant enormous sums of money raised abroad for the NUM and led to

French, Belgian and Australian dockers blacking shipments of scab coal. It even led to French miners fighting pitched battles with the police to stop the coal reaching the ports.

Such high points of class struggle, in which the idea of a world working class starts to become visible to many workers, are unfortunately exceptional. Much more often internationalism is about very hard arguments with anyone who will listen about racism in the workplace, or about Ireland, the Falklands, Middle Eastern terrorism or any one of the subjects that the news throws up. Most importantly, it means battling against the ideas of nationalism and the 'national interest'. For the core of internationalism is the attitude that the German revolutionary Karl Liebknecht expressed as 'the main enemy is at home'.

National unity?

Being an internationalist does not just mean cheering on struggles abroad, but also—more importantly—understanding how to use those struggles to build opposition to our own ruling class at home and its foreign policy. Not because they are the most unpleasant—though there are few who could give the British state lessons in viciousness—but because it is such opposition that makes our principles turn into action.

How we fight them is of course a question of tactics, determined by the overall state of the class struggle. For if our internationalist ideas are to be practically useful then they have to be expressed in ways that connect to workers' struggles and experiences. Individuals can be convinced by arguments alone. Winning large numbers of workers requires that struggle changes the way they see the world.

So during the Falklands war it was of little use to have lengthy arguments about which imperialist power first landed there. The arguments that connected were the contrast between the hundreds of millions squandered on the war and Thatcher's refusal to pay the health workers' pay claim, and the Tories' attempts to use the war to damp down class struggle at home. Working class opposition to the war was a minority throughout, but it was higher among health and rail workers than elsewhere because their experience of fighting the Tories made it easier to see through the sham of 'national unity'.

So too with Ireland. Our position of support for the Irish struggle has been one of the most unpopular things to argue over the past fifteen years. Yet during the miners' struggle a much wider audience on Ireland opened up because of the miners' experience of police

Nicaragua:

REVOLUTION UNDER SIEGE

by Mike Gonzalez

Judge by the reaction of the US, and the Nicaraguan revolution is a Marxist threat on a par with Joe Stalin. According to its supporters, it is a socialist revolution 'of a new type'. Beneath these highly-coloured reactions, what is really happening in Nicaragua? Has mass involvement in the overthrow of the Somoza dictatorship been translated into mass democracy? What are the political effects of the US blockade and military threat?



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brutality on the picket lines and in the villages.

It was impossible to see Orgreave and not be reminded of television pictures of Ireland, and it was natural for those who identified with the miners to also identify with those fighting the police in Belfast and Derry. Tens of thousands of miners and their supporters learnt to draw the connections and question the British presence in Ireland.

In both cases, given our size and the balance of class forces, it was possible only to make propaganda, and only to convince a very small number of our arguments. But the stand we did take was in marked contrast to that of the Labour Party, who in both cases lined up with the Tories against workers' interests. This was not an accident, or the result of wrong leadership, but something inherent in reformism.

For if your politics aim at taking over the existing state, it follows that you identify with the interests of that state. So it is perfectly possible for Labour or TUC conferences to make all the right noises about Chile, South Africa or Poland, for in none of those cases are the interests of our ruling class fundamentally threatened.

When it comes to cases that do affect those fundamental interests, to take a consistent internationalist position would require them making a clear break with the ruling class. So Labour governments have followed exactly the same repressive policies in Ireland as the Tories over the years. And on a smaller scale, the acceptance of the Falklands war led to the abandonment of agreements on hours and conditions in workplaces directly connected with war production.

International enemy

Failure to oppose the ruling class in their adventures abroad necessarily leads to abandoning working class interests at home. Once again, consistency in fighting the class struggle at home demands consistent opposition to the ruling class. Our internationalism is dictated by our standing for the interests of the working class above all others.

That same principle applies when we look at national liberation struggles. For socialists, our starting point has to be unconditional support for anyone whose struggle aims at weakening the hold of the imperialist powers over the world. But we also recognise that the leadership of practically all such forces are not the working class, but middle class parties. Their aim is not the overthrow of capitalism but the creation of an independent capitalist class. And because that aim must necessarily bring them into conflict with the working class at some point, our obligation is to be critical of them and point out that a further, socialist revolution is necessary to finally get rid of exploitation and oppression.

This attitude is less than popular with most of the left who are internationalist. The argument has practical significance for the two most important solidarity movements around today—those concerned with Central America and South Africa.

In Central America, the experience of the Sandinista revolution has been taken as a



Sandinista, what sort of government?

model by other revolutionaries there, and has been hailed elsewhere by people who ought to know better as 'a workers' and peasants' government'.

Now while it's obviously true that the vast majority of Nicaraguans are better off today than under the previous dictatorship, Nicaragua is very far from socialist. Over 60 percent of industry is still in private hands, trade union organisers independent of the Sandinistas have been jailed, and as the war comes to take up greater amounts of the nation's wealth, living standards have been cut sharply.

This is not because the Sandinista leadership are individually nasty people; but because the pressures of the world economy on a purely national movement leave them few other options. To call Nicaragua socialist is not only to keep quiet about or excuse the continuing exploitation of Nicaraguan workers. Worse, it is to argue that the only road to liberation in Central America is the Sandinista one, and to tie workers in the region more closely to their own nationalist middle classes.

In South Africa, the fight against apartheid has until recently been dominated completely by the African National Congress (ANC), which sees the racist state as being overthrown by an all-class alliance. In this black workers have a role to play, but one subordinate to the guerrilla struggle and international pressure. This strategy has reflected itself inside the solidarity movement in this country, which has followed the path of winning influential people to the task of 'isolating' South Africa.

The rise of the black working class to a central position in the struggle challenges in practice this well-meaning liberalism. It is now possible to point to the struggles of black workers as the beginnings of a force which can challenge apartheid at its roots, which has the power to not only overthrow white minority rule but also the whole capitalist system itself.

For socialists, it follows that the solidarity movement should orient itself around supporting and building links with black workers' struggles. The stronger the black working class, the greater their ability to take

on and defeat apartheid—as is true for any working class anywhere in the world.

And it is precisely because capitalism has become a world system that the possibility objectively exists of replacing it on a world scale with socialism—it is possible, given the enormous development of productive forces throughout the world, to base the whole of human society on ending need and not on making profits.

The final and most crucial argument for internationalism is that we face an international enemy. Capitalism cannot be broken in one country alone, as the crushing of the Russian revolution by Stalin shows. For that defeat was one dictated by having to compete as another nation state in a world system of contending states. As Stalin himself put it: 'We lag 30 or 40 years behind the west...either we make good that gap in ten years or they will crush us.' To that end millions of peasants were dispossessed, millions more thrown into labour camps and every fragment of workers' control crushed. Socialism came to equal national economic development, whatever the cost to the working class.

Workers unite

Yet the early days of the Russian revolution showed the possibility of breaking national boundaries, as the same world crisis that sparked off the Bolshevik revolution also gave rise to revolutions in Hungary, Finland and Germany, and to mass upsurges of workers throughout Western Europe. The objective conditions for socialism were present in all those situations—what was lacking outside Russia was a revolutionary party.

Though the revolutionary wave was eventually defeated, it nevertheless showed that international socialism is not some abstract utopianism but a real possibility. It was a glimpse of the truth of Marx's closing words in the *Communist Manifesto*—'The workers have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Workers of all countries unite.' For Marx, as for us, those were not pious hopes, but a guide to action.■

Charlie Hore

We talked to a civil servant active in providing solidarity with South African workers

Passports and politics

I'VE WORKED in a passport office in London for nearly two years. There are 160 CPSA members working in the office and about 80 Society (SCPS) members who are on supervisory grades.

Before I arrived our office had a militant reputation. It supported the official callouts more than other Home Office departments, mainly because of greater pressure of work. But this didn't mean people would fight over local issues.

Issues were often missed—heating, asbestos, fire extinguishers—all the grass root things. The office had been well organised but bureaucratic.

The first union meeting I went to was a month after I started working. Only 22 people were there including all the committee members. Three of us volunteered to stand for the committee. The other two were fairly new as well.

First we did this health and safety audit, listing all the things wrong in the office. Most of them were ultra small things like trailing wires off telephones. Then we publicised the fact that we were health and safety officers by sending circulars around the rooms. If management complained we said we were having a teabreak.

The first issue we took up was a pregnant woman working on a VDU. Management forced her to do the work. She phoned me and I went down straight away to have an argument with the manager. He quickly backed down, mainly because there were about 40 people listening to what was going on. Ever since we've had full membership in that department.

Small issues

We had a lot of complaints about the excessive heat on the counter. We spoke to workers there individually and said, 'Unless you're prepared to walk off we won't be able to force the management to get fans.' Immediately every clerical officer and clerical assistant walked off. Within half an hour management had backed down. They instantly provided desk-top fans and a completely new heating system was put in within weeks.

I got more and more roped in to organising our branch. I was taking more of a lead in meetings with management.

We've got a thing called the examiners' allowance which is an extra £517 a year for all those people dealing with the public. It is really an inconvenience allowance. When its abolition was announced in January, there was a unanimous vote for a walkout there and then for half a day. A few days later we came out for a whole day. The branch secretary called in the CPSA official. Between them they organised a meeting.

We lost the vote for all-out action by 60 to



40, against their opposition. The mood in the office had been great. During the one-day action we'd had about 60 picketing. We organised a strike committee. Eighteen volunteers put their hands up. We didn't limit the numbers and took them all on. This was important because some of them were quiet and wouldn't have got on if there was a vote.

There are five passport offices in Britain—Glasgow, Peterborough, Liverpool, Newport and Belfast. They all came out for one day each. Three of them were known as weak offices so it must have scared management.

The first time I went to the SWP branch was to talk about this strike. After the dispute I was elected branch secretary.

Over the last few months we've had walk-offs over conditions at the main hall counter, paint smells, heating and burst piping.

At the first committee meeting after my election each committee member was delegated a room to cover. He or she would have to gain the confidence of the workers in there by discussing politics, collecting for other offices, handing out leaflets, and organising raffles and union discos.

The disco is a good idea for raising money. More importantly it involves members in the union. It gets them together after work in a relaxed atmosphere. Surprisingly people discuss politics and the union as well as enjoying themselves.

The 'floor reps' also encourage people to go to branch meetings. Now there are over 100 turning up.

Over the last six months we've organised branch day schools. These are often very

unimaginatively organised in other branches, with a video (sometimes with people saying how they've never been on strike since joining the CPSA) being shown or a boring official talking.

In our school I start off by saying what kind of union we need and why. We go around everyone to get them to introduce themselves and say what made them join the union—to break the ice. At first we had a heated argument about whether to split into groups for the women's, blacks' and gays' discussion but we decided against. This is useful because sometimes someone will say something sexist or reactionary and the others can take them up on it.

We also discuss the union's structure and talk about new technology. Then everyone is given a statement or quote such as Neil Kinnock's 'The miners' strike was a wasted year for Labour' or 'Abortion—a woman's right to choose'. People go away for about 15 minutes and write their thoughts on it. Sometimes you get a massive argument.

After the state of emergency in South Africa I brought people to a picket line that I'd found out about at the local SWP branch. They came away saying that we had to do something.

We got the committee together and defined what we should do more precisely. In the end we refused to process any British citizen travelling to South Africa and the people who had dual passports. We blacked the telex and the typing of correspondence to the South African embassy as well.

South Africa

After the first week a South African woman had her passport application refused by a black girl. The woman went to the next member of staff saying, 'That coloured girl refused to serve me.' He replied, 'What colour was she, green, blue, pink or black?' He said he hated her country, apartheid, and wanted nothing to do with it. The manager was called and I went down as the union rep. The bloke is normally quite shy but he started lecturing the manager on racism and South Africa. I didn't have to say anything.

The woman was forced to leave the office. She contacted the South African embassy, who phoned the manager. They even complained that there had been racial discrimination towards South African citizens!

We tried to escalate the action. In our office supervisory grades did the work we had blacked. Other offices in the Home Office section were phoned but they refused to back us. We had originally called the action for four days—in fact it lasted for two weeks. We are trying to get a speaker from the South African Metal and Allied Workers Union so that we can restart the action soon. ■



MARXISM & CULTURE

LOTS of people on the left are very suspicious of any mention of culture. They'll watch *Taxi* on a Tuesday night, maybe go to the odd film, but they're not going to confuse any of that with politics.

It's not surprising really when you think what the word conjures up—opera, art galleries, theatre, fancy escapism—ways for the bourgeoisie to forget what a mess it's made of the real world.

And what do we get? Those of us who can't afford a night at the opera get the TV. It puts our mind in neutral when we get back from work, but it hardly seems worth talking about.

The left's contribution to the arts doesn't exactly inspire confidence in this field. It's not for want of trying. It's a case of talking too much and saying too little.

A section of the British (and European) academic left has actually *concentrated* its work in the last 50 years on problems of culture and communication, and wasted a lot of paper and ink in the process. A small industry of cultural theory has developed, (mis)using the ideas of Gramsci and Althusser to create a view of culture as a separate area of struggle for socialists. Though they may not openly say it, the implication of many of these works is that cultural struggle can actually change society itself.

The overall impact of most of this theory has been disastrous. 'Radical analyses' of the media, for example, by Raymond Williams or the Glasgow Media Group tend to lead to demands to reform the media and obscure the need to take on the state.

Much of this kind of theory has been developed without a clear view of how society can change, and without recognising that organising in the workplace must be the primary aim of socialists. In spite of this, the cultural theorists can give us important insights into how ideas are produced and exchanged, and the influence they can achieve.

Meanwhile a whole lefty alternative arts scene has developed, centred mainly in London, sponsored by the GLC and enthusiastically supported by magazines like *City Limits* and *Marxism Today*.

Some good things have come out of this set-up: the Half Moon Theatre in the East End of London, for example, tends to put on hard-hitting and enjoyable political drama. But in general the scene, with its 'in' people

and 'in' places, is self-sufficient: a cosy world of rebellion that rarely threatens anyone.

There's no lack of ideas, imagination or anger, but there are very few people who have the courage to bring a *political* analysis to their activity, to ask what real impact they're having—to ask *how* plays, cinema, books can relate to political practice. The result is that the alternative arts scene fails to orientate itself to forces that can take its rebellion out of the theatres and cinemas and onto the streets.

But whatever the state of culture in Britain, it would be a mistake to write it all off.

It's important to understand that a society's culture doesn't *just* reflect the interests of the ruling class. The media isn't *all* Oxbridge graduates telling lies about the level of coal stocks—it's shaped by contradictions. Just as there are economic tendencies of capitalism that potentially weaken its own structure—the constant need to drive down wages and to create broader and broader combinations among workers—so the liberal ideology of capitalism can turn or be turned against itself.

"Socialists need to take an active part in criticising and encouraging cultural production"

Classic liberalism insists that all views should get a hearing even if they threaten the class basis of liberalism itself. In order to (at least partly) substantiate its claim to be a democratic forum, the media needs to give a voice to disaffected elements in society. It will distort and weaken that voice, often it will be no more than a whisper, but it will only silence it at a time of total crisis or breakdown. For all the censorship, subtle and not so subtle, programmes that support workers' struggles do get shown, even during crises like the miners' strike.

While most of the conclusions of the academic left about culture and communication are used to back up reformist conclusions, it is too simplistic to reject their ideas outright. Anything that helps us understand the world we live in and how capitalists can hold sway in it can't be ignored. It's important to intervene in debates about culture not just to widen our influence among students and others who are interested, but also to reestablish the connection between radical culture and the power of the working class in all social change.

For all the long words and complex debates do have a bearing on practical struggle. Action taken by NGA members during the miners' strike (the blacking of a

large number of anti-miner articles and the Right to Reply campaign), the production of the miners videotapes by ACTT members as well as the NUJ's recent action over Tory censorship—all this shows that media workers are dealing with specific circumstances that need systematic analysis.

Many people have used films, songs, books and plays to express their outrage at what's going on. A lot of young people are half-lost in a kind of music that is often screaming for change. 'Money's Too Tight to Mention', 'Walls Come Tumbling Down', 'Free Nelson Mandela' have all been national hits. At another level, the best political artists—Brecht, Eisenstein, Jack London, Ken Loach—have been a consistent source of inspiration to revolutionaries all over the world.

Socialists need to take an active part in criticising and encouraging cultural production. One of the things we can learn from the theoreticians on this matter is that it's *not enough* for a song or a book to be written by someone who has a correct line on Russia or the trade union bureaucracy. Marx reckoned that Balzac was the greatest anti-bourgeois writer even though he was one of the rats himself.

What needs judging is the impact or effect a particular work has.

What has been established by writers as different as Reich and Gramsci is that revolutions don't come about automatically on account of social or economic processes. They have to be *desired* by the mass of workers. Gramsci notes that 'every revolution has been preceded by hard critical thinking, the diffusion of culture and spreading of ideas among men who are at first unwilling to listen'.

How far we can extend this spread of ideas depends on the course of the class struggle, but it *is* a process that must take place before we can have a revolution. Nor will this diffusion of culture take place spontaneously—it can only come about through the active intervention of revolutionaries. It is suicidal to be neutral or negative in the sphere of culture.

What this means in practice needs careful consideration. Although the impact of revolutionaries must be limited—we're a tiny minority—the experience of the Anti-Nazi League and Rock Against Racism, and more recently the Redskins' success in reaching thousands with militant soul music shows us what can be done.

Revolutionary ideas and the revolutionary party *can* give a direction and lead to those elements in our society who are rebelling without a cause, to those people who want something more than capitalism but cannot see beyond it.

The experience of the ANL was mixed and the Redskins feel the pressure of being around the Top 40, but then cultural politics aren't simple. Revolutionaries can't keep their hands clean when things get difficult. It would be madness to ignore the influence and energy popular culture can provide. The alternative is to leave popular culture's edge to Kinnock and leave the growing body of theory in the hands of revisionists at *Marxism Today*. ■

Chris Nineham

The respectable renegade

Hugh Dalton
Ben Pimlott
Jonathan Cape £25.00

HUGH DALTON is now chiefly remembered as one of Labour's 'Big Five' in the 1945-51 government (the others were Clement Attlee, Ernest Bevin, Herbert Morrison, and Stafford Cripps). As Chancellor of the Exchequer Dalton played a pivotal role in the years 1945-7, when most of the Attlee administrations's major reforms were pushed through.

Ben Pimlott, himself a Fabian intellectual, has written an absorbing and justly praised biography of this unpleasant man, who fawned on those who had power and patronised those who didn't. 'Keep that man away from me,' Winston Churchill said of Dalton, when the latter was one of his ministers in the wartime coalition. 'I can't stand his booming voice and shifting eyes.'

Tories generally hated Dalton as they did Aneurin Bevan. But while Bevan was that rare figure—a working class MP who tried to bring the class war into the House of Commons—Dalton was one of their own, a renegade.

Dalton's father was a canon of St George's chapel, Windsor, and was very close to George V as both prince and king. His son went to Eton and King's College Cambridge. Dalton was at Cambridge in the years before the First World War. He was exposed there to the culture of the Bloomsbury group and the politics of the Fabian Society. Together these influences encouraged Dalton to rebel against the Anglican Toryism from which he had sprung.

Pragmatic and paternalist

In later life Dalton paraded his contempt for the values of his class—for example, selling or giving away royal gifts to his father. The Windsor family loathed him. 'Don't ever bring that anarchist son of yours to see me again,' George V told Canon Dalton.

Pimlott even suggests that George VI intervened when Labour came to power in July 1945 to persuade Attlee to appoint Bevin rather than Dalton as Foreign Secretary. This was even though the new Prime Minister had already told Dalton to accompany him to the Potsdam peace conference in that capacity.

Only to British royalty could Dalton seem an anarchist. A professional economist, he devoted his attention to the unequal distribution of income. The aim of socialism was to remedy that, through death duties and what we would now call a wealth tax.

The idea that the distribution of income was a consequence of a more fundamental distribution, that of the ownership and control of the means of production, did not occur to Dalton. Nor did he see the change as something working people could only make

for themselves. Pimlott calls him 'a child of the Webbs: pragmatic, paternalist, collectivist, a pre-war critic of property rights'.

Dalton's socialism differed from Marxism also in its nationalism. His experience of the First World War—in which many of his closest Cambridge friends died (above all the poet Rupert Brooke whom he worshipped)—left Dalton hating, not capitalism, but the Germans. His racism went a lot further. He was horrified when Attlee offered him the Colonial Office in 1950: 'I had a horrid vision of pullulating, poverty stricken, diseased nigger communities, for whom one could do nothing in the short run and who, the more one tries to help them, are querulous and ungrateful.'

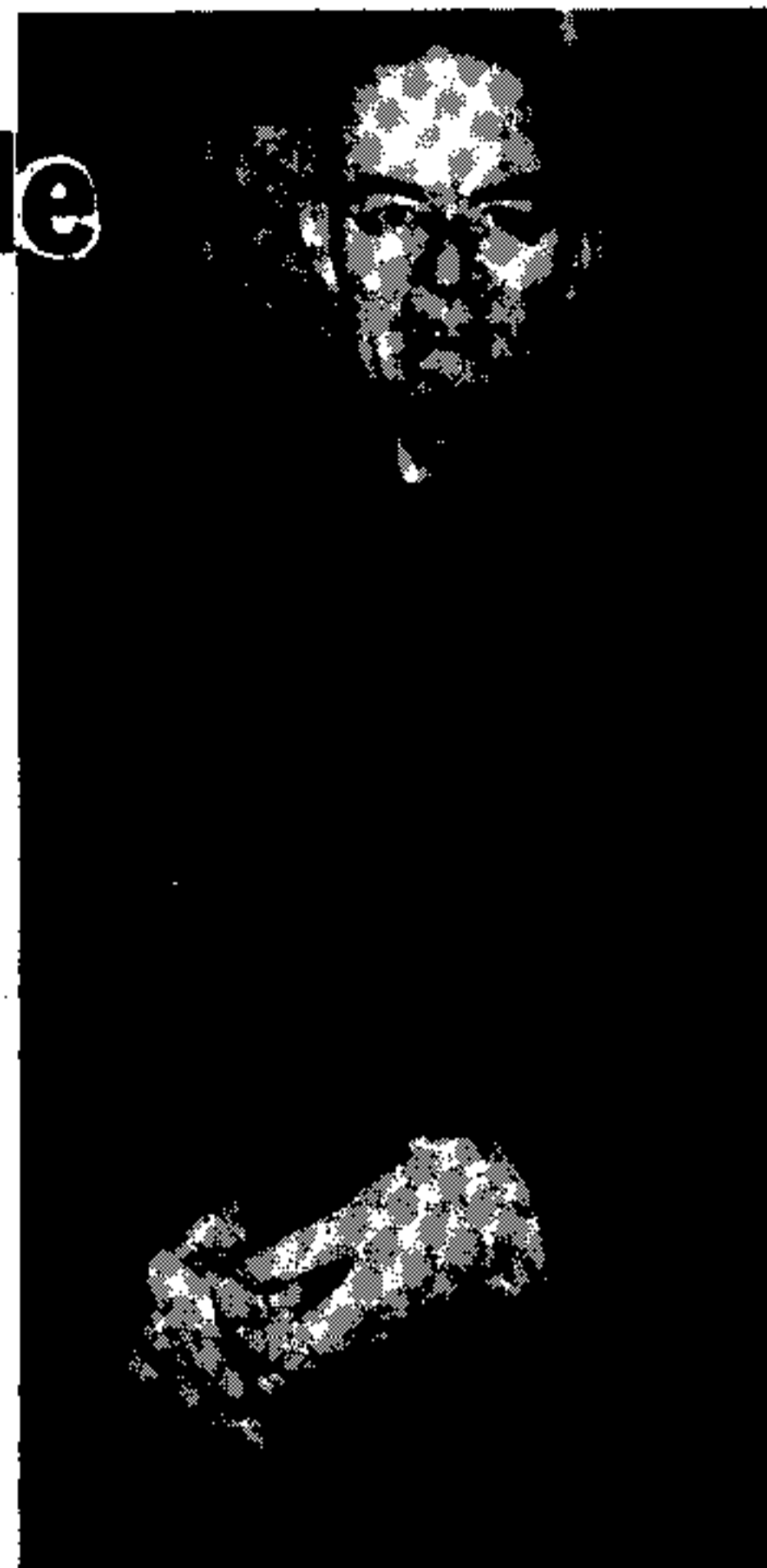
The fact that a leading member of the only seriously reforming Labour government could express such attitudes is itself revealing. Why, then, take any interest in Dalton? There are at least three reasons for doing so.

First, Dalton was a key figure in Labour's right wing in the 1930s and 1940s. As a member of the National Executive he helped pick the party up after the debacle of 1931. In an alliance with Bevin and other trade union leaders, Dalton successfully resisted pressure from Cripps and the Socialist League to take Labour far to the left. He also encouraged a group of young right wing intellectuals (Hugh Gaitskell, Evan Durbin, Douglas Jay and others) to conduct the policy discussions, associated with such bodies as the XYZ Club, which created the framework of postwar Labour economic thinking.

Of critical importance here was the thought of Maynard Keynes, and his demonstration that higher public spending could increase employment. Dalton himself wasn't particularly sympathetic to Keynes as a person (he had been Dalton's tutor at King's) or as an economist. He did not side with Oswald Mosley and others when they demanded that the 1929-31 Labour government use spending to combat the effects of the Great Depression. But he lent his backing to those who did take Keynes seriously, thus helping to provide the Labour right with an answer to the Marxist claim that capitalism couldn't be reformed.

This was an instance of Dalton's most lasting role as a patron of bright young men, usually—though not always—on the right wing of the party. His most important proteges were those two lost leaders of the Labour right, Attlee's successor Hugh Gaitskell, and Tony Crosland, author of the revisionist bible, *The Future of Socialism*. Dalton manoeuvred Gaitskell into the position where he was the main candidate to succeed the dying Cripps as Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1950, and helped to precipitate his election as party leader in 1955.

The second reason for looking at Dalton now is that he is a good exemplar of a certain breed of Labour politician. The Labour Party has been well described as an alliance



Stafford Cripps, Dalton's successor as Chancellor

of the trade union bureaucracy with a section of the professional middle class. Those of the latter who form the Labour right wing represent a number of things—most importantly pure undiluted careerism. But there are two more distinctly political strands.

One is left Liberalism—well represented in the 1920s as many bourgeois parliamentarians abandoned the shipwrecked hulk of the Liberal Party for the fast rising Labour Party. Most of these recruits never abandoned their Liberalism, and never cared especially for the trade unions. The modern representative of this strand is Roy Jenkins—and, as mention of him suggests, much of it has now passed back into the SDP/Liberal Alliance.

The other strand is distinct and might be called right wing Labourism. This involves a genuine political commitment to the organised working class movement, identified with the trade union bureaucracy (and especially, of course, with its right wing). Modern examples are Tony Crosland, who broke with the Jenkinsites in the early 1970s, Denis Healey and Roy Hattersley, who refused to follow the Gang of Four into the SDP.

Dalton fits well into this category. Pimlott says: 'He disliked the rich, and had no difficulty in identifying whole-heartedly with the trade union movement.' (The difference between the two types of right winger isn't absolute of course: a good deal of calculation enters into the second sort's commitment to the labour movement—Dalton toyed with the Liberals before it became clear that they were on the way out.)

The third reason why Dalton is important has to do with his time at the Treasury in



Labour's Big Three: Dalton with Ernest Bevin and Herbert Morrison

1945-7. There was nothing socialist about his Chancellorship. Dalton was committed to planning, which he saw as the state exercising physical control over production and distribution. Predictably he was impressed by Stalin's First Five Year Plan when he visited Russia in 1932; a few months later he was equally impressed with Mussolini's 'Corporate State' (and indeed by the *Duce* himself: 'There is no other living man it would have thrilled me more to meet,' he wrote after an audience with the fascist ruler).

Pimlott writes:

'In the 1930s, Labour had imagined coming to office in prevailing conditions of *laissez faire*, and establishing the machinery of socialist planning from scratch. Instead, the incoming government inherited a wide range of controls and a powerful administrative machine geared to an economy mobilised for total war... Encouraged by a belief that existing government arrangements were ideally suited to their purposes, Labour ministers slipped into the position, and took over the powers, of their predecessors.'

Dalton proceeded to use this machinery to maintain the full employment created during the war and to generate the income needed to fund Labour's reforms. This effort eventually broke him. The British economy could only continue working in 1945 with American financial aid. The price of the loan which Keynes concluded in Washington in December 1945 was that the pound sterling

should become convertible on world currency markets by July 1947. The result was an enormous external constraint on British industry: industries had to be made competitive with their foreign, mainly American, counterparts to prevent a financial crash when sterling became convertible.

The loan was inseparable from the Labour government's commitment to defending British imperialism and to remaining a close ally of the US. Keynes wrote afterwards: 'It comes out in the wash that the American loan is primarily required to meet the political and military expenditure overseas. If it were not for that, we could scrape through without excessive interruption of our domestic programme.' The burden of military expenditure insisted on by Bevin, the government's most powerful figure, helped to doom Labour's economic policy, and with it Dalton.

The Chancellor found himself under increasing pressure to abandon a domestic programme which the City and his own economic advisers denounced as inflationary. Sir Edward Bridges, the Permanent Secretary of the Treasury, accused him of using the American loan to finance 'an artificially high standard of living' for the British working class. The crunch finally came with convertibility in July 1947. The result was a huge outflow of gold and dollars, reflecting a balance of payments deficit, and foreign suspicion of Britain's 'socialist' government.

Dalton was forced to change course. He introduced an emergency budget on 12 November 1947 which amounted to surrender to the City's demands for whole-

sale deflation, raising taxation and cutting spending. Shortly afterwards he was forced to resign from the government for having disclosed details of the budget to a journalist minutes before presenting it to the House of Commons.

Dalton's career never recovered. Stafford Cripps, who succeeded him at the Treasury, made a policy of Dalton's retreat—austerity. The third postwar Labour Chancellor, Gaitskell, completed the process in April 1951 when he made the first cut in the government's greatest reform, the National Health Service, in order to finance the enormous rearmament programme demanded by Washington.

Pimlott suggests that Dalton was a broken man before his fall, pondering resignation as his policy collapsed around his ears. His colleagues were happy to throw him to the wolves. Pimlott concludes:

'Dalton was the only Chancellor who had ever attempted to perform his duties in a distinctively socialist way. The experiment ended with the convertibility crisis; it was never tried again.'

'Socialist' needs to be taken with a pinch of salt. Still, the point remains. The 1945 Labour government, with enormous popular support and a planning machine inherited from the wartime coalition, could not use the existing state apparatus to plan the economy in defiance of world capitalism. Do we have any reason to believe that a Kinnock government, in far less favourable circumstances, could succeed when Dalton and his colleagues failed? ■

Alex Callinicos

The politics of despair

The Bureaucratisation of the World. The USSR: Bureaucratic Collectivism.

Bruno Rizzi trans. Adam Westoby
Tavistock Studies in Sociology £9.95

MANY socialists have rejected any idea of Russia being a 'workers' state', but have been unwilling to accept the SWP's theory of 'bureaucratic state capitalism'. They argue that the social system of Russia is neither capitalist nor socialist, but is a new, historically distinct mode of production with a new type of ruling class. Many of these socialists use the term 'bureaucratic collectivist' to describe this new mode of production.

The nature of Russia

The term 'bureaucratic collectivist' was first coined in the late 1930s by Bruno Rizzi. Rizzi was an Italian shoe salesman who, in his trips abroad, met and debated with Trotskyists. His book *The Bureaucratisation of the World* was a contribution to the debates then going on about the nature of Russia. Since its 1939 publication it has been often referred to, but the recent translation of its main part makes it available in English for the first time. For this Tavistock Publications are to be thanked.

There is much in this book with which we can agree. He accepts that the defeat of the Russian revolution followed the failure of revolutions in the West, and the subsequent change of internal policies in response to the 'external world'. He argues that the bureaucracy consolidated its power as a class. This bureaucracy, through its control of the state, is effectively the 'owner' of the means of

production—whatever the juridical myths.

He quite correctly points out that marxism is not about dogmas, about the bandying of quotations of 'this or that saint', but is about the method we use to analyse history and the world about us.

With all of this we agree. However when Rizzi moves on to what he thinks Russia is rather than what it is *not*, he goes astray.

Firstly, his definition of capitalism is inadequate. He argues that the contradiction specific to capitalism is between the mode of production and the 'form of property'—and that this contradiction has been resolved in the USSR, without socialism being realised. Russia's economy cannot be capitalist as it is not based on private property. Like Trotsky he is mesmerised by the private form of property under classical capitalism.

This focus on private property leads him into errors when he discusses the fate of the proletariat in Russia:

'What did we understand by the proletarian in capitalism's free market, if not a free seller of labour-power... The soviet worker has but one master... As a monopolist [the state] can no longer limit itself to the purchase of a certain quantity of labour-power for a fixed period... In taking possession of it all it becomes in fact the owner of those who provide the labour-power... The worker in today's Russia...has the characteristics of a slave.'

So 'bureaucratic collectivism' is a *slave* system, but is still 'progressive' over capitalism because it abolishes capitalism's contradiction!

His system has no dynamic, it goes nowhere. Rizzi identifies the trend of increasing

state involvement in the process of economic accumulation, and rightly sees the ultimate expression of these trends in bureaucratic Russia. But why is this so? What makes the system tick?

For us competition, and particularly military competition, forces accumulation on the bureaucracy, and determine Russia as 'bureaucratic state capitalist'. Rizzi does not see this. In fact he believes that, 'bureaucratic collectivism, through its suppression of capitalist contradictions enables a *lessening* of the waste of arms expenditure.'

For him the ruling class does not force accumulation forward in order to defend 'its' patch of the world economy. Instead it hijacks the system for itself. It *could* 'distribute a large share to those it is exploiting', but instead it 'channels surplus value in various ways to its functionaries'. The fact that bureaucrats are greedy becomes the dynamic force.

Political judgement

In 1946 George Orwell reviewed a book similar to this one (Burnham's *Managerial Revolution*). He wrote:

'Power worship blurs political judgement because it leads...to the belief that present trends will continue. Whoever is winning at the moment will always seem to be invincible.'

Ultimately Rizzi's book, too, is power worship. However critical he might be he is impressed by the sheer power of the new 'bureaucratic class'.

How far this could blur his political judgement is clear from this, an unused preface:

'The proletariat still has a very important task to accomplish; to acknowledge Herr Hitler and Mr Mussolini as the grave diggers of international capitalism...and to help them in this task.'

Rizzi was an anti-semite (we must 'become anti-Jewish because we are anti-capitalist'), but another source of this disgusting drivel is his writing off of the working class.

During the Russian revolution:

'The brutalised and indifferent masses raised their heads from their immediate needs and scanned the horizon, sniffing the wind like beasts of prey coming out of their lair.'

And later, under Stalinism, the worker 'is simply an unthinking element of a mass which is there to be manipulated by the bureaucracy'.

Despite the Italian Socialist Party leader, Craxi, hailing Rizzi as 'a pioneer thinker of democratic socialism', his work has nothing to do with socialism. His vision of the ultimate bureaucracy is despair, and we reject it. We continue to base our politics on the struggles of workers everywhere.

As Tony Cliff wrote in 1948:

'The theory of Bureaucratic Collectivism is suprahistorical, negative and abstract. It does not define the economic laws of motion of the system, explain its inherent contradictions and the motivation of class struggle. It is completely arbitrary. Hence it does not give a perspective, nor can it serve as a basis for a strategy for socialists.'■

Derek Howell

socialist worker
Review

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Introducing Lukacs

Georg Lukacs

GHR Parkinson

Routledge and Kegan Paul £5.95

THE great Hungarian revolutionary Georg Lukacs was born into comfortable circumstances and seemed set for a career as a bourgeois intellectual.

The experience of the First World War turned him against the ruling class and when, in late 1918, a new Hungarian Communist Party was formed he was quick to join.

The new CP found itself in power within four months of its foundation. The Hungarian Soviet Republic lasted 133 days and Lukacs was both Deputy Commissar for Public Education and fought against the invasion by Rumanian counter-revolutionaries. After the defeat of the Soviet Republic Lukacs worked underground against the semi-fascist government of Admiral Horthy for two months, but then escaped to exile.

His exile took him to Vienna, Berlin and Moscow and was to last to 1945. As a leading militant in the Hungarian CP and in the Communist International he played a leading part in the debates of the revolutionary period. As a philosopher he tried to give his ideas theoretical shape in the famous book, *History and Class Consciousness*.

When the Comintern degenerated Lukacs backed Stalin and used his talents to help sell the successive changes of line. Despite this, he was imprisoned in Moscow in 1941. He survived and in 1945 became Professor of Aesthetics and an MP in his native Budapest.

In 1956 when the Hungarian workers rose against the regime Lukacs again became Minister of Culture, this time in the even more shortlived government of Imre

Nagy, which tried to mediate between the workers and the Russian invaders. After the crushing of the workers he was arrested and deported. Eventually he was rehabilitated and died loaded with honours in 1971.

Despite this hectic life, Lukacs wrote a number of important works of philosophy and a great deal of literary criticism.

This paperback re-issue of Parkinson's little book provides a clear introduction to the ideas of Lukacs. The range of his ideas, from the most difficult studies of philosophy to quite simple political theses, make an introduction useful to anyone who does not have the same wide knowledge. It is particularly useful in guiding the reader through the unfamiliar background of German philosophy. Readers who have found some of the debates about Lukacs in recent years in *International Socialism* difficult, will find the discussion of *History and Class Consciousness* particularly useful.

The major criticism of the book is that while it is scrupulously fair in its aim of presenting Lukacs' ideas rather than criticising them, it reflects the concerns of the author in what is presented. Thus the question of the party is rather skimmed over in the section on *History and Class Consciousness*, and there is only passing mention of Lukacs' excellent book on Lenin or his other political writings.

Overall it is a useful introduction for anyone who wants to study the writing of a man who, faults and all, was one of the greatest thinkers that Marxism has produced, and whose most stimulating ideas were thought out while in the leadership of a revolutionary party. ■

Colin Sparks

Fears for Tiersky

Ordinary Stalinism

Ronald Tiersky

Allen & Unwin (no price given)

SINCE 1945 the United States government has spent vast sums of money paying academics to study communism. One of the problems they are concerned with is changes in communism, both in the East European states and in the mass CPs of Western Europe. Are they still the enemy they used to be?

Tiersky's answer is to distinguish 'high Stalinism' (the period of the old butcher himself) from 'ordinary Stalinism' (destalinised Russia and Western Euro-communism). Now

an interesting book could be written on change and continuity in Stalinist states and parties, but it would have to start with the global crisis, showing the constraints of the arms race and international banking on the Eastern ruling class. Tiersky can't do this, as it would mean calling into question his own paymasters and their system.

Instead he opts for the study of an idea—'democratic centralism'—which he sees as the unifying feature of all Stalinist organisations. This enables him to study texts instead of studying the real world—a far more comfortable alternative. He thus manages to get it wrong on both counts. He misunderstands both

the real world and the texts.

For example, he gives an account of the Italian Communist Party, based entirely on its organisational shift from Stalinism and without any consideration of the economic and political crisis in Italy, and ends up prophesying a 'serious political future' for the PCI. In fact the PCI has spent the last twenty years trying to get into the government and is now further than ever from its goal.

Likewise on texts. Tiersky tells us that the 'main point' of Lenin's *What is to be Done?* is that 'the trade unions had to be subordinated to the revolutionary will of party leadership.' Lenin in fact was concerned with a quite different question, the relation of socialist consciousness to trade unionism, and explicitly urged that trade unions should be 'very broad organisations'. It comes as no surprise, therefore, to discover that though Tiersky makes many references to Lenin, no work by Lenin appears in his bibliography—all quotations are second hand from other academics.

In fact, 'democratic centralism' is nothing like the mystery Tiersky makes it out to be. The principle that a group of people discuss a course of action, agree on it, and unite to implement it, is fairly basic to human organisation. It is, for example, the basis of 'cabinet responsibility' in British government. Indeed, it would be impossible for two people to carry a table downstairs without some form of 'democratic centralism'.

What makes 'democratic centralism' different for a revolutionary organisation is that all members are activists, and therefore involved in making and implementing decisions. When a party

like the Labour Party is in government there is 'democratic centralism' at leadership level (left leaders like Benn must accept cabinet responsibility) but 'freedom' at rank and file level (ordinary members can say what they like, but the government will ignore conference decisions).

When Stalinist parties were still mass parties of activists, they needed a form of centralism, albeit highly undemocratic; now that their membership is largely passive (in the Italian CP only ten per cent of members attend section meetings) the myth of 'democratic centralism' can be dropped.

More generally, the question of revolutionary discipline cannot be understood simply in terms of organisation. Anyone who has done a *Socialist Worker* sale will know that the Bolshevik paper sellers may—occasionally—arrive late or oversleep altogether. But workers will actually run down the street to get into the factory on time. Revolutionary discipline is a response to, and a means of fighting against, the labour discipline imposed by capitalism. But someone who spends their life wandering into libraries at their own chosen time must find this hard to understand.

During the McCarthy period, all the American experts on Asia who knew anything about the subject were purged as being 'soft on Communism'. So, when the Vietnam war began, the only 'experts' left were hacks and time-servers who gave rotten advice. As a result the US escalated the war and lost it. If it relies on slipshods and blinkered experts like Tiersky, the US government will also lose its war against the working class. ■

Ian Birchall

Revolution examined

History in Focus: Riots

Alan and Katherine Dures

Batsford, £6.95

Living Through History: The Russian Revolution

Elizabeth Campling

Batsford £6.95.

BOTH THESE books are written to be part of an O-level/CSE syllabus, and are aimed at the 14-16 age group.

The book on the Russian Revolution supplies a more in-depth view of the revolution than most O-level syllabuses. It traces the history of the events leading to the revolution and afterwards, until Lenin's death, and views it through the eyes of people involved in and observing the events concerned. These people range from dedicated Bolsheviks to majors in the White Army and include Louise Bryant, Arthur Ransome, Emma Goldman and Lenin himself.

Each section gives a few pages on the 'factual' events, and then the accounts of those involved. It is not always exactly in chronological order, but it manages to present the stream of events fairly coherently.

The narrative accompanying each biography tends to sympathise with the person concerned and so the political position that it presents is not totally consistent.

In no way is this a revolutionary book, but anything that will interest O-level/CSE students in the Russian Revolution, which I think this will, is a good thing.

The book on riots follows different kinds of riots, from food riots in the early eighteenth century right through to the 'picket line violence' at the beginning of the miners' strike.

It is on neither the side of the rioters or the authorities and shows the justification behind each disturbance. The rise in the police

combatting riots, the Riot Act of 1715 and the difference between rural and urban rioting are all shown. Also shown is the fact that not all rioting is pro-reform or radical: anti-Irish/Catholic riots feature heavily.

Only the last third of the book is dedicated to post-1914 rioting. The Jarrow marches, fascism and unemployment protests are all included.

The protests against the rise of the National Front in Lewisham, where the SWP are acknowledged as one of the main forces are well covered, as are the Brixton/Toxteth riots. What mars this, however, is that it neglects to mention the death

of Blair Peach in 1979, killed by a policeman during an Anti-Nazi League demonstration. The omission of this is either grossly stupid or deliberate, as the authors go to great pains to describe the death of Kevin Gately in the early seventies, similarly on an Anti-Nazi demonstration.

Altogether though, this is a fairly good book and covers a subject not often covered as a whole.

Both books are good texts, better than multi-purpose text books, and are worth including in a syllabus although they are nothing to go wild about. ■

Daniel Birchall

Armed without an army

The Swiss Army

John McPhee

Faber and Faber £8.95

THE FIRST congress of the Second International in 1889 addressed itself to the question of militarism:

'It opposed outright the institution of standing armies as... "itself a threat to peace, incompatible with any democratic and republican regime, an instrument of reactionary coups d'état and social repression." It called for the replacement of standing armies by a popular militia'. (Braunthal, *History of the International*).

This is a profoundly revolutionary demand, entirely free from pacifist illusions and its realisation, one might think, incompatible with the very existence of a capitalist state.

And yet there is an example of it today. From its (extremely violent) inception, the Swiss Confederation has never had a standing army, has relied entirely on an armed and trained population. Switzerland is undoubtedly a class society, undoubtedly capitalist. A serious study of how this combination has been possible would be very valuable to revolutionaries.

Unfortunately, the present book is not such a study. Written in the style of a travelogue, uncritically enthusiastic about all things Swiss, it is remarkably short on hard facts, let alone substantial analysis. Nevertheless something can be gleaned from it.

Switzerland has a population of 6,343,000, roughly the same as that of Greater London, and an army of 650,000 men—bigger than the total strength of the British armed forces. Every male Swiss citizen is required to serve for 30 years. The initial training period is 17 weeks followed by annual retraining and exercises to the age of 50. If women were required to serve (they are not), the Swiss could put well over a million troops into the field!

Nor is this in any sense a toy army. Its weaponry is well up to the best contemporary standards and training and discipline are reputedly good. The mobilisation system requires that small arms and a standard issue of ammunitions are kept at home. 'There are six hundred thousand assault rifles in Swiss homes' McPhee tells us and he adds, with astonishment, 'Communist Swiss soldiers keep rifles and machine guns at home.' There are not, however, many Swiss communists—that is a condition for the survival of the militia system. Heavy weapons, including aircraft and missiles, are widely dispersed in locations necessarily known to the population.

It is worth noting, for the benefit of advocates of gun control laws, that this, the most heavily armed population in the world (with a large number of private weapons as well as army issue) has one of the lowest incidences of gunshot wounds, including both deliberate and accidental shootings.

How is all this possible? A full account would have to take into consideration the peculiar history of the Confederation, the international role of Swiss capital (depending for its protection on foreign standing armies) and a number of other things. But one factor stands out above all others.

Switzerland has, for practical purposes, a largely non-citizen working class. The bulk of manual work is done by foreign workers who have no right of residence, no votes—and no guns. The national militia is the armed middle class (including the farmers—49 percent of the population was still rural in 1978).

Nevertheless, it is a standing demonstration of how, in an industrial country, a workers' state will have as its core an armed and trained working class. ■

Duncan Hallas

A limited analysis

The Miners' Strike in Oxford
Oxford Miners' Support Group
MSG Publications, 35 Osler Road,
Headington, Oxford.

THIS book is a profusely illustrated collection of articles on support work for the 1984-5 miners' strike in Oxford, written by Miners Support Group activists, published by Oxford Trades Council, edited by Trades Council and MSG Chairman Alan Thornett, and financially underwritten by Oxford City Council.

Its strength lies in the wealth of practical detail of support work, and the enthusiasm with which it is related by the people who actually did it. It is a counterblast to the hindsight and regrets now afflicting much of the soft left. Through the details of collections, donations, picketing, rallies, benefits, the international links, the work of the women's group, right through to the return to work, the pride and self-confidence shine through.

The book's weakness lies in the limits of its political analysis. The bad guys are the national leaderships (NUM excepted). One article apart, there is no criticism of any NUM leader. Local union bureaucrats stand blameless, thanks partly to devoting just a single page to the fight for solidarity in Didcot Power Station, and half a page to Austin Rover's Cowley plants. The local Labour Party stands proud and tall: the 1983 parliamentary candidate lauds the council's efforts, while the

difficulties encountered in getting collection licenses emerge, as an aside, in other articles.

It follows logically that because of the sterling qualities of all local activists, there is no place for any revolutionary organisation to pose an alternative to the reformists and bureaucrats. So we find revolutionary organisations reduced to invisibility.

The role of revolutionaries has to be pieced together, by the knowledgeable from lists of named individuals. It is these individuals and the local Labour Parties, as well as the Mardy and Merthyr Vale miners themselves and their wives, that are the book's heroes and heroines.

Activists outside Oxford will still be able to compare experiences with their own, review practical lessons learned in the strike, and perhaps weave together all the threads of political conclusion and analysis that are left as loose ends in the book.

Even the tiny articles on work inside Didcot and Austin Rover bring out how organisational weakness contributed to the feebleness (at Austin Rover) or the collapse (at Didcot) of solidarity organised at rank and file level.

The book has been priced to keep it accessible and for the price its size and production quality are exceptionally good. Profits over the production costs go to families of victimised miners. If you see it, buy it. ■

Graham Chapman

The International road

Nicaragua: Revolution Under Siege
Mike Gonzalez
Bookmarks £1.95

TO ASSESS Mike Gonzalez' short book on the Nicaraguan revolution, we must consider the political context in which it appears.

In the US a large section of the left has abandoned a critical anti-imperialist position in favour of cheerleading for the Nicaraguan regime. The politics of the American Socialist Workers Party are an example of this.

For the SWP (US) the centre of world politics is Central America, where Castro 'initiated the American socialist revolution and revived the continuity of proletarian internationalism practiced by the Bolsheviks'. Today, they see the struggle of the Sandinistas against American imperialism as the focus of the world struggle for socialism.

For them and for many others the conclusion of such ideas is to submerge socialist politics to 'move-

ments' which support the Nicaraguan regime. This is then extended to include other movements—the movement of blacks, women, gays, native Americans and so on.

The majority of the left in America today has abandoned any notion of class politics in favour of the reformism of the movements. Thus movementism in the US and third worldism abroad are two parts of a formula whose common denominator is the shift away from working class politics.

The Marxist position is different from this. It is certainly possible for national liberation struggles, such as the one led by the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, to eliminate overt political control by imperialism—in the Nicaraguan case the puppet regime of Somoza. But during the whole process of decolonisation after the Second World War it was possible for national liberation struggles to achieve nominal independence from imperialism.

Yet, the countries in the less

developed world, even if they achieve apparent political independence from the core states, necessarily remain subordinated to the world system. Genuine national liberation is impossible as long as the world is dominated by the competition of the strong states and economies at the heart of the system.

What has this meant in Nicaragua? In order to survive at the head of their tiny state, the Nicaraguan regime has to see augmenting capital accumulation as their central aim. The 'freedom' of national liberation is transformed, as long as the world system remains intact, into the freedom to be subsumed to the logic of the system. For the working class this means more sacrifice, more austerity, more production.

The only alternative for anyone who is really serious about national liberation is to base themselves on the struggles of the working class. The necessary precondition for national liberation is a workers' revolution which spreads internationally.

It is this argument which is the central point of Gonzalez' book. He couples it with a strong criticism of the discounted version of socialism peddled by most writers sympathetic to the Nicaraguan revolution. For them a popular state and 'mass organisations' seem to be sufficient for socialism in Nicaragua. Gonzalez says nonsense: socialism, he emphasises, is workers' control over the state and economy or it is nothing. ■

Glenn Perusek

Expensive souvenir

William Morris's Socialist Diary
Ed Florence Boos
Journeyman Press £3.25

MORRIS's diary covers three months of 1887.

It is not a substantial work. In this edition his writings span 37 pages, and half of these are footnotes and photographs.

This is no lazy work by an editor trying to cash in on a famous revolutionary's name. The small amount of material is surrounded by extensive and methodical research in the form of copious footnotes, introduction, and biographies of socialists and activists of the time. The attention to detail and sources would no doubt be invaluable to anyone who specialises in the subject.

However, those of us not well acquainted with all the ideas and writings of Morris may well find the book raises more questions than it can answer. For example, what were Morris's views on standing for parliament, or involvement in the unions?

Without a doubt he was one of the first English Marxists to recognise the corrupting effect of parliament on socialists. He didn't believe that the system could be changed through parliament. Workers had to form their own institutions and take over the means of production if socialism was to come about.

But these issues are only alluded to in the diary, a lot of which is anecdotal.

Eating three pence worth of shrimps, miners' strikes, meetings of nine and rallies of thousands compete for equal footage, with no analysis of any in particular (the strikes, I mean, not the shrimps).

I suspect that Journeyman Press brought this out as part of the souvenir industry that sprung up around the 150th anniversary of Morris's birth. It would cost £468 to fill a yard of bookshelf with this very expensive souvenir. At £78 a yard E P Thompson's *William Morris* is a far more substantial introduction to the life and works of this early British Marxist. ■

Andy Strouthous

Sweet soul music

Nowhere to run—the story of soul music
Gerri Hirshey
Pan £3.95

MOST books on rock music are as disposable as last year's top ten, written either to cash in on a passing trend or as a list of recordings with the occasional comment thrown in. So it's a true joy to come across a book like this, one that both captures and explains the passion and commitment of some of the most enduring music of our time.

Twenty years after its heyday,

soul music still retains the power to move us that it had originally.

Soul music developed out of the whole range of black American music, but the dominant influence on it was undoubtedly gospel music. The call-and-response between the preacher and the congregation, the need to testify and the steady beat of handclapping became essential elements of soul. And as the concerns of the music turned from religious to secular themes, so the tone turned from resignation to one of hope, from suffering being black in America to

an idea that something could be done about it.

Soul music grew out of and in turn inspired the rebellion of Black Americans in the sixties, articulating both their desires for a better life and their understanding that it had to be fought for.

The Detroit sound came to dominate the dancefloors and the charts of the world. From 1964 to 1969, Berry Gordy ran Tamla like a hit factory, turning out great dance music with the regularity of the River Rouge plant turning out Cadillacs.

While the Motown Sound was deliberately crafted for a white audience, artists like James Brown, Aretha Franklin and Otis Redding developed far more distinctive and individual styles. These were people who managed to keep control of their careers and who could take almost any song and make it distinctively their own.

Under their inspiration, soul music developed a diversity and an integrity that ensured it would survive even after the boom burst, as it was to do in the early seventies.

Gerri Hirshey's documentation of that diversity cannot be done justice to in a short review. For she looks not only at the development

of the music itself, but also at the companies who produced it, with a thoroughly critical eye. So as well as Diana Ross's rise to megastardom, we get the full story of the oustings of Florence Ballard from the Supremes because she didn't fit their image. She never lets you forget that the vast majority of the white businessmen who ran the industry treated the artists as wage labourers producing commodities like any other worker.

Though the music was a sustained outcry against racism, and though it achieved a white audience, it could do nothing to remove the racism from American society.

That racism and that treatment of the artists are ever-present in the book, making it the work of a committed fan without the slightest trace of naivety or hypocrisy—a quite rare achievement.

So whether you're a Wigan Casino veteran with a cross-indexed collection of old 45s, or an occasional collector of compilation albums, or just like good music, that sweet soul music—you're certain to find it enjoyable. And if you're not on that list—have you checked your pulse lately? ■

Charlie Hore

BOOKBRIEF

TOP of the list of recent fiction are the two *Allison and Busby* reprints of Chester Himes' classic black crime novels *A Rage in Harlem* and *The Real Cool Killers* (both £2.95).

Opinions differ about the first four books in the *Women's Press* series of feminist science fiction reprints: Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* and *Extra(ordinary) People*, Sally Miller Gearhart's *The Wanderground* and Jane Palmer's *The Planet Dweller* (all £1.95). Our volunteer reviewer says she does not think you should bother.

Two books of poems are Nikola Vaptsarov's *Nineteen Poems* (*Journeyman Press* £1.95) and *No Holds Barred*, poems by women chosen by 'The Raving Beauties' (*Women's Press* £2.95). Vaptsarov was a leading Bulgarian CP member murdered by the fascists in 1942.

Two books with an autobiographical slant are *Absolute MacInnes*, a selection of writing from gay novelist and journalist Colin MacInnes—best known as an observer of London culture in the 1960s (*Allison and Busby* £4.95) and poet Mary Sarton's *Journal of a Solitude* (*Women's Press* £3.95).

We are used to the occasional left wing play on TV and to radical plays in the theatre. Rather less common than they were ten years ago are the socialist fringe theatre groups touring with working class plays. Both of these activities have

quite a long history and have in the past been closely linked with the organised working class movement.

The record in Britain is much less impressive than it was in pre-war Germany, where in 1929 there were seventy workers' theatre groups. But Raphael Samuel, Ewan MacColl and Stuart Cosgrove have collected together a great deal of interesting material about the Workers' Theatre Movement and other organisations in *Theatres of the Left 1880-1935* (*Routledge and Kegan Paul*, £8.95). The book contains a number of scripts including Clifford Odets' classic *Waiting for Lefty*. It's worth the price for that alone.

Also from *Routledge and Kegan Paul* is Edward W Said's *Covering Islam* (£4.95). Said is an American professor who is well known for his analysis of the racist assumptions underlying Western thinking about what we call 'The East'.

New technology is the subject of Michael Shallis's *The Silicon Idle* (*Oxford* £3.95). Shallis has noticed that people who use computers and the like often become fascinated by them and invest them with god-like powers. That there is a danger of 'internalising alienation' is certainly true. Shallis believes in a 'real' god, so he can't see how the worship of machinery suits those who would keep the same oppressive social relations while pushing on with the introduction of equipment which makes the possibility of human freedom that much clearer. ■

Colin Sparks

The slippery path

I HAD been looking forward to the response to Claire Gray's letter published in June *SWR*. I was disappointed.

In her letter Eileen Cook says that the very publication of such a letter was 'both counter-productive and insulting to readers'. Speaking for myself I found it neither of those things. I don't know Claire Gray, nor do I know her politics, but it seemed to me that her letter was written in a comradely and constructive way. It raised some serious questions for socialists and it was hardly the work of a crazed right winger.

If we feel that an argument is mistaken, whatever the argument, we should explain why we think it is mistaken and not simply dismiss it out of hand as Eileen Cook does.

Maggie Mariscotti's letter was a much better attempt to address Claire Gray's point about individual rights and collective responsibility. However, I think she lets herself down by taking her argument along a path that can prove slippery, and has led in the past right into the arms of the anti-abortionists.

Maggie states that the stand of the pro-abortionists 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 and lousy conditions'.

Of course as socialists we are against all this, but to use this as a major plank in an argument for abortion seems to imply that in a system where things like 'manipulation into low paid jobs' and so on did not occur, for example, in a socialist society, then the argument for abortion would disappear. It would be hard to argue that the demand for free and legal abortions is only legitimate under capitalism.

Maggie goes on to say, 'Working class women don't need to be reminded by Claire Gray that a thirty week old foetus is identifiable as a baby and can be destroyed. We are well and truly aware of the sanctity of human life.' If she does not need to be reminded we must conclude that she believes this to be true: ie a thirty week old foetus can be identified as a 'baby' and qualifies as 'human life'.

I for one do not accept this, if I did then I would certainly not be in favour of abortion on demand.

It seems to me that the only way we can consistently argue for a woman's right to an abortion on demand is if we maintain that a foetus is just that, a foetus: not a 'baby'—not after thirty weeks or any other amount of weeks.

A baby and a foetus are two different things and unless we keep this distinction clear then the logic of our argument could lead us to some very frightening places. ■

Blazes Boylan
New York

Down to earth

CLAIRE GRAY (June *SWR*) talks about the collective rights of society. In talking of collective rights, however, she ignores the fact that society is divided into two antagonistic camps

Having abstracted society from reality, she then gets on to talk in the abstract about the *individual* 'rights' of foetuses and babies. She asks whether a woman has the right to abort a foetus or kill a week-old baby, without asking the more pertinent question—whether society has the right to burden individual women with the responsibility of raising children, from which capitalist society benefits.

Socialists do not advocate infanticide. Neither do we call for the prosecution of women who kill their newborn babies or abandon them to die (as in the Kerry babies trial). Instead we look to the economic and social conditions generated by class society which leads to such practices.

The *Communist Manifesto* starts from the position that history is the history of class struggle and ends with the assertion that no section of the working class has interests separate from the working class as a whole. This is our starting point, when, as revolutionary socialists, we campaign for women's, black or gay rights.

Yet the liberal tone of Margaret Renn's article which places such stress on the rights of individual women without explaining that abortion is a class issue, opens the door wide open for objections like Claire's. Some socialists do not like abortion not 'for some reasons of their own', but for badly thought-out reasons.

Socialists should support the universal rights of women to abortion at any stage of pregnancy because we do not trust the bourgeois state to protect individual rights even where they *do* exist, and because working class women in control of their bodies and their lives can become confident class fighters.

Claire attempts to develop a materialist ethical stance on the 'sanctity of human life'. The truth is that we can't float about class society constructing moral theories. Far better to stay on earth and join the class struggle. ■

Cathy Eastham
Preston

The secret road to socialism

A REPLY to the letters criticising *Workplace Notes* (April *SWR*) is called for. First some facts. The comrade concerned is an extremely experienced militant who did indeed weigh up the balance of forces with considerable realism.

From this it was apparent this workplace presented a lot of problems. In particular, the management was virulently anti-union, and there was not the slightest vestige of organisation on the shop floor.

The comrade worked on the night shift (about 20 workers), which was completely isolated from the majority on days. Of course, he sounded out the few people around him and found a couple who agreed that things needed to be done. However, they all believed—rightly—that even limited action on the tiniest of issues would get them sacked.

So there were two alternatives. He could keep his head down on the night shift and hope for the best, or he could try to force the pace. It is the first of these which is truly the secret road to socialism, if it can be called a road at all. In practice it means abdicating leadership without improving the chances of survival, since it is impossible to pick up on the trade union issues, even on a small scale without running an excellent risk of dismissal. You are reduced to waiting more or less passively for a major revolt of some kind to break out.

The comrade therefore decided to break out of his isolation and to agitate among the whole workforce, while trying to preserve his anonymity for the time being. This worked well. Only the first leaflet was a 'dark glasses' job, to test the response. After that local SWP members leafleted the factory on at least three of these occasions. The results were exciting, to put it mildly: delight among the workers and furious resentment from management.

The two meetings which were organised went well, and it was only the casual incompetence of a union official which destroyed the whole campaign—in the nick of time, from management's point of view. Agreed, this was a predictable piece of behaviour which should have been better guarded against, but it certainly does not mean the whole strategy was wrong.

Comrades should appreciate that there is a big difference between organised workplaces with decades of struggle behind them and anti-union sweatshops in small towns. In this case caution was obviously essential, but which is

better: cautiously to do virtually nothing, or cautiously to try and force the pace? ■
Howard Senter
Slough

But Is It art?

FEW SUBJECTS cause Marxists so easily to discard logical thought in favour of emotional triumphalism, than the relationship of music to society and politics.

At Marxism 85 Ian Birchall pleaded with a packed meeting to 'beg, steal or borrow the new Style Council album'. Bernie Wilcox, in the last issue of the *Review*, urges his socialist readers to acquaint themselves with the same record.

Immediately questions spring to mind. Why should we exhort our relatively small and politically well-defined audience to buy this album? Are the lives of those of us unable or unwilling to procure this artefact significantly poorer than those lucky enough to have heard the splendid sentiments of Paul Weller?

If I was a Marxist with a passion for soul, reggae, jazz or classical music, I would be quite entitled to feel that the SWP had little to offer me, if familiarity with Paul Weller's lyrics is a desirable asset for social and political acceptance in the party. But of course what binds us together as participants in Marxism 85 or readers of *Socialist Worker Review* is our desire to abolish the class system, not our musical preference.

A completely different matter of course is, say, Chris Moore's fine article on the miners' strike in *New Musical Express* or a positive review of the Style Council in the same publication. The difference is that we are talking about two different, and not significantly overlapping, audiences.

Following on from that, it is clear that *our* criticism of Weller should not be in terms of how closely his lyrics fit in with the politics of the SWP. Rather we should be arguing that Paul Weller and his fans should develop those ideas to their logical conclusion and join an organisation dedicated to overthrowing the unjust system which he highlights. At the very least we should question what solution *they* have to offer.

Secondly, if the production of a significant work of art warrants being brought to the attention of our small audience it needs to be placed in some sort of political and social context. This is the great value of, for instance, John Rees' article on Bruce Springsteen. Through an analysis of a particular musical phenomenon, he also attempts to further our political understanding.

Our 'support' for the latest release with politically right-on lyrics is, in reality, the worst sort of opportunism. We achieve a lowering of our musical criticism to the level of NME at its worst. But far more crucially, we let off the hook those people whose sole contribution to the solution of the crisis of capitalism will be to buy the new Style Council album and vote Labour in the next election. ■
Chris Glenn
East Dulwich

Russia: who to blame?

IS MANSON'S letter (June *SWR*) criticised the Bolsheviks' seizure of power. But without the Bolshevik Party there would have never been a revolution. It was only because the Bolsheviks were able to show in practice that they represented the interests of the working class best, that they were able to mount a successful insurrection.

They demonstrated this during the Kornilov affair in August. General Kornilov wanted to crush the soviets and establish a military government. However, the Bolsheviks rose up from illegality to defend the soviets by mobilising detachments of Red Guards to fight and then defeat Kornilov's forces.

As a result of this four day crisis the Bolsheviks gained a majority in the two most important soviets: Petrograd and Moscow.

The letter claims: 'The rise of Stalin and the bureaucracy was inevitable if the party remained in power.' However, two important factors are ignored. The poverty and backwardness of the country were immense. It is an instructive fact that the average income per occupied person in Russia in 1913 was only 81 percent of the corresponding figure for Britain in 1688.

Secondly, a workers' revolution cannot be consolidated in one country alone because the capitalist countries force a 'socialist' one to compete on its terms. Presently in Russia accumulation of capital takes place because it is forced to compete with the US in the arms race.

The impact of this military competition on the Russian economy can be seen by the fact that 15 percent of the GNP is allocated to arms expenditure—a bigger proportion than in any other country in the world.

The bureaucratisation of the Soviet regime was not a technical or organisational error of the Bolshevik Party. Rather it was to do with the capitalist system of states strangling and killing socialism in its infancy. ■

E Mustafa
South London

Only two legs to stand on

I WAS INTERESTED to read Norah Carlin's review *Animal Attitudes* (May *SWR*). The question of a Marxist position on animal rights is of far more importance than many socialists seem to realise. Norah, however, has some highly questionable opinions regarding ecology and animal liberation.

To dismiss all ecology as 'trendy' is to totally ignore both the importance of ecological issues, and the dedication of those activists who are attempting to bring about a less polluted, safer and more pleasurable environment for us all.

The level of commitment of such activists is unquestionable. The real problem with ecology groups is that their political outlook is basically reformist. They do not realise that the interests of ecology and capitalism are totally incompatible.

The same arguments apply when considering the 'animal liberation' movements. Those aside however, Norah misses the point when she attacks the ideas of animal liberation. It is not 'false and incoherent' to fight against the atrocious suffering which laboratory and fur-trade animals are forced to undergo. I feel that Rosa Luxemburg's belief 'that no living creature should be harmed unnecessarily' is totally correct, and should be the position we all adopt.

This raises the question, however, of what is 'unnecessary' harm. This is simply a matter of commonsense. We have to take measures against 'malarial mosquitoes or harmful bacteria' for simple reasons of survival, and I doubt that any 'animal liberators' would dispute this.

It is certainly *not* necessary, though, that women wear fur coats and trinkets which require that beautiful and innocent creatures live in unimaginable misery or die slow and agonising deaths in traps. The use of animals for the manufacture and testing of cosmetics is also unnecessary, as are many 'medical research' experiments.

We tend to forget that we are a species of animal ourselves. Furthermore, we are not the only species that is capable of communication, compassion and social organisation. Surely if as socialists we endeavour to respect the rights of other human beings, then it is only fair to respect the rights of others.

David Harris
Newcastle SWP

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"The boys are marching"

IN SEPTEMBER 1911 British school kids entered the stage of history. Inspired by the repression of school and the militant union strikes of the previous summer, they took to the streets to raise their demands.

It began in Llanelli. A boy was punished for a minor offence and the school walked out in protest. After a short demonstration they returned to their classes.

The next day children from schools in the Edgehill district of Liverpool went on strike. They elected a strike committee which presented demands to the teachers: abolition of the cane, an extra half-day holiday per week, payment for monitors.

Then they marched to all the local schools calling for support. Blacklegs were beaten with sticks and, as the *Northern Daily Telegraph* reported: 'Such was the outlook at one time that the calling out of a company of boy scouts was suggested.'

As the strike spread it became clear that boy scouts, called out or not, would not be enough to control the action. In Manchester appointed pickets marched around the town armed with sticks and toy pistols to 'frighten the strike-breakers'. Local newspapers, who at first ridiculed the strike, now recorded it with growing alarm. Police were stationed at school gates.

The elected flying pickets—boys aged from five to 13 with 'picket' cards pinned to their coats—left their areas to raise support from neighbouring schools.

From Shoreditch they went to schools in Islington:

'Just as the scholars were going into school about ten strikers appeared on the scene, armed with sticks, stones, bits of iron, and similar weapons. They threw stones at the school windows, and the policemen on guard at the schools had a difficult task in quelling the disturbance.'

Pickets in Sheffield chased 'strike-breakers' into the school yard and dragged them out. In the Potteries:

'Schoolboys armed with sticks and stones attacked the Northwood and Grove Schools at Hanley, and a dozen panes of glass were smashed at each school, while windows at other schools were also broken.'

In many areas the mere arrival of pickets had the desired effect. An Aberdeen paper wrote:

'The boys, being apprised of the presence of a large number of strikers outside, revolted. They banged on desks, and in a wild rush to get outside to join the other strikers they smashed the fittings.'

Elsewhere they used their belts to strap school gates together and marched through the streets smashing windows and lamps and chalking their demands on walls.

The demands were often presented to the press by the strike committees. In Montrose the list included: steam heating apparatus, a fixed age limit of 14, shorter

hours, potato-lifting holidays, no home lessons, abolition of the strap, free pencils and rubbers.

The most popular demands were for fewer hours and no cane. In Darlington they only wanted one hour in the morning and one in the afternoon, while in Durham they asked to:

'...start school at 9.30 in the morning until 12 noon, begin again at 2pm until 4pm, and unless these conditions are forthcoming, Alderman Costelloe need not hope to be Gateshead's Mayor next year.'

In many areas the demands included payment for attendance. In Darlington it was a shilling a week. In more radical Leicester it was 30 shillings. In Newcastle the banners asked for a penny to be given out of the rates to each boy every Friday. (Girls were not generally involved in the strike. The only reports of girls' schools joining in come from a few towns in Scotland and one from Portsmouth.)

By mid-September strikes had been reported in over 60 towns. Police were being regularly used against the 'rolling columns' of schoolkids.

Children arrested

At Tower Bridge police court in London, 'Two tiny tots aged six and eight were brought before the magistrate and were charged with wandering abroad without proper guardianship.' (These 'tiny tots' apparently pleaded their own defence—that they were on strike, not wandering—and were 'released'.)

The largest strike was in Dundee. A local newspaper wrote: 'Rowdy scenes occurred in Dundee yesterday in connection with a strike of schoolboys. No fewer than eight schools were involved, and it was calculated that by the afternoon several thousand boys had mutinied... The boys paraded through the town and adopted various tactics to secure accessions to their ranks. A company of them paid a visit to the High School and, armed with sticks and missiles, they created a demonstration.'

In most areas, however, it was a minority that came out. The average was from 50 to 80 in the schools affected. Where it was less, teachers easily picked off the leaders and the punishments were harsh. Caning was a minimum. Black marks went on character references which were needed for finding work.

Parents' response varied around the country. In some areas they encouraged the action. In others, they tried to break the strike by dragging their kids back to school. Some even mounted counter-pickets on the gates. But it was in the towns most affected by the summer strikes of the seamen and dockers, the rail and mill workers, that the school strikes were the strongest and used the methods of the trade unions.

September 1910 to September 1911 had been the first phase of militant working class struggles that was to last until 1914. Starting with a miners' strike where violent clashes had deeply affected the Welsh communities, the focus shifted in June to transport strikes.

First it was the ports. Then a national rail strike. The strikes were militant and were met with armed violence. On 15 August two strikers were killed in Liverpool, and a few days later two more were shot dead in Llanelli—the town where the school strike started.

Almost all the strikers came from council schools in the poorest areas of the industrial towns. Most of them worked for part of the week. All ate and lived together in cramped homes. In towns like Dundee, the jute mill owners (the largest employers of child labour) had built classrooms in the mills since being required by law to ensure the children were educated.

There was thus little separation between school and factory, between growing up and grown-up. The little ears were not protected from the political discussion and harsh realities of the day.

The authorities called them the 'truant class' and rewarded them with an education of inspections, table-reciting and caning. The poorest were singled out for the worst treatment and were usually prevented from joining the more enjoyable sports and science lessons for lack of money.

And it was these children who discovered a new world during the strike. Some paraded in the streets singing strike songs like 'Tramp, tramp, tramp, the boys are marching' to the accompaniment of tin whistles and mouth organs.

Others sat around in groups debating, discussing and electing their representatives. Some wrote new music and put new words to old songs, while others created street theatre. Some went swimming and picnicking and others went blackberrying.

The strike changed little in the education system, but in the weeks that it lasted the children labelled 'dunces' and 'rogues' showed what they were capable of when briefly freed from the monotony and repressiveness of school and factory. ■

Clare Fermont

Thanks to Dave Marson's pamphlet *Children's Strikes in 1911 History Workshop Pamphlet No 9*.

