

# socialist worker Review

May 1987 Issue 93 60p

## Gorbachev's Gamble



Origins of the  
cold war

Chris Mullin  
on the  
Birmingham  
bombings

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## GENERAL ELECTION

# Tactical treachery

"THERE is only one logical conclusion for those of us who put the defeat of Thatcher first. It is, in every constituency, to vote for the candidate who offers the best chance of beating the Tories, whether Labour or Alliance."

It hardly comes as a shock to read Eric Hobsbawm's advice to readers of this month's *Marxism Today*. The direction of that publication has, after all, been clear for some time now. Its aim is to fashion a popular front alliance of all those to the left of Thatcher.

But rightward moving Eurocommunists are not the only ones taken in by the idea of tactical voting. Many traditional Labour supporters are also under pressure to accept the idea in the face of what seems overwhelming evidence from the opinion polls that Labour cannot win a majority government.

The argument goes that there is today, as

there was in 1983, an anti-Thatcher majority. But neither Labour nor the Alliance can win on their own, and so simply by backing one or the other that majority which opposes Thatcher can in effect be responsible for allowing her to win a third term.



**Eric Hobsbawm: guru of the tactic**

The argument has two major flaws. It has to firstly exaggerate the horrors of Thatcherism and then play down the extremely right wing policies of the SDP and indeed Labour. So Hobsbawm describes the present government in apocalyptic terms:

"This appalling government, by far the most dangerous and disastrous in 20th century British history, ought not to be allowed to do even more irreversible damage to Britain."

In the same issue of *Marxism Today*,

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Martin Kettle tries to claim there is no difference between Labour and the Alliance:

"The Alliance should be regarded as part of the reformist Left, along with Labour. It is a competitor with Labour, but it is not an enemy, as the Tories are."

Yet the idea that the Tories are damaging some mythical "national interest" while the Alliance has a much more benevolent approach simply doesn't hold water. David Owen has made it crystal clear in recent weeks that he is all too willing to form a coalition with the Tories—what he rejects is any such cooperation with Labour.

A vote for the Alliance is clearly a vote against the working class—for cutting public spending; for attacking the unions; for using the racist and anti-gay cards, as the SDP and Liberals are doing in many Labour constituencies.

But, some socialists will argue, there is little difference between the policies of Labour and those of the SDP. So if you are prepared to vote for one to keep Thatcher out, why not vote for the other?

At the heart of this argument lies a confusion over why socialists call for a vote for Labour. It is emphatically not because Labour is the "lesser evil".

Labour governments are as capable of attacking workers' organisation, of holding down wages or of fostering facism as any other government. The Wilson and Callaghan governments from 1974 to 1979 were a case in point.

All governments are in any case constrained by the fortunes of the capitalist system itself. In a period of boom this can mean that even Tory governments are able and willing to concede reforms to working people.

During prolonged crisis and recession, all governments whatever their political hue will be forced to attack workers' conditions and living standards in order to increase the profit levels of the capitalist class.

Socialists call for a Labour vote because Labour is what Lenin described as a "bourgeois workers' party". It is a pro-capitalist party which nonetheless retains substantial links with working class organisation through the shape of the trade unions. It was created to represent the unions in parliament.

It is therefore likely to take more notice

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of the union bureaucracy. Even these very tenuous links with workers are something which the ruling class would like to break.

This explains the media barrage in recent years to try to stop individual unions from affiliating to the Labour Party. It explains why today there are constant attacks on Labour from the media and big business.

They would like a situation where the only electoral choice for workers is two openly pro-capitalist parties, neither of which has any connection with the organised working class. This is the situation which prevails today in, for example, the United States and Ireland.

The two major Irish parties, Fianna Fail and Fine Gael, simply represent two wings of the capitalist class who for historical reasons found themselves representing different interests. The same is true of the Democrats and Republicans in the United States.

The fact that there is no major party in either country which has any organic connection with the working class only serves to strengthen the ruling class. The working class and the unions are also weakened.

The main aim of the SDP split from Labour in 1981 was to bring about a similar weakening inside the working class. Both Owen and Thatcher would like to get rid of Labour from the political scene. It is for this reason that every socialist has to argue for a vote for Labour in the coming elections.

We should have no illusions that Labour can deliver anything for workers. Its deep commitment to the maintenance of the system means it will pursue policies which help our rulers.

But support for Labour is at its most basic level a class question. It is about defending the organisations of the working class, however feeble and imperfect they are.

This is what makes the line of *Marxism Today* so right wing. It represents the abandonment of any commitment to working class struggle, and a willingness of erstwhile "Marxists" to collaborate with openly pro-capitalist parties.

Many socialists will see no alternative to what Hobsbawm is arguing. However, the argument is not just about voting, but about whether the working class has the potential to fight, or whether it has to rely

on representation in parliament.

The lessons of France and Spain over the past months show us that the fundamental determination of whether workers fight back lies not in the nature of their government, but in their confidence as a class to take on their rulers.

In Britain too the future of working class struggle does not lie in who has a majority in parliament, but in the strength of the working class. The Eurocommunists and indeed many Labour supporters have already given up on the idea of the working class fighting.

It is important that revolutionary socialists do not do the same. An important part of this is defending working class organisation. That is why socialists can have no part of tactical voting or any other variation on the theme.

### WORLD ECONOMY

## Power beyond parliament

THE FORTHCOMING general election will make some difference to the political situation in Britain. If the Conservatives win another outright victory it may well embolden the ruling class to go on the offensive sooner than would otherwise be the case.

But the underlying conditions which make such an offensive necessary against the wages and organisation of workers will not be altered even if the Conservatives lose.

The two most important influences on the course of British capitalism over the next few years will be the state of the world economy and the level of class struggle.

The election result will have no influence on the world economy. It will have only a marginal and uncertain influence on the class struggle.

Many people assume that the big decisions which determine the fate of the British economy are taken in the corridors of Whitehall and the cabinet meetings in No 10 Downing Street. They think the government can press buttons, issue orders, and pass laws which will make the economy move in whatever direction it wants.

But capitalism simply doesn't work like that. Ninety billion dollars gets traded on the London foreign exchange market every single working day. That money is owned not just by British banks but by massive multinational companies, by all the international banks, and by Japanese pension funds.

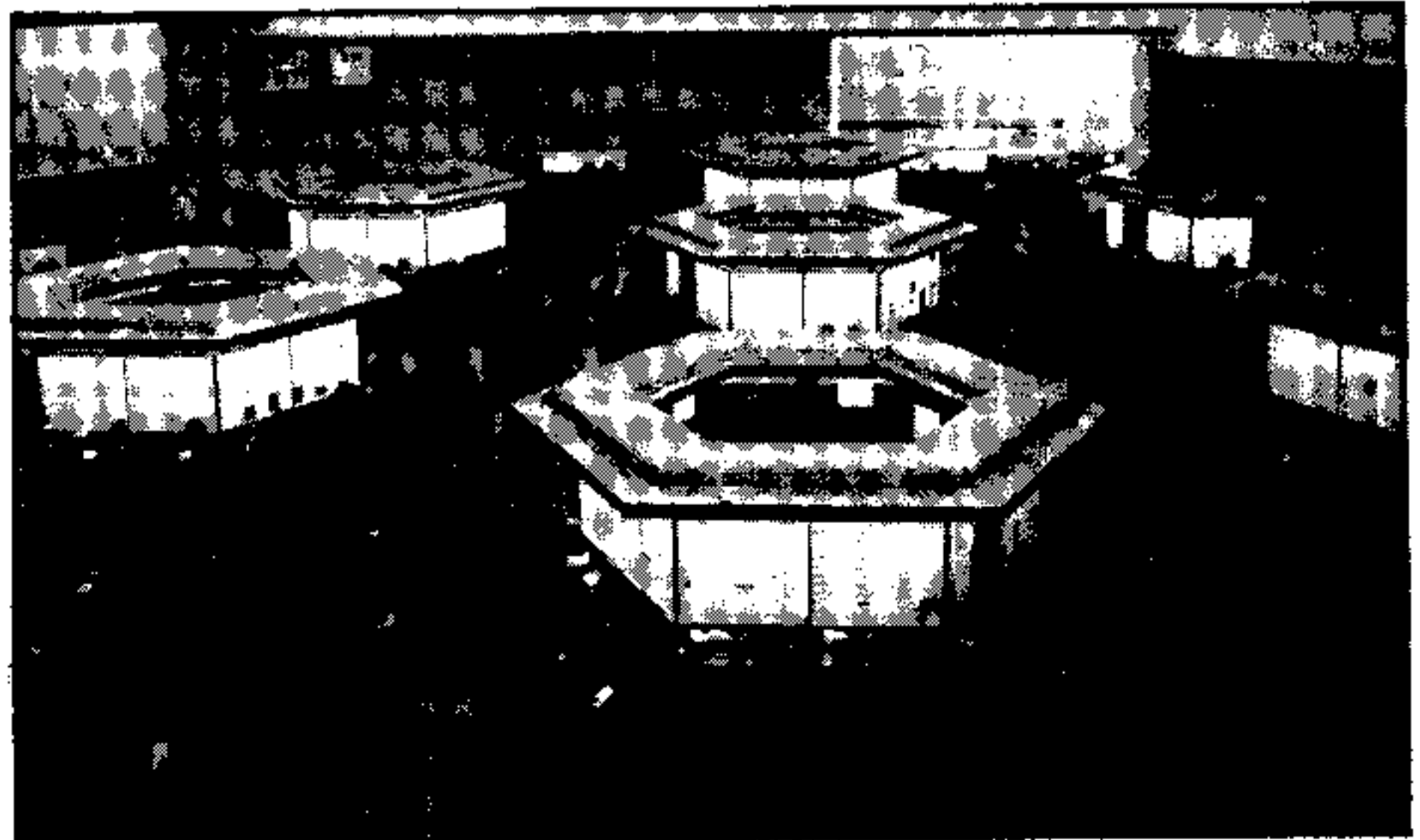
They are what the *Financial Times* in 1983 once described as the "Sheikhs of the currency markets". The *FT* especially referred to "perhaps 20 or 30 companies worldwide led by the giant oil, car and chemical concerns...powerful enough to move the foreign exchange markets through individual dealings".

It is equally wrong to suggest that those companies can control the system. The big oil companies, for example, cannot fix the oil price, any more than OPEC or the British government, if the market is running against them. The system itself is out of control and not even the mighty American government can do anything about it.

What governments can do is "bend into the wind" as the fashionable phrase in the financial press puts it. What that means was well illustrated by the Plaza agreement negotiated by US Treasury Secretary James Baker in September 1985.

The dollar at that time was already falling on the world currency markets from its heavily overvalued level of early 1985. So Baker and the other leading finance ministers from West Germany, Japan, France and Britain met and said they wanted the dollar to fall further.

They didn't actually have to do anything since all round the world the currency



Today the floor is empty—but the speculation goes on.

Sheikhs were selling dollars anyway. Baker was acclaimed as a financial wizard and it seemed as though everything was under control.

But what the Americans could not do was correct what Nigel Lawson in his budget called the "fundamental imbalances" in the world economy.

What they are can be summed up as follows. The US government in response to the deep slump of 1980-2 engaged in a programme of "military Keynesianism". It spent a lot of money on arms and borrowed from the rest of the world to pay for it.

That was good for American capital. But it was even better for the more efficient capitals in the rest of the world.

The Japanese for example were able to run a \$58 billion trade surplus in 1986 by selling much more to the rest of the world, especially the USA, than they imported. They then lent the dollars they'd acquired back to the American government to help cover its balance of payments deficit of over \$100 billion.

All very neat, you might think. Except for the fact that American manufacturers are screaming about Japanese competition, and some of them at least want more import controls like the duties Reagan has just imposed on imports of semiconductors.

At the same time the USA has become the world's largest debtor, owing some \$300 billion more to the rest of the world than the rest of the world owes to it. The dollar has kept falling.

The Japanese pension funds are threatening to stop lending to the American government unless it pays a higher rate of interest. If interest rates rise, half a dozen big debtors as well as Brazil could refuse to pay, stock markets could crash, and the world will once again be thrown into a deep slump.

In this situation Baker and his gang of five met once again on 8 April this year. They announced that they wanted the dollar to stop falling. Nigel Lawson assured journalists that the agreement was "a very satisfactory result". This time the foreign currency markets took absolutely no notice.

The escalation of the trade conflicts between the US, Japan and the EEC; the continuing turmoil on the currency markets; the wild swings on the global stock markets—all are symptoms of much deeper crises in the capitalist order.

There are three interlocking strands to this crisis. Most fundamentally the profit rate which capitalists expect to make on their investments is still, despite the substantial recovery of the last few years, well below its level of the 1960s (see "Questions on the Crisis", April *SWR*). So investment in new factories and big projects is still depressed in all the major industrial economies.

Secondly the dominant position of the United States in the world economy has been seriously weakened. For much of the period after 1945 arms spending by the US was capable of propping up the world economy as a whole. The US acted as the

big spender providing the markets which economies with low levels of military spending, such as Japan and West Germany, could sell to. But arms spending has itself contributed to a weakening of the "competitiveness" of much of the American economy.

That contradiction has now intensified to the point where the Reagan boom has reached its limits. Yet the exhaustion of the American market, and the squeeze on sales from the falling dollar (which makes imports into the United States more expensive) is having a devastating impact on the export-dependent capitals of Japan and West Germany.

Thirdly, those contradictions are destabilising the bloated financial markets of the world. The massive accumulation of debt by governments, companies and individual consumers alike is very vulnerable to another rise in American interest rates.

Stock markets in London, Paris, New York and Tokyo have reached new highs in recent months. In the view of *Bank Credit Analysis*, a respected US publication, the world is in the grip of a "once in a generation" financial mania. A major decline in prices is, it says, unavoidable. It suggests that the crash could begin in Tokyo where "speculation has become as rampant as that seen in the US in the 1920s".

We should be wary of leaping to the conclusion that the world is about to repeat the crash of 1929. That still seems unlikely. The important point to stress is rather different.

In Britain the Tories are crowing about what they call a boom. Wages are rising, unemployment has fallen slightly, tax cuts have been delivered and the pound is up against the dollar. What revolutionaries have to say is very simple. When the world economy goes into slump when oil prices fall again, or stockmarkets collapse, it won't matter tuppence which political party thinks it is in power. They will have to take desperate measures regardless of the rosette they wear on election days. ■

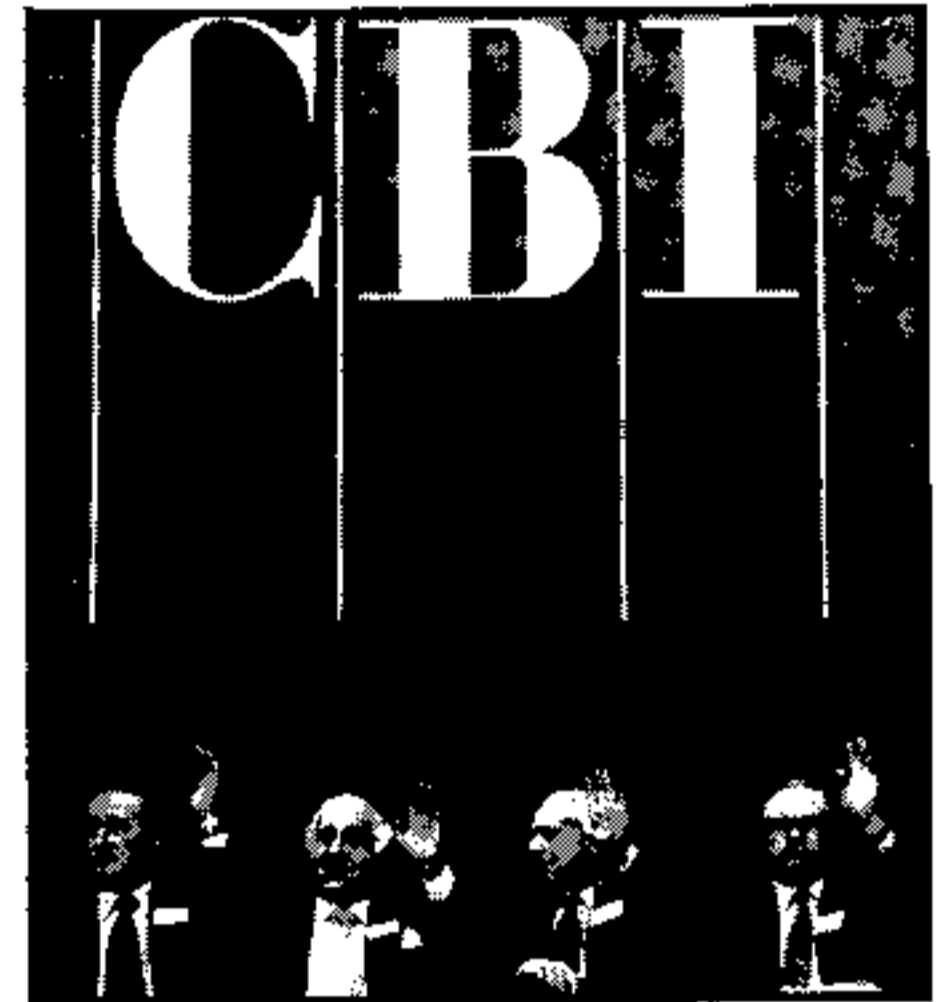
## WAGES

# On the up and up?

ONE OF the reasons the Tories have been doing so well in the opinion polls is quite simple. Most people have more money to spend this year, as they did last year, the year before that (and for that matter every year since 1982). The official figures show that the "underlying rate" (excluding most distortions) of increase in average earnings

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Anyone for a pay rise?

has been at or about 7½ percent since mid-1984. The rate of increase in prices over the same period rose from 5 to 7 percent, falling to 2½ percent, before rising to its current level of 4 percent.

Naturally this does not mean that everyone is so much better off. Looking for simplicity's sake at the earnings of men in fulltime employment (excluding trainees etc) the increase between April 1983 and 1986 for the lowest paid manual workers was 18.5 percent, compared to between 22 and 26 percent for the majority of workers and 29 percent at the professional level (and of course much, much more for managers etc).

The gap between the low paid and the higher paid has been getting steadily wider (for women as well as men incidentally). Even so the figures above compare with an increase of just under 16 percent in retail prices over the same 1983/86 period.

Why have earnings increased at this rate when strikes over pay have been relatively rare (and almost always defensive)?

First, basic increases have held up more than the government and the employers believed possible. Two years ago the CBI was calling for a cut of 2 percent in pay settlements in 1986 and a further 2 percent in 1987, which would have reduced basic pay rises to less than 3 percent. Instead rises have stayed mainly at the 5 to 6 percent level, with some groups of workers getting considerably more.

Secondly, the composition of the workforce has been changing. Large numbers of the workers who have been sacked have

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been low paid and less skilled. Factories now employ many less workers but the proportion who are skilled has increased. Their average pay has risen, and employers have had to pay more to keep them.

Thirdly, there is wage "drift".

Wage drift is important for us not only because it is a thorn in the side of the employing class but because it can be a barometer of the underlying strength and organisation of the working class. It is a complex thing. In the 1950s and 1960s wage drift was often about the ability of piece workers to push through changes to timings and prices on the shop floor.

Some of it is still like this. Bonus payments are pushed up by increased output or productivity and it is hard for management to reduce them. Overtime is often necessary for workers to have anything like a living wage, but it can also be controlled by them.

There is also salary drift, through upgrading jobs, extra annual increments, payments for "merit" and so on. This has been increasingly important as the white-collar part of the working class grows in numbers and organisation. ■

### EQUAL PAY

## Caught in the Act

THERE are two essential assumptions about equal pay common to the politics of the "new realists" and most of the women's movement. The first is that legislation was and is the way to secure women's rights. The second is that men will have to give up their "privileges" to allow women to make progress.

We are now seeing the practical results of such ideas.

In the courts two recent cases have highlighted the problems of relying on the law. In the first, Julie Hayward, a chef at the

Cammell Laird shipyard, had a claim for parity with skilled men turned down on the grounds that her other "contractual benefits" were better than theirs—as a white-collar worker her meal breaks were paid and her holiday and sick pay were better than a manual worker's.

In the second case Ethel Pickstone, a woman worker at Freemans Mail Order, was told her claim for equal pay could go ahead, even though there are both men and women employed in her grade and the higher-grade job with which she is claiming parity.

The main point about both these cases—brought under the 1983 "Equal Pay for work of equal value" amendment to the Equal Pay Act—is that they will go on and on. It is already 2½ years since Julie Hayward won an initial tribunal award and it could be the same length of time before she goes through all the appeals and rehearings necessary to complete the case.

Nearly every other case will also drag on—not just because of the amazing slowness of courts but because of the bureaucratic and cumbersome nature of job evaluation procedures. Any momentum in the claims is thus lost. Any chance of generalising from one woman's success to other claims is very slim indeed.

Contrast what happened to the Ford sewing machinists three years ago. They lost a tribunal claim, but then went out on strike in November 1984. They won a regrading after 3 weeks.

Relying on the law is one thing. Down-rating "male" jobs compared to "female" ones is quite another. Yet this has recently been agreed by the unions representing council manual workers (TGWU, GMB, NUPE). The argument has been—quite rightly—that the so-called caring jobs, such as home helps, have been under-rated, trapping women manual workers at the lower end of the pay scale.

But instead of a fight for a better deal for the women, as at Ford, the union officials set up a job revaluation working party with the employers. The outcome is that some men's jobs are going to be downrated, a notable example being the dustmen. Explaining this policy (long before the revaluation was completed), one official told the *Financial Times*: "It is true that those who have historically commanded a strong place in the grading structure because of their clout, and not necessarily because of what is involved in their jobs, may find their relative position changing."

As yet the negotiators haven't attached new pay rates to the new ratings. When they do there may be hell to pay. One can imagine the feelings of groups of workers who are suddenly told their job has been downrated, even though their conditions and staffing levels have been getting steadily worse and worse. By avoiding an honest fight and by not involving the rank and file the unions look set to score a classic own goal with a risk of reactionary strikes.

In arguing against the ideas of relying on the courts and on "skilled negotiation"(!) we'd do well to remember the lessons of the major struggles over equal pay in the past.



"Women did not rely on the law"

Going back to the sewing machinists at Ford, the reason that they didn't lie down and accept the tribunal's judgement was partly that they'd been caught out before. It was their strike in 1969 which panicked the Labour government into introducing the Equal Pay Act. It was one of the last laws enacted by that government and it coincided with the attempt to push through anti-union laws.

Unlike "In Place of Strife" the Equal Pay Act was welcomed by the unions—but it too was designed to control rank and file pressure. Equal pay was enshrined in law, but only equality with low-paid men, and the employers were given five years to "prepare" for it. Their success can be reckoned from the fact that it took the Ford women 15 years before they took up the demand again and won.

Nevertheless, the legislation did raise women's expectations. When 1975 came along and the law was enacted, the spirit of the previous few years carried women workers forward, even though the class struggle had begun to ebb. There was a wave of strikes in 1976 as women (and men) fought for proper equal pay, mainly in the engineering industry.

Factories and offices across the country were involved, the most famous being Trico in west London, where 350 women and 150 men were out for 21 weeks. They too had a tribunal rule against them. The AEU boycotted it and the claim was won.

The main conclusions to be drawn from this period are as follows: 1) The impact of legislation depends on the confidence of the working class. Though the Equal Pay Act was a check on women's militancy, it nevertheless helped to fuel the fire. Women did not rely on the law.

2) The struggle for equal pay was seen as part of the general battle over wages and conditions. In 1973, even though the national officials of the AEU mishandled and eventually sold out the engineers, one of the four main demands of the workers who occupied 32 Manchester factories was for equal pay. The idea of downrating men to give the women a little more was anathema. ■

# A cross class cocoon

THE ENDING of the Caterpillar occupation will have destroyed many myths for many people.

The 800 workers who occupied the plant for 103 days have gone back to work with no guarantee of keeping their jobs and very little hope of ever getting work once they are made redundant.

So, how was it possible for the defiance of the occupying Caterpillar workers to be transformed into the despair that saw them follow their union leadership to disaster?

For 14 weeks the engineering workers occupied a multi-million pound factory against all the odds. They defied their management, the courts and, eventually, their union leaders.

Moreover, they served as an inspiration to those wanting to fight. Unemployment has ravaged the West of Scotland—when Caterpillar closes in Tannockside, outside Glasgow, unemployment in the area will soar to 50 percent.

The occupation received widespread, if passive, support from workers throughout Scotland. Street collections were netting £15,000 a week, workplace levies and delegations were commonplace.

Yet it failed to generalise politically against the union leaders or against the politics that came to dominate the occupation. Worse still, that support was opportunistically used by the Scottish TUC and the Amalgamated Engineering Union to front their acceptance of right wing ideas and practice—with or without a left face.

When Caterpillar won their court injunction a month before the occupation ended, it surprised no-one that two stalwarts of New Realism—AEU leaders Laird and Jordan—refused to continue their support for an “illegal” occupation.

But it shocked a few militants to discover that the greatest advocate of this line was Jimmy Airlie, the Scottish AEU organiser and a Communist Party member. His folk heroish image (mythical though it is) from the days of the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders battle in 1972 took a battering.

It was Airlie who hammered the final nails into the occupation's coffin. He told the stewards that he would ostracise them from the trade union movement, thus rendering their fight ineffective.

There was increasing pressure from the STUC and the media to end the occupation. The outcome was the stewards buckling under the AEU leadership and recommending a return to work.

They had become trapped by the popular front politics of the STUC. The occupation was characterised by the support it received from all parties—the CP, the Alliance, the Tories and the Labour Party, all of whom shared platforms with bishops, ministers and shop stewards.

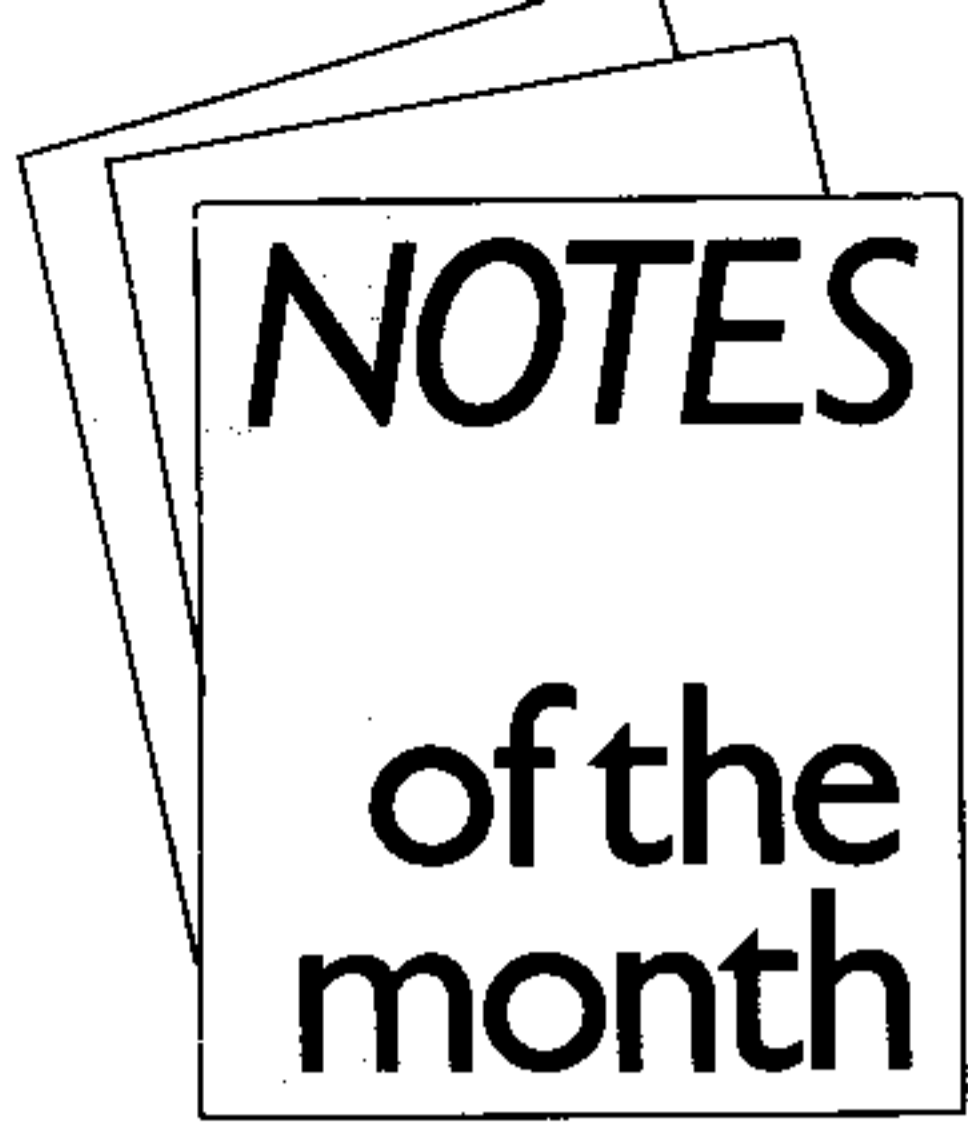
The stewards had believed that they could somehow ‘control’ the STUC. They were sadly deluded. The desire for electoral credibility, the quest for a broad campaign meant workers’ interests being subordinated to their rulers and representatives.

The result—Caterpillar management have assurances of their profits and their equipment, Caterpillar workers have nothing but empty promises and a committee to look for a buyer.

The occupation itself had a high proportion of activists, most workers were involved, whether through collecting money, delegation work or sitting-in. The problem was never one of participation, but politics.

The stewards failed to politically challenge the popular front strategy by presenting an alternative course of action to the workforce. This led to workers fostering the illusion that someone else, like ex-BSC chief Sir Monty Finneston or STUC chief Campbell Christie, could save their jobs for them.

To have pursued another strategy would not have been easy and victory would have been far from certain. But there was an



alternative. A strategy which encompassed the politics of change from below through workers’ self-activity. It would have meant going to meet groups of workers face to face in an attempt to turn the solidarity into action.

Such a strategy would have won the Caterpillar workers no friends among their politician buddies, it would have definitely led to a confrontation with the STUC much earlier and an all-out war with the AEU from the beginning. ■

*Additional notes by Pete Green, Dave Beecham and Julie Waterson.*

## IDEAS THAT CAN WIN

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NIGEL HARRIS

# Moscow's migrants

DID YOU see the story about Moscow having a lower standard of living than the rest of the Soviet Union? The tortuous argument went like this: in order to meet the demand for unskilled manual labour in the city over the past 15 years, 700,000 workers have been brought in from poorer parts of the country. Currently, some 70,000 arrive each year to do the jobs Muscovites will not do. Mostly young people, they arrive on temporary visas and live in dormitories, but after three years of good behaviour, they can get permanent status.

The natives, the beneficiaries of this import of cheap labour, complain bitterly that the city and its services are being swamped by outsiders: they want tighter immigration controls. The city authorities

get workers to move out of some areas—for example, from Central Asia—to Siberia. Big construction projects (for example, the Daykal-Amur railway, the Tyumin oil fields) have great difficulties in recruiting and keeping an adequate labour force.

There is a supply of labour, however, which is fully mobile without high pay: foreign workers. It is not clear how big this labour force is. In the spring of 1982 a Japanese newspaper picked up an article by the Vietnamese Minister of Labour in the Hanoi daily, *Nhan Dan*. The minister said an agreement had been reached with the Soviet Union for 10,000 Vietnamese workers to go to work in the Soviet Union. Commentators speculated that this labour was in part repayment for Vietnam's £2 billion debt to Moscow. The workers were

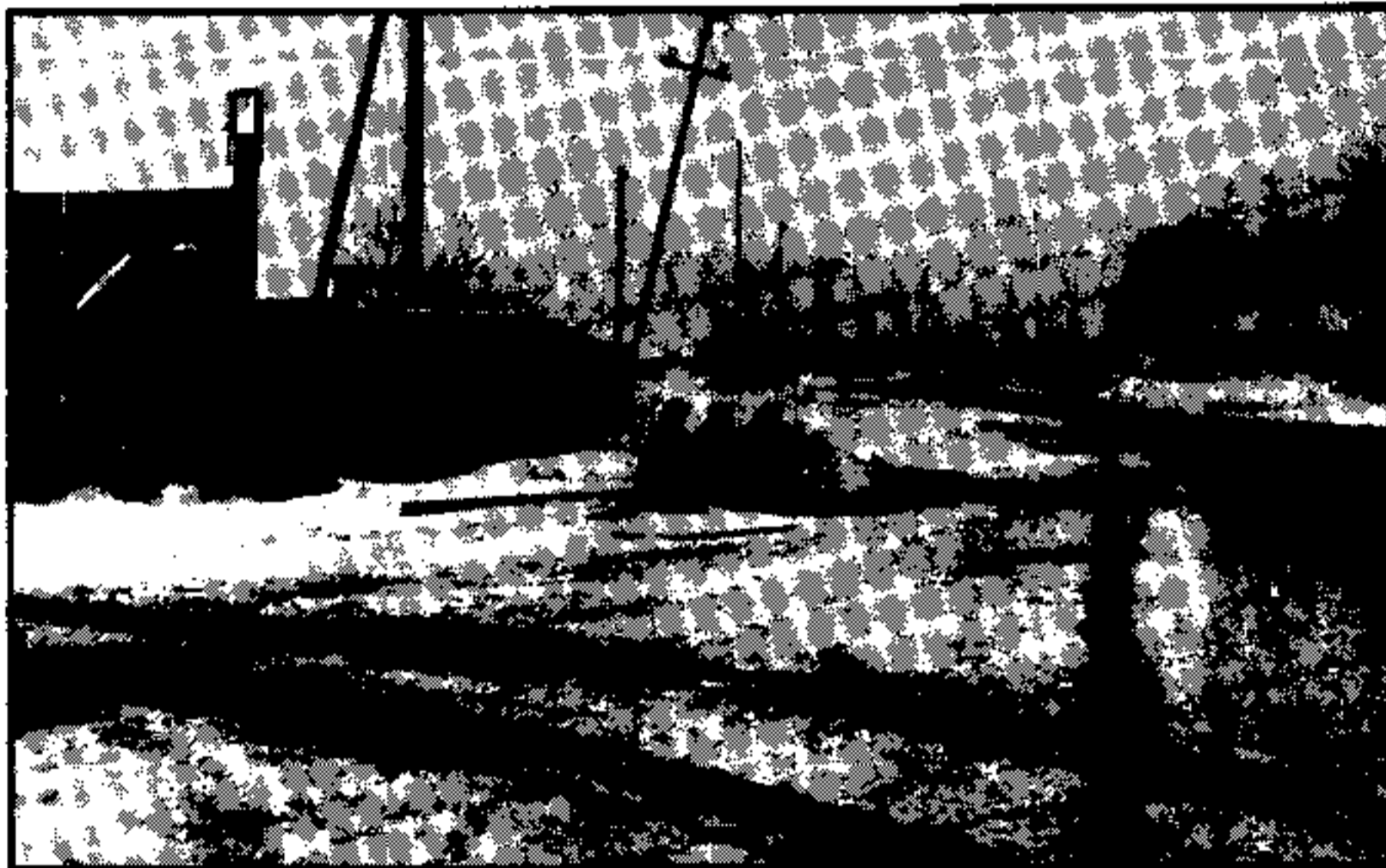
the Soviet Union is not at all new. Since at least 1967 workers have been sent there "supposedly for vocational training but in fact providing cheap labour for Soviet factories". The workers, he says, get "board, lodging, clothing and a small amount of pocket money for the first three years", with full pay after that. Most of the workers are aged between 18 and 25, and none are permitted families. Other sources say the overwhelming majority of Vietnamese workers are sent to Siberia, and the Soviet government retains 60 per cent of their pay as part repayment of Vietnam's debt.

From Vietnamese refugees in Canada come stories of letters received from their relatives, working as "guest workers" in the Soviet Union. They complain of the very long separation from their families, the poor conditions and pay. Some say that between 60,000 and 100,000 Vietnamese workers were officially working overseas. One man, living in a work camp next to a construction site in Siberia, wrote:

"We are given seven roubles a month as allowances, enough to buy ten packs of cigarettes. That is all we get. When I first arrived, they issued me with one pair of winter shoes, a thick jacket, a sweater, a pair of trousers, one cheap shirt and some undershirts and shorts, to be used for the next three years... When I left home, I never expected life in this Russian region would be so wretched. Winter is raging right now..."

The issue is not the same as in the United States for the numbers are small alongside the Soviet labour force (37 million employed in industry, 11 million in construction). But the mobility and the cheapness must seem remarkable to Soviet industrial planners, as well as the degree of discipline that must be exercised to survive in Siberia's permafrost—rebel workers cannot run away.

The migration of workers is always a response to the anarchic or accidental location of new employment—the movement of labour "equilibrates" demand and supply. It is essential to maintain profits, and generally costs governments nothing. Furthermore, the migrant is always a good target on which to heap blame for the failures of the government or employers. The same principle seems to be true in the Soviet Union, even though the country still seems to have big reserves of unskilled labour in the countryside and tightly controlled wages. Any increase in the tempo of growth—the target of the Gorbachev regime—can only exaggerate the localised scarcities, forcing either increased wage differentials or increased immigration. ■



Siberia's "wretched winter"

did try to restrict entries more tightly, but on all sides the public employers protested that they could not meet their plan targets unless they had the right to bring in cheap labour.

A few issues ago this column featured the problems of a growing scarcity of unskilled manual labour in Japan (*SWR*, November 1986) and in the United States (*SWR*, December 1986) and it is interesting that similar issues afflict the Soviet Union. The problem in the Soviet Union is less an overall shortage in the country than scarcity in particular places like Moscow. The scarcity is a product of controls—otherwise masses of workers would migrate there, since the wages and conditions are the best.

Siberia is the opposite because of its ferocious climate and poor facilities. Workers will only go there for temporary periods and, by Soviet standards, very high wages. The government has long tried to

to work for five to six years, the minister said, in coal mines, chemical plants, textile and engineering factories and in the south where the climate was warmer. They would be joining "several thousand" other Vietnamese undergoing training as apprentices in Russian factories.

At about the same time, *Radio Prague* reported that some 14,000 Vietnamese workers were working in Czechoslovakia, and another Hanoi daily, *Hanoi Moi*, carried a report that some 50,000 Vietnamese workers were employed in East Germany, Hungary and Bulgaria. *Izvestiya* gave more details on the Russian picture: "over 7,000" Vietnamese, between the ages of 17 and 35, were in training in the Soviet Union for one year; *Tass* amplified—one year's training and four years working.

Nayan Chanda, one of the leading journalists on Vietnam, reported from Hanoi sources that the flow of workers to



# Left limitations

THE WAVE of strikes in Spain seems set to continue. But it is still very much under the control of the trade union leaders.

Unless an alternative leadership emerges among rank and file workers, the strike wave will inevitably peter out with no real gains being made.

So one of the most important questions to ask is: to what degree has the left in Spain responded to the wave of strikes and demonstrations engulfing the country?

Many of the best strike leaders and street fighters have come from the ranks of the two main revolutionary organisations, the Movimiento Comunista (MC) and the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR).

The MC in particular has been in the forefront of land occupations in the southern province of Andalusia for the last three years.

Both organisations have managed to get a greater foothold in the more militant trade union federation, the Workers Commissions, in recent years. This has been much helped by the fragmentation of the Communist Party, which has traditionally controlled it, over the last three years.

MC and LCR members have joined with other left wingers and managed to not only rebuild severely weakened workplace organisation in some factories, but also win positions within the union structures.

But the present lack of any real focus of united leadership to the myriad of strikes and demonstrations shows their successes have been very limited.

The bureaucracy is still dominated by members from one of the three Communist Parties now existing. They are at present arguing among themselves over the call for a general strike. In the meantime all of them are ensuring the actions of their members don't get out of their control.

All of them—no matter what their position on the call for a general strike—are making it clear the strikes are not designed to overthrow the present Socialist Party government, that they are only aimed at forcing a change in its economic policies.

So what are the revolutionary left doing?

Apart from being the best militants in each situation the answer appears to be virtually nothing.

The newspapers of the two organisations, *Servir Al Pueblo* (Serve the People soon to be renamed *To Do*) for the MC, and *Combate* for the LCR, obviously place great emphasis on the struggles going on.

But other than offering detailed analyses of the arguments going on in the leadership of the Workers Commissions, and calling for a general strike, no real specific actions are put forward.

Despite many of its members responding

well to the situation, the MC's *Servir Al Pueblo*—has yet to call on workers to set up their own strike committees and to try and act independently of the bureaucracy.

Calls for the unity of struggles are made, but either abstractly or in the context of calls for the general strike. The concrete unity that could be built now between various sections of workers, students, farm workers and so on is hardly mentioned.

Moreover, neither paper is sold openly. Even at the major Workers Commission rally in Madrid three weeks ago MC and LCR paper sellers seemed few and far between. In fact the most prominent paper on sale was *Nuevo Claridad* the paper of the extremely small *Militant* organisation.

This paper also offered the clearest analysis of the situation. Unfortunately, it is so influenced by the politics of *Militant* that it too could not offer a real road forward. Its central call was for the Socialist Party government to deliver on its promises to workers.

The weak responses of the MC and the LCR flow from the politics of both organisations.

The MC grew out of the major confrontations with the Francoist state in the late 60s and 70s. Its earliest base was in the Basque country.

During the period of huge upturn in class struggle following the death of Franco in 1975 it gained members in many other parts of Spain.

But its basic belief that the struggle for Basque nationalism is key to the overall struggle for socialism in Spain has clouded its overall analysis since.

Not only has it encouraged the growth of nationalist movements where they had no working class base—such as in Andalusia, it has accorded similar roles to other movements, such as the anti-NATO movement and the women's movement.

Its central political strategy is now the formation of a "political alternative" to the Socialist Party and the Communist Party. The MC's role as a party is the focus for the alliance of various movements and groups that will make up this "alternative".

The working class, though obviously important, becomes just another one of the "movements" for revolutionaries to work in and fight to be the leadership of.

The basis of Marxist strategy—the centrality of the working class—has been badly diluted.

The major problem with the strategy—how do revolutionaries build the revolutionary party when they are immersed in being the best at leading the movements—is acknowledged, but no conclusion has been reached.

The LCR, although clearer about the centrality of the working class and the class



Demonstration in Madrid, April 1987

nature of nationalist movements, also accepts the importance of working in and fighting for the leadership of the movements, and according them a central place in the struggle for socialism.

Matters are made worse for the MC by its love affair with Nicaragua. It and the LCR have been in the forefront of organising groups of Spanish workers and students to work in Nicaragua.

All very laudable, except that it has begun to chronically distort its analysis of the state. The MC now make a distinction between "reactionary" and "revolutionary" states. The first must obviously, in the true Marxist sense, be smashed.

The existence of the second depends, however, not on the organisational power of the working class but on the leadership of the popular uprising. In fact the working class is not mentioned in the context of the revolutionary state.

Its success depends on the honesty of the leaders, who may have to use dictatorial powers in order to quell reactionary forces.

None of the three parties mentioned have a clear position on the role of the trade union bureaucracy.

The MC and the LCR have been working together in the Workers Commissions. But their aims seem very similar to that of the Broad Left in this country—the strengthening of workplace organisation on the one hand, but always secondary to that of winning positions in the union machine on the other.

A common complaint on the left is that the trade unions are not militant enough.

Some workers and revolutionaries, including the MC, respond to this by setting up or working in alternative left unions. The MC are at present working in at least two other unions apart from the Workers Commissions.

The LCR, despite its clearer line on working in the Workers Commissions, also believes that there is a fundamental difference between the left and right wing of the union bureaucracy, and that the left wing can be captured.

None of the parties see how the bureaucracy becomes, no matter what its politics, an obstacle to workers' struggles, because of its role as balancing between labour and capital.

There are some good revolutionaries in Spain. But the weakness of their organisations hampers them from building out of the present very, very favourable conditions. ■

Alan Gibson and Miguel Cabrillana

# A fundamental shift

SOCIALISTS IN Egypt are in a state of shock following last month's election results. Even clear evidence that the government rigged the poll cannot conceal a stark reality: while candidates of the left were marginalised Muslim fundamentalists received enormous votes.

There is a mood of panic among some members of the Progressive Unionist Party, or Tagammu, in which almost all socialists are active. "In two or three years we could face an Iran situation", said one member in Giza. "The Ikhwan (The Muslim Brotherhood) have made a leap forward. Now we must hope for a big increase in working class struggle—otherwise the future is bleak." This view probably exaggerates the pace at which the fundamentalists can gain further ground but it has the virtue of looking squarely at the problems faced by the left.

For other Tagammu supporters their party's failure—and the Muslims' success—can largely be put down to blatant ballot rigging. The ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) of President Mubarak is virtually synonymous with the state machinery and local officials and police disqualified voters, stuffed ballot boxes and intimidated opposition observers, especially of the left.

In some areas where returning officers declared no votes for the left Tagammu members had voted themselves and even acted as poll observers. "This was not achieved by magic, it was plain robbery," said a leftist whose own vote simply "disappeared". Such methods helped to ensure a vote of 70 percent for government candidates.

But rigging can only partly account for the left's dismal performance—it gained less than two percent. The fundamentalists' vote was also fixed in this way—the government's problem here was that the Muslims' real success was far more difficult to conceal. In the end the government allocated them 17 percent. The bourgeois Wafd Party took the balance.

The fundamentalists even upstaged the left in its traditional bases. In Helwan, the country's main industrial centre where rigging was expected to be minimal, one of the left's most popular candidates was beaten out of sight by the government party and the fundamentalists. Even in areas where workers have a long tradition of militant activity, the fundamentalists made important gains.

The shift towards fundamentalism is taking place at a time when the majority of Egypt's population is faced with a new battle for survival. The country is bankrupt. The international debt totals \$36 billion and there is a chronic shortage of foreign currency. While the recent increase

in oil prices and a new tourist boom have given the government a breathing space, it still needs a new deal from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and an agreement to reschedule debts if it is to continue feeding the population. Sixty percent of Egypt's food needs are imported and with the population of 50 million growing at a million a year demand is rising relentlessly.

During the oil boom of the 1970s and early 1980s millions of Egyptians migrated to work in the Gulf. Their remittances proved a lifeline for the Egyptian economy—until recently making up the country's largest source of foreign exchange. But the contraction of the Gulf economies has produced a flood of returning migrants, many of whom cannot find regular employment. Inflation is now rising and there are repeated shortages of some basic goods. Real wages have fallen, while for the unemployed or the millions who scrape a living from occasional work, the situation looks hopeless.

Meanwhile a minority of the population—the "fat cats"—continue to prosper taking advantage of the government's policy of boosting private industry and raking off huge sums from trade based largely on the import of food and luxury goods.

All Egypt is now awaiting the result of talks between the government and the



**Mubarak: gained from blatant ballot rigging**

IMF—which has insisted that new loans are conditional on some move to reduce Egypt's \$2.5 billion subsidy bill. While Mubarak has successfully fought off demands for wholesale reduction of food and fuel subsidies, cuts are inevitable. For the bulk of the population practical solutions to everyday problems are needed. Why then, is the Islamic alternative so attractive?

The fundamentalists contested the election as the Islamic Alliance. This was a coalition of two small legal parties—the Socialist Labour Party and the Liberal Party—and the Muslim Brotherhood, which the government will not legalise but permits to conduct open activity. The Brotherhood was founded in the 1920s and has long been the leading anti-establishment Muslim organisation. Unlike the "true" fundamentalists of the underground Islamic groups such as Al Jihad, which assassinated president Sadat in 1981, the Brotherhood aims to increase its influence by stealth. While the clandestine groups argue for armed struggle against the government, the Brotherhood has increased its influence within existing institutions.

The Brotherhood dominated the Islamic Alliance, absorbing the two legal parties and even winning the support of some of the underground groups. Its main slogans were abstract, even other-worldly: "Islam is the solution" and "God is our aim, The Prophet is our leader, The Koran is our constitution". It also appealed to many backward but potent ideas: the notions that characterise fundamentalism East and West. The assertions that a vote for the Alliance was a vote for God, or even that a vote for other parties was a vote against religion, expressed the kind of appeal made in Khomeini's Iran or in American Christian fundamentalists' conviction that Ronald Reagan is close to the Almighty.

But the Alliance campaign had another dimension. It was sharply anti-government and expressed many of the fears of workers, peasants and the poor. At election rallies Brotherhood speakers attacked corruption, dishonesty and inequality. They spelt out that the problems of the poor were the work of the government, and, crucially, that Islam permitted Muslims oppressed by a corrupt state to disobey it. The Brotherhood stopped short only of using its rallies to instruct followers to take on Mubarak and the state. The fundamentalist camp presented itself as a strong and determined opponent of poverty, injustice and oppression.

For many Egyptians this picture of the organisation fits with their own experience. Throughout the country the Brotherhood—and many of the smaller clandestine groups—have established clinics, schools and welfare organisations, often attached to mosques. They have been of great importance in those areas of the big cities where rural migrants have congregated, providing vital services for the poor, helping to integrate semi-peasants into city life and providing the fundamentalists with a large political-religious periphery.

Much the same operation has been carried out at Egyptian universities, where the main recruiting ground for the fundamentalists (in this case often the clandestine organisations) has been in the student hostels. Here the groups have provided cheap food, books and clothes and, most importantly, a sense of community which helps to orient the large numbers of rural and provincial youth who move to the cities to study. At Cairo University—with 45,000 students the largest in Egypt—the fundamentalists have made such an approach the centre of a strategy which has given them domination of student affairs. The Brotherhood and the underground groups have completely replaced the left, which ran campus politics for much of the 1970s.

The Islamic current as a whole has been able to build a cadre of young petit bourgeois and professionals and a large following among the poor, especially in the marginal, semi-rural areas around the big cities. This was the basis for its strong electoral performance. But the Brotherhood was able to call on one other vital resource—the backing of an important group of big businessmen, mainly traders who made their fortunes in the Gulf states after being expelled from Egypt during the 1950s for their beliefs.

Since President Sadat allowed the Brotherhood to re-engage in activity in the late 1970s—mainly as a counterweight to the left—they have returned to take up a prominent place in Egyptian economic life. Many of Egypt's trading empires—such as Al Hoda, Al Rayyan, Al Sharif and Al Saad—are run by such men. Their money has endowed the mosques, clinics and schools run by the Brotherhood and allowed the Islamic Alliance to launch its election campaign.

The Brotherhood is thus a cross-class alliance; inherently unstable if there is a strong alternative pole of attraction which can draw away its underprivileged elements.

Under conditions of rising struggle by the country's large working class, the contradictions inherent in the Islamic movement should surface, exposing the leadership's interest in sustaining Egyptian capitalism and pulling some of its popular support towards the idea of a secular solution to their problems. So what of the level of workers' activity?

Since the workers' movement peaked in 1977, a combination of repression and lack of leadership has produced only sporadic and isolated struggles. But over the past 12 months, as pressure on living standards has intensified, a series of strikes has taken place in textile mills, on the railways, and most recently, in the engineering factories of Helwan. All were short-lived and largely unsuccessful but proved that the class is by no means wholly passive. If ruling-class pressure continues, further struggles are likely—and if history proves a guide they could erupt into the mass strikes and demonstrations that in 1977 all but toppled the Sadat regime.

Such action could again threaten the



Food riots in 1977—the anger still simmers today

government—and disrupt the progress of the Islamic movement. But only if the left directs its energies towards the working class can it hope to establish a political leadership which can challenge the fundamentalists. The Tagammu is pitifully inadequate to the task. "The party is not a front, not an alliance—it is a sort of container into which all the leftists and liberals have been put," says a member in Giza. The leadership, obsessed by the desire to remain legal and to get into parliament, will have nothing of activists' demands for a real orientation on workers' struggles. Indeed, all the signs are that the election result will move it further to the right, closer to the Nasserists who seek a vague alliance of "patriots" against the government.

There are many excellent members of the Tagammu who are becoming increasingly frustrated by the suicidal politics of their leadership. But they are still immersed in the Stalinist traditions of the left, and find it difficult to take the new direction which is necessary—the best of the rank and file are therefore suspended between Stalinism and instinctive but undefined revolutionary ideas. The result is an extraordinary mixture of neo-Stalinist ideas: the popular front strategy is viewed with disdain but the theory of "stages" has not been abandoned; the working class is said to be the key to change but the peasantry still seen as central; the "parliamentary road" is dismissed but election campaigns are embraced with enthusiasm.

The disorientation is also evident on the international level. Solidarnosc was "a good thing" but the Russian invasion of Afghanistan "understandable". Russia is regarded as "a parody of socialism" but

Gorbachev is seen as a reformer taking Soviet society closer to "proletarian democracy"!

The dangers for the Egyptian left are enormous. Unless a revolutionary current can emerge—one capable of discarding Stalinism in its entirety and directing socialists towards workers' struggles—the fundamentalists will continue to set the pace. Worse, they could come to dominate key workplaces—the textile mills, engineering factories and steelworks where the left has long had a base. The awful spectacle of an "Egyptian Khomeinism" could then become real. And if Egypt's workers are defeated by the profoundly reactionary current of fundamentalism the prospect for the whole region will be dreadfully bleak.

If, indeed, Egypt is about to enter a period of heightened workers' struggle, oppositionists in the Tagammu must move fast to complete their political re-orientation. Time is not on their side. ■

Phil Marshall



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# The left's dilemma

WE RECENTLY reviewed (*SWR* Dec 86) *The Labour Party's Political Thought—a History* by Geoffe Foote. In response Foote, an independent socialist, has kindly agreed to set out some of his views on the problems facing socialists, both inside and outside the Labour Party.

THE LABOUR PARTY has historically represented the organised working class in Britain. No other party calling itself socialist has ever come near to gaining the political strength that Labour has developed since its foundation, and those socialist parties which have historically attempted to replace Labour as the party of the working class have failed miserably.

However, the Labour Party is fundamentally incapable of challenging the foundations of power in capitalist society, and could never really be socialist in any meaningful sense of the term.

This is not merely because of its failure to confront the inadequacies of parliamentary action, as Miliband and Coates have argued, but because the party's very nature prevents it from even seeing capitalism as an enemy. Its socialist face has at the best of times been a veneer for a social Liberalism decked out in trade union colours.

The dilemma which results from this fact is the dilemma which socialists must resolve before any progress can be made to challenging a capitalist system which presents appalling dangers, not only for the working class in the imperialist countries but for humanity as a whole.

Unless socialists are particularly clear about the precise way in which the Labour

Party is a working class party, then unnecessary misunderstandings and animosities are bound to arise.

Labour is the party of the organised working class—the trade union movement. Many arguments could be had about the nature of the trade union bureaucracy, and its genuine reflection of rank and file interests, but whatever the precise relationship between union leaders and members, the paradoxical relationship between Labour and the unions provides both the strengths and limitations of the party.

The Labour Party, as the creation of the unions, is the expression of trade union politics. It was established to protect workers living standards by political action, and as such has remained bound to its union base—financially and, through the union block vote, politically.

The paradox, as noted not only by recent commentators like Leo Panitch but by Lenin and Trotsky as well, usually becomes clear when Labour is in power. In administering the capitalist state, it is forced to attack working class living standards, and is thereby forced to attack the unions which ultimately exist to defend those living standards.

The result has been the constant failure of Labour governments to either represent their constituency properly or to guarantee the conditions for capital accumulation to take place smoothly.

This is a point which would obviously need a certain degree of qualification—to characterise the Attlee government in this way would be too simple—but generally it would illuminate a problem in understanding the nature of the Labour Party.

It can be seen at its clearest in the Wilson government's attempts in 1969 to impose restrictions on unofficial strike activity.

The White Paper, *In Place of Strife* was seen by the government as necessary for the (capitalist) economy to overcome its problem of stagnant growth, which was causing increasing unemployment, balance of payments difficulties, and inflation.

However, the opposition of the unions to the White Paper, reflected in a major backbench revolt as well as union demonstrations and strikes, forced the government to drop its proposals.

The contrast with the success of Heath's Conservative government in passing its Industrial Relations Bill through parliament only underlines the dependence of Labour on its union base.

Thus, Labour's position as a "national" party in office led it to attack the unions, while its position as a *labour* party meant that the attack failed.

This tension between Labour and the unions has marked the history of the party. It has been able to make headway when the unions have been acquiescent—as during the first years of the Attlee Government or in the "Social Contract" period in 1974-78—but it has always faced limits to what it can do, in stark contrast to the Tories.

When the situation becomes intolerable, Labour would prefer anti-working class measures to be pushed through by the Tories rather than suffer the storm which would descend upon their own heads if they were to do so themselves.

In 1931, the Labour Cabinet (wrongly) felt that there was no alternative to cuts in unemployment benefit and public sector pay, but were unwilling to push through those cuts themselves. As a result they agreed to resign—though Macdonald's decision to join the Tories was a shock to them.

They preferred to represent the labour movement rather than to carry through draconian measures, but they preferred resignation to the socialist measures which alone would have genuinely represented working class aspirations.

If Labour is the party of the working class, it is not and never can be a genuinely socialist party. The reason for this lies in the nature of trade union politics—the nature of labourism.

Labourism is a very much over-used term which has traditionally referred to a particular period of trade union history when the New Model unions were politically respectable, disliked strike action as injuring their credibility and bank accounts, and were politically dependent on the Liberals.

This is much too narrow a definition, useful for Labour Party hagiographers but leading to profound misunderstandings of the nature of trade union politics. Its radical aspects are ignored and it is extremely vague as an ideology—as an "ism".

In fact labourism, insofar as it stands for trade union politics pure and simple, was expressed at the very birth of the free trade union movement in this country when Thomas Hodgskin wrote *The Rights of Labour Defended* in 1825. It is both radical and conservative in its implications

## THE LABOUR PARTY MYTH & REALITY

DUNCAN HALLAS



Labour leaders thrive on the myths of Labour's golden past, invoking them repeatedly as elections draw near. This pamphlet looks at the often grubby reality they hide.

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**A poster from 1910—77 years later the way is still blocked**

because it represents the politics of a movement which was organised to defend working class living standards *within* a capitalist society.

Labourism in its radical aspects stressed the need of the working class to separate itself from the employers. There was the vague belief, usually expressed in a semi-Ricardian theory of value, that the workers were being cheated of the fruits of their labour, and that labour must organise in order to redistribute the wealth in a fairer manner.

The employers had too much, while labour had too little, and the purpose of union activity was to cure this maldistribution of wealth by fighting for higher wages.

In its conservative aspects, however, the social system by which wealth was to be produced was never really questioned. The opposition of the labour movement to capitalists was never extended to opposition to capital as a social system. Indeed, unless they were prepared to launch a profound social upheaval, the unions had to work both with and against the employers.

The essential business of union leaders had been that of bargaining and negotiation for an improvement in the terms by which labour power is bought and sold, not that of the abolition of the system of wage labour.

Marx in his critique of Hodgskin in *Theories of Surplus Value*, pointed out that this opposition to capitalists and acceptance of capital as a system was a typical characteristic of English socialists.

It has certainly been typical of political thought as it has been developed within the Labour Party, where there has been a traditional distinction between the wicked capitalists—usually bankers and insurers—who idly reap profits from the honest labour of the community, and hard working employers whose labour deserves a reward as much as does that of their employees.

Any socialist in the Labour Party has not

only had to come to terms with the power of the unions within the party, but with the labourist ideology which underlies their politics. This labourism may not be expressed with the clarity with which Hodgskin expressed it at the birth of the union movement, but it is always present because it expresses trade union practice within capitalist society.

Keir Hardie concentrated on this labourism, rather than his version of Christian Socialism, in order to defend the new Labour Party from Liberals and Marxists alike, and all subsequent socialist thinking within the party has had to relate itself to this labourism, if it is to have any chance of success. This is why Labour at its most radical—as in *Labour's Programme 1973*—emphasises only the redistribution of wealth rather than the abolition of the system which lies at the root of wealth's maldistribution.

If a group holding any of Labour's diverse ideologies—Christian Socialist, Guild Socialist, revisionist, corporate socialist—refuses to adapt to the labourism which underlies the unions, it either cuts itself off from the mainstream of Labour thinking and as often as not leaves the party—like the Independent Labour Party on the left in 1932 or the SDP on the right in 1981—or it is brought back into line—like the Wilson technocrats in 1969.

This labourist ideology also has limits, of course. As it involves a bargain over the sale of labour power, labourism tends to be more compatible with gradual and piecemeal solutions of capitalism than with radical and fundamental solutions.

The socialist veneer with which Labour has covered itself since the adoption of its 1918 Constitution has almost always been interpreted in a gradualist manner, and political solutions which involve either the overthrow of the state or the denial of national loyalty have been either excluded or relegated to the status of eccentricity.

Marxism could be only acceptable within the Labour Party if it is shorn of any commitment to a workers' dictatorship—if

its radical economic analysis is abstracted from its revolutionary political conclusions. Marxists who refuse to do this have been expelled as soon as they become a threat to the party's functioning—as happened to the Communists in 1925-27 or to the Socialist Labour League in 1964-65.

Labourism—its flexibility and limits—is the key to the variety of political ideas and positions which have developed within the Labour Party in the last eighty-odd years. The ability of new ideologies to fit into the labourist framework determines their chance of political success in the party.

This does *not* mean that all new ideas are reducible to labourism. It merely means that the different political ideologies within the Labour Party are forced to relate and adapt to this labourism if they are to have any chance of success. It marks the boundaries within which Socialist thinking can evolve within the party.

This does not, of course, answer the basic question of how socialists are to relate to the Labour Party. In many ways, it only reinforces the dilemma.

The sad fact is that socialists who have left the Labour Party in order to create a genuine socialist party have suffered the fate of finding themselves in a political desert.

This has been the fate of the SDF, the Communists and the ILP in the past. When the ILP left the Labour Party in 1932 to set up a (vaguely) revolutionary party of the working class, it collapsed, dropping from 17,000 members in 1932 to only 4,000 members in 1935, and they eventually disappeared.

As a party which was not a democratic centralist party, it was open to become a happy hunting ground for both Stalinists and Trotskyists, but it did not fail because it was not socialist enough. It failed because it was not connected to the Labour Party.

On the other hand, if socialists remain tied to the Labour Party, they become associated with the failure of Labour governments to satisfy working class aspirations. The result of this failure has been to disillusion most working class people not merely with the Labour Party, but with socialism.

The Labour Party is a labourist party, and its socialism is totally inadequate to begin to overcome the dangerous crisis facing us.

The failure of socialists to overcome this dilemma will be fatal. I believe it can be overcome, but the first step must be for socialists both within and outside the Labour Party to recognise the dilemma.

The reason for socialists remaining within the party is their fear of political impotence if they leave. However socialists outside the Labour Party have to find ways of working with the "hard" left, earning their trust and at the same time getting across the basic truth that, in the medium term, political impotence is the fate of anyone who relies on the Labour Party to achieve a new society. ■

**Geoffe Foote**

# GORBACHEV'S GAMBLE

Many in the West are beginning to sing the praises of Mikhail Gorbachev's reform programme. In the East it is being copied by other leaders. **ANDY ZEBROWSKI** looks at the limits of these reforms and their possible ramifications.



**W**HO IS Mikhail Gorbachev? "Mikhail Gorbachev is the most determined Russian revolutionary since Lenin... His efforts make up the most radical attempt to change Russia since it went communist in 1917"—so says Stephen Milligan, Foreign Editor of the *Sunday Times*.

*Pravda* would no doubt agree. But despite the hyperbole it is clear that important changes from the top are being brought about in the USSR and other East European countries. What are they, why are they being introduced now, and can they work?

Since Gorbachev came in in March 1985 he has promised a shake-up. He has become world famous for his two buzz words *perestroika* (reconstruction) and *glasnost* (openness).

By *perestroika* he means more autonomy for the managements of enterprises and therefore less centralised decision making. This is not new. "Market reform" has been seen as the panacea for the East European economies for decades.

The word *glasnost* means literally voice-ness. The idea clearly is that everyone can have a say in the running of society. Gorbachev has compared his *glasnost* with Lenin's (apparently Lenin too used the word extensively). What Lenin meant by *glasnost* was workers running society.

Gorbachev's aims are somewhat more limited. He wants workers to feel they have a stake in the system.

He began with a campaign against the worst excesses by some of the leading bureaucrats. Happily for Gorbachev his anti-corruption campaign managed to end the careers of some of his principal rivals.

Brezhnev's son-in-law was one of his victims. As were members of the Leningrad City Committee and the leadership of the Republic of Kazakhstan—the power bases of Grigory Romanov and Dinmohammed Kunaev.

When Kunaev was removed nationalistic riots resulted in the Kazakh capital of Alma Ata last December. These were the biggest riots in the USSR since the early sixties.

Secret ballots and multiple candidacies have been promised for party elections. In some enterprises there have been elections of managers.

The most important *perestroika* measure had been the devolution from central planning for managers in light industry and the encouragement of small industrial cooperatives at the beginning of this year.

The reforms associated with Gorbachev have not been restricted to the USSR. His most eager follower has been Jaruzelski in Poland. In recent weeks statements have been made that the Polish government will continue the policy of withdrawing from managing enterprises.

Unprofitable enterprises will be allowed to go bankrupt. Subsidies are to be cut by 15 percent this year. Private individuals are to be encouraged to buy shares in state enterprises. Even a stock exchange in Warsaw is a possibility.

In Bulgaria the market reform debate was cut short at the end of last year. But in April this year a new labour code introduced the election of managers. A two-tier banking system has been introduced.

Czechoslovakia's conservative leadership sees no need for drastic reform since the economy has a respectable growth rate of 2.2 percent and a relatively modest debt to the West of 4 billion dollars (Poland's is 33 and Hungary's 11 billion).

But if they are not keen on *perestroika* the Czechs have made some *glasnost* reforms. There has been the obligatory anti-corruption campaign in recent months and election of managers began in March.

The Czech leader Husak who came to power thanks to the Russian invasion in 1968, has made vague noises about further reforms. The result is that popular interest in politics is growing, and Party meetings are very well attended.

**T**HERE have been three kinds of *glasnost* in Eastern Europe since the war. First there is the Gorbachev kind. Really it amounts to the voicing of opinion through controlled official channels.

Then there has been the allowing of independent organisation for intellectuals and students. This has been necessary for the reformers who need allies from outside the bureaucracy against their conservative enemies inside. This group includes a minority of workers interested in ideas for change.

Finally this *glasnost* may spread to workers as a class. They begin demanding and striking for the right to have their voices heard through their own independent organisations such as strike committees and real workers' councils from below.

Market reform *perestroika* has been touted by both Eastern reformers and Western observers as the solution to the economic ills of the "communist" countries.

It suits the Eastern reformers because it draws attention to the inefficiencies they are trying to weed out in their economies. In the West it provides an apology for a market capitalism which no longer exists.

The problems of waste are not restricted to the Eastern economies. Every capitalist, whether state or multinational, needs to make long term predictions about investment. Because of the competitive pressure to accumulate massive investments are made which are not completed, or which produce goods that can't be sold. This could only be avoided if capitalism expanded continually, if there was no crisis.

How much centralised planning there is and how much autonomous decision-making by enterprises is secondary to the problem of over-investment. The market reformers' ideas cannot work because they do not begin to tackle the problems of competitive accumulation on a world scale. The most centralised economy in Eastern Europe, East Germany's, is also the most successful.

The history of the East European economies since the war can be seen as a history of the ruling classes trying to combine elements of *perestroika* and *glasnost*.

The economies were tied to the USSR economy by 1948 for military reasons. The countries overrun by Russian troops at the end of the war had already been systematically pillaged. Those which had been allied to Germany came off badly.

For example, all cars in Rumania were transported to Russia. In Hungary 90 percent of the working capacity of the engineering industry went to pay reparations.

But even the supposed friendly countries were hit. Between 25 and 30 percent of industry was removed to Russia from German Poland.

After 1948 the Russians continued to force the East Europeans to trade on extortionate terms. They made almost 1 billion dollars over seven years from Polish coal alone by only paying the transportation costs.

The first country to break from these expressions of "socialist brotherhood" was Yugoslavia. Bulgaria, Rumania, Albania and Yugoslavia were to be producers of raw materials and food for Russia's industry and workers. Tito was able to split from Stalin because he had come to power without the aid of Russian troops.

In Yugoslavia *glasnost* preceded *perestroika*. In 1950 the workers in every enterprise were told they could elect a workers council and managing board. A year later the 1947 five year plan was aborted and a regulated market mechanism introduced.

There were progressive moves towards more and more enterprise autonomy until 1965 when it was greatly increased. Up to that year 60 percent of enterprise income went to the centre. Now it was to be 30 percent.

Today, the election of managers is seen as a safe way for the rulers throughout Eastern Europe to try and gain popular support from workers to increase productivity.

But in Yugoslavia the reality of the "workers' control" exercised by the workers in the workers' councils was shown in the results of a questionnaire given to 312 engineering workers in Smeredovo in 1965.

They were asked who took the decisions over work norms, wages, planning production, bonus and welfare payments. Nobody got all the answers right. A third of the workers got all the answers wrong.

**A**FTER Stalin's death in 1953 the rulers of the USSR were divided among themselves about how they could extend their support in the population and curb the powers of a police apparatus that even threatened them. The police chief Beria was executed, prisoners were released, and food prices were cut by at least 10 percent.

In June the East German leadership were ordered to ease up on their repression of the population. But economically the squeeze was still on. Productivity norms were raised for the workers. Because of their instructions the police did not know whether they should allow workers to meet about the raised norms. How far were reforms to go?

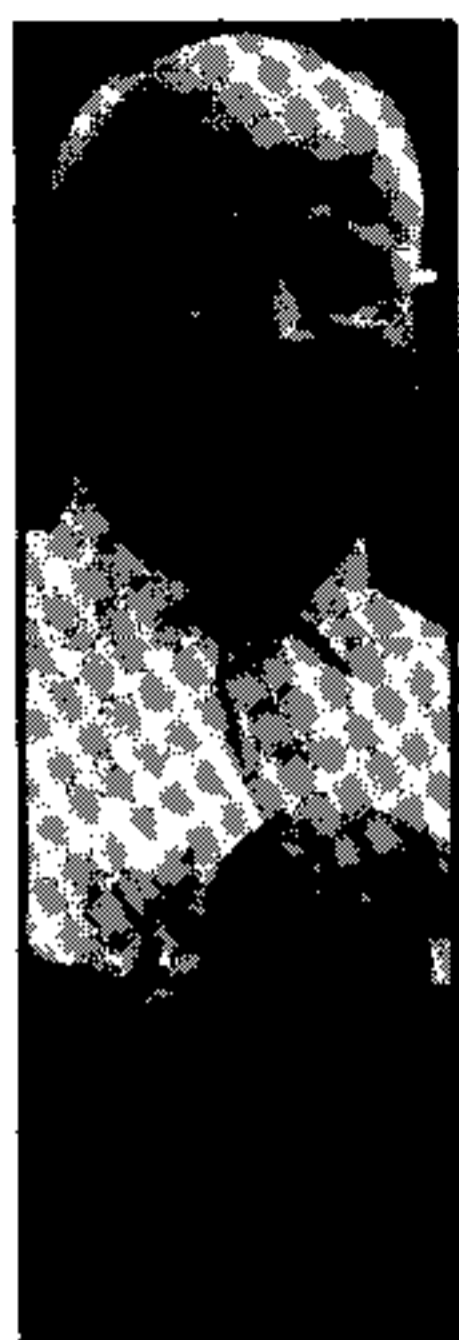
The workers gave their own answer. Building workers struck against the productivity increase and a general strike resulted. Twenty five thousand Russian troops and 300 tanks crushed the unarmed workers in Berlin.

Hungary's leaders were ordered to introduce reforms ten days later. The Russians wanted the leaders of the countries in their empire to introduce reforms that would increase popular support. This process gained momentum after Khrushchev's speech at the Twentieth Congress in February 1956, at which he talked of Stalin's crimes.

The divisions among the bureaucrats outside Russia were more serious than those inside. The Russian regime had been established over decades—not just a few years. Whereas



A poster seen on a Prague wall: Lenin weeps as a Russian tank advances



**KHRUSHCHEV: his  
fate provides a  
warning**

Khrushchev embarked on half-hearted reforms, the reformers in Poland and Hungary had to look for support outside their ranks, since if they failed they knew they faced possible execution or imprisonment.

In both countries in 1956 ideas for change spread like wildfire. Publications were produced and meetings in which people discussed anything from politics to poetry were organised—both independently of the ruling party. This was a *glasnost* far more open than Gorbachev's.

In Poland the reformer in chief was Gomulka who stood for more resources to be devoted to consumption and workers' participation in management. The only market socialism he talked of concerned the peasants and self-employed craftsmen. Gomulka was popular because he had himself been imprisoned a few years earlier.

To defend his position he had gone as far as to order the Internal Security Guard to occupy key points in Warsaw and fire warning shots on the border to halt the approaching Russian tanks.

He even made preparations to arm the workers as a warning to the Russians. Having threatened Khrushchev with insurrection, he came to an arrangement with Moscow on 23 October, the day revolution broke out in Hungary. Gomulka had won.

The workers' councils which arose spontaneously in Poland in October 1956 and which he had encouraged in order to strengthen his position, became simply organs for increased productivity and incorporation by management in the next months. By February 1958 strikes were once again made illegal.

The best form of *glasnost* was seen in Hungary. Ironically the revolution began with a demonstration in support of the Poles, whose struggle was now on the way down.

There were two periods when workers' councils controlled Hungary. The first led to the down fall of the regime, the second was during the Russian occupation. The Hungarian workers were on general strike for 19 days altogether despite the presence of 200,000 Russian troops and 3,000 tanks.

This reform from below was crushed with the murder of over 20,000 people. But there was an increase in living standards after Russia poured in aid to create stability.

The pattern of reformers seeking allies outside the ruling bureaucracy was repeated in Czechoslovakia in 1968. Here the Russians followed what they had done in Hungary rather than in Poland.

Their invasion in August was not only aimed at the Czechs but at the reformers in other countries. What the Kremlin bureaucrats feared was not the ideas for economic reform in themselves. After all market reforms had been introduced in Hungary in March 1968 under Kadar's New Economic Mechanism.

Rather they feared the independent discussion circles set up by intellectuals, students and numbers of workers, and what they might lead to. The invasion was a warning to reformers in

the rest of the Eastern bloc not to go too far.

The ability of the Russians to intervene militarily in Hungary and Czechoslovakia raises an important question. We have already seen how the moves for reform began outside the Kremlin after Stalin's death. So why didn't the reform-minded bureaucrats, in Russia itself, seek support outside the bureaucracy?

This would probably have paralysed the ability of the military to intervene in Hungary and Czechoslovakia and may have led to workers' revolts.

In fact in July 1953 there had been a strike at the massive slave labour camp at Vortuka which contained half a million prisoners and 25,000 miners. All the miners struck as well as half the prisoners. They stayed out for weeks even after 120 of their leaders were shot.

But in Russia the workers' revolts didn't spread. There was not even any independent organisation among the intellectuals and students.

The reason must lie in the strength of the conservative wing in the bureaucracy, which made the bureaucracy as a whole stable. Khrushchev did try some limited reforms in agriculture and industry before he was ousted in 1964.

There had been a serious threat of war between the superpowers over Berlin in 1961 and the Cuban missile crisis in 1962. When Khrushchev was ousted, the US had four times as many bombers and missiles as the Russians. By 1972 there was parity.

The situation was different for the other Warsaw Pact powers. Russia bore then as it does now, the brunt of the Warsaw Pact military budget. Today the US and USSR have about 25 percent each of world arms spending. NATO adds 17 percent and the Warsaw Pact only 4 to this figure. Khrushchev challenged the conservatives only slightly but that proved political suicide for him.

He was kicked out at a time when the conservative bureaucrats, particularly the military and the bosses of heavy industry were gaining in power.

**R**USSIAN rulers were clear about the need to stop independent political organisation. They were less clear about how much market reform they could allow.

It was the pressure of world trade which determined the nature of Hungarian market reforms in 1968. There was a big expansion in subcontracting, especially to the West.

Under pressure from Moscow the Hungarians were forced to curb their reforms between 1972 and 1978. But their trade grew so that today it is some 50 percent of output.

The question of trade was becoming more important than internal market reform for the other eastern European countries as well.

In the first decade after the war the East Europeans hardly traded with the West.

To fill the gap Comecon was set up (East



Europe's common market). But even Stalin had not been opposed to trading with the West on principle.

The collapse of world grain prices in the early thirties had had two effects on Russia's trade. First, the collectivisation and murder of peasants was stepped up to pay for the technology necessary to militarise. Secondly Russian trade with the West was cut to a minimum.

A distinction should be drawn here between the world economy and the world market. The most important competition is in arms production—without arms no ruling class can exist.

Stalin's Russia and the integrated Eastern economies competed with the West almost exclusively militarily after the war.

But during the post war world boom world trade has grown faster than production. Even for the big almost self-sufficient economies like the United States the world market has grown in importance.

Between 1965 and 1979 the share of trade in US output rose from 13.7 to 31.1 percent. In the USSR today the figure is somewhere between 4 and 12 percent of output. This seems like a small amount but it has grown in importance.

All the Eastern economies, except for tiny Albania which was not in Comecon, greatly increased their trade with the West in the seventies to stimulate their growth. But the other economies (except Yugoslavia and Hungary) did not choose internal market reform as a way to engage in this trade. They thought that borrowing and trading would be enough to successfully expand.

Other ruling classes thought likewise. Countries as diverse as Ireland and Brazil, which had taken protectionist measures a decade earlier, now also opened up to the multinationals and banks.

**B**Y 1982 the Comecon countries had a debt of 90 billion dollars. Poland was in deepest trouble. Poland's debt to the West grew to 27 billion dollars by 1981. Over investment on the strength of borrowing in the West had created a problem of waste that dwarfed the issue of whether or not Poland had market reform in its internal economy.

Throughout East Europe the *perestroika* of the seventies had led to deals with Western multinationals. And the workers were again pushing their own form of *glasnost*—at least in Poland.

The revolt against price rises in Poland in 1970-71 and 1976 ensured that the regime allowed more *glasnost*. In the years between 1976 and 1980 several groups of which KOR (the Organisation for Workers' Defence) was the best known produced hundreds of newspapers.

But it was the shock of fifteen and a half months of independent workers' organisation during 1980-81 that is really the main reason for Gorbachev's *glasnost*.

Jaruzelski has boasted that he introduced it first. The truth is that in Poland he is frightened of cracking down too hard. Underground



Solidarity is in reality semi-legal. It still claims one million members and says 600 weekly papers are printed.

*Repression Polish style*

The biggest circulation is *Tygodnik Mazowsze* which covers Warsaw and sells 50,000 copies. Three hundred books are published annually and 300,000 videos have been produced.

It is the fear of such a workers' response which makes Gorbachev so keen on *glasnost*. He needs to get workers to support the restructuring of the economy he believes Russia needs. But he must also be bearing in mind the response of 700 Hungarian miners to their market socialism last August when they were told that the market dictated that they had to lose their jobs. They struck—the most important strike in Hungary since the revolution. The recent strikes in Yugoslavia must add to his worries.

Gorbachev also remembers how Khrushchev was ousted. He won't want to tread on the toes of his bureaucrats too much. Khrushchev failed to reform in a period of boom—the only time reforms can work. The biggest problem Gorbachev faces—that of reducing arms spending—will not be solved in a deepening world crisis. The last time there was a drastic reduction in world arms spending, in the detente years of the seventies, the crisis had not yet bitten.

The world crisis has forced the East European leaders to talk about reforms more seriously than at any time in the last 20 years. It will also ensure that they cannot succeed.

But the *perestroika* and *glasnost* reforms are important for the 129 million workers of the USSR. They are seeing more changes today than at any time in the last 30 years. These changes have created expectations which cannot be met.

# THE COLD WAR CARVE UP

The Truman Declaration in March 1947 marked the beginning of changed relations between the superpowers, which were to have profound effects on the post-war world. Simon Terry explains the origins of the Cold War.



Truman: "Let them kill as many as possible"

**T**HE COLD War began roughly with the Korean War of 1950 and ended with the Cuban missile crisis 12 years later, when the world seemed on the verge of the nuclear holocaust.

Although Russia and America did not openly start referring to each other as Public Enemy Number One until some time after the end of World War Two, the roots of the antagonism go right back to the formation of the wartime alliance.

The alliance of imperial Britain, "isolationist" America and "Bolshevik" Russia was born of necessity in the face of German aggression rather than willing cooperation. It was characterised from the start by mutual suspicion.

Russia viewed pre-war appeasement as proof that the West preferred fascism to communism and was trying to deflect Hitler's ambitions eastwards. This fear was not allayed by the then Senator Truman's comment on the German invasion of Russia that "if we see that Germany is winning we should help Russia, if Russia is winning we ought to help Germany and that way let them kill as many as possible..."

Similarly the West regarded the Hitler-Stalin Pact of 1939 as proof of Stalin's duplicity. The alliance was further undermined by Anglo-American refusal to open a Second Front in Western Europe, and by the justifiable Russian complaint that they seemed to be fighting the Nazis on their own. For most of the war the Eastern Front absorbed between 70 and 75 percent of the German force.

By 1943, with the defeat of the Axis powers in little doubt, the reluctant bedfellows turned their attention to the spoils of war.

America broke with the isolationism and economic protectionism of the 1930s. American capital had to expand, new markets had to be opened up (especially the British Empire), tariff walls had to be demolished and the economic citadels of the world stormed by the liberating forces of "free trade".

These "principles" had been embodied in the Atlantic Charter of 1941 which stated that all nations should enjoy "access, on equal terms, to the trade and raw materials of the world". The fact that America emerged from the war with its industrial output and gross national product virtually doubled, whilst every other industrial nation had seen its economy run down, meant that access would most easily be gained by those flying the Stars and Stripes.

The rhetoric of free trade was the smokescreen behind which American monopoly capital was to penetrate and hegemonise the world, a task smoothed by the financial dominance estab-

lished at Bretton Woods in 1944 with the creation of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

The British economy was in no position to resist American encroachment on the Empire and Churchill's aims were limited to preserving some degree of influence in areas of traditional British interest, such as the Mediterranean.

The practical implications of such aims belied the rhetoric about restoring freedom and democracy. For the British it meant backing the right against the left led resistance movements in both Greece and Italy.

For the Americans it meant supporting the neo-fascist Vichy French rather than the "anti-American" emigre government of de Gaulle. American desperation to keep Italy safe for capitalism led to the installation of a friendly government to which they granted the massive sum of \$100 million, refusing either the British or Russians (let alone the Italians) any say in the matter.

The precedent for the carve up was set.

**F**OR RUSSIAN state capital the requirements were more straightforward. The devastated Russian economy could not possibly hope to compete with America on a global scale. Russian aims were indicated by the 1939 annexation of the Baltic states and Eastern Poland.

Stalin wanted new sources of raw materials and industrial plant as well as a "secure" (ie expanded) border behind which the Russian economy could be rebuilt.

By the end of 1944 Europe was becoming divided into spheres of influence. The Second Front was no longer a matter of life and death for Russia as its troops now stood astride Poland and Romania.

In addition Churchill had, in October, flown to Moscow to make his famous agreement with Stalin over Romania and Greece. The Yalta Conference of February 1945 merely rubber stamped the existing situation.

But the small print still had to be finalised and the future of Poland, where Stalin had installed the puppet Lublin government, became a test case of the new arrangement.

America still pursued the utopian hope for an "economically open" Eastern Europe. It demanded free elections and the inclusion of more non-Communists in the government.

Stalin merely noted that "Poland borders on the Soviet Union which cannot be said about Great Britain or the USA". Neither did he recall having been consulted about the composition of governments in Belgium and Greece.

Stalin was simply asserting control over his own "backyard" just as America contrived to control South and Central America while demanding "democracy" in Eastern Europe.

"Free" elections in Poland would probably have produced an anti-Russian government but equally such elections in Guatemala, Honduras or Nicaragua would have given power to anti-American governments.

But by August 1945 a new factor was working in America's favour: the atomic bomb. The barbaric destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the subsequent Japanese surrender meant that the West was no longer handicapped in its negotiations with Stalin by the need to gain Soviet entry in the war in the east.

And the monopolisation of the bomb was regarded as a powerful factor to gain concessions in Eastern Europe.

But there were two major constraints on the use of this weapon of destruction. One was the might of the Russian army in Europe which could conceivably respond to the bombing of Russian cities by overrunning Western Europe. The other restraining factor lay with the Western proletariat.

**D**URING THE war the left had grown massively. In Italy the CP grew from 402,000 in July 1944 to two million by the end of 1946; in France from 328,000 in 1937 to 1,034,000 in 1956 and in Belgium from 125,000 in 1939 to 301,000 in 1946.

In northern Italy there were mass strikes during the winter of 1944 involving over half a million workers. There were an estimated 200,000 left led partisans in the region.

But the CP saved the day. In Spring 1944 it denounced the "parochial communism" of the Resistance and demanded that it support the government in the name of "anti-fascist unity".

In Belgium the situation was even more critical. In September 1944 Allied troops moved into the country restoring the unpopular monarchy and a government which could not control the food and fuel crises. Neither could it control the

Resistance which refused to disarm and called a demonstration which was fired on by the police, wounding 35 people.

A general strike was called but, with revolution seemingly imminent, the trade union and CP leaders reasserted their authority, called off the strike and appealed to workers' patriotism to restore order. Three months later Communists took posts in the government.

In France de Gaulle allowed the return from Moscow of CP leader Maurice Thorez. Strikes were banned, and more labour was demanded from workers.

It was the Stalinist sabotage of the potential Western revolution which gave Stalin his real credibility at the negotiating tables of Yalta and Potsdam.

**W**HILST THE Americans huffed and puffed about Russian expansionism they devoted their real energies to the destruction of the Western left whom Stalin had so obligingly delivered to them. In France and Italy American money was used to undermine Communist control.

In Britain Communists were witch hunted out of the unions and May Day marches were banned.

The most blatant act came in 1948 when it looked like the Communist-Socialist slate might be victorious in Italy. American battleships were anchored offshore during the election and it was announced that no Italian who voted Communist would be allowed to emigrate to America.

But the onslaught was not just confined to Europe. In America a vicious anti-Communist campaign was launched culminating in the McCarthy show trials of the 1950s, whilst in Japan McArthur's occupation force was constantly used to intimidate the militant post-war trade union movement.

The Cold War was not simply about squabbling superpowers. It was also about the strangulation of a potential revolution. It is the hidden part of the Cold War which we should not forget.



*Hail and farewell. US and USSR troops meet in Berlin*

# Prisoners of prejudice

In October 1974 six Irishmen were arrested and charged following the IRA pub bombings in Birmingham.

The men have always protested their innocence, claiming that their confessions were beaten out of them, and disputing the forensic evidence.

Their case was largely forgotten until former editor of *Tribune*, and perspective Labour MP Chris Mullin re-raised it, first on Granada Television's *World in Action* and then in his book on the case *An Error of Judgement*. Pat Stack of *SWR* interviewed him about the case. We follow this with an article by Paul Foot on the question of confessions.

**SWR:** Your book shows many inconsistencies in the prosecution case at the time. It seems incredible that hardly anybody was asking any questions. To what extent was the political atmosphere important?

**CM:** That was tremendously important. The assumption from the beginning was that these men were guilty. That was very widely held from the moment they were picked up. The Assistant Chief Constable announced after the men had been in custody for three days, "I am satisfied that we have the men primarily responsible for the bombing."

**SWR:** Can you describe more generally the political atmosphere?

**CM:** There were 160 people injured and 21 dead. Most of them were young people, some of Irish origin. There was tremendous outrage. A lot of Irish people and people connected with the Republican movement had their windows stoned in. It wasn't a good time to be Irish in Birmingham. In those few weeks the workers at Longbridge went on a march with big banners calling for the culprits to be hanged.

So that was the climate. But these people were arrested even before the climate broke. They were unlucky men. They were in the wrong place at the wrong time. They drank in pubs where a number of the wrong people drank.

They caught the boat train at New Street Station a few minutes walk away from where the pubs blew up. They left at 7.55, and the first bomb went off at 8.17. They were picked up when the train got to the other end in Lancashire.

**SWR:** It seems the police's attitude changes with the forensic results.

**CM:** Yes. The evidence provided by a forensic scientist called Dr Frank Skuse was key.

They were taken to Morecambe police station where they were still treated as innocent suspects. Dr Skuse came out in the early hours of the morning, did these tests and pronounced himself satisfied that



Chris Mullin

two of the five men, at least, have recently been in touch with nitroglycerine. And that confidence never deserted Dr Skuse.

He had no reason for it, because even under the rules he was supposed to operate by, confirmatory tests are required on laboratory equipment which is said to test for nitroglycerine a thousand times more sensitively.

He made those tests. All proved negative. Yet despite that he stuck by his view that the initial tests were sufficient for him to be 99 percent certain. That view prevailed for 11 years.

There was a defence chemist called Dr Hugh Black who said that nitrocellulose is found in most polishes and varnishes and could give the same result as nitroglycerine. He argued that at the trial, rather ineptly, and was demolished. But he was right as it turned out.

It was not until Granada Television set up the tests again that they showed there were a whole range of innocent substances that would give the same result.

The reason why the tests are important is that from the moment they got those positive results by about 7 or 8 in the morning the West Midlands police believed they had got the Birmingham bombers.

It is alleged, and I believe, that they set about them with the view to obtaining confessions. Within two or three days, four of the six had signed confessions.

**SWR:** Can you give an outline of some of the things that happened surrounding the confessions?

**CM:** We are talking about fairly systematic torture over a period of two or three days involving mock executions, with guns being put in their mouths and the trigger being pulled.

We are talking about two or three nights without sleep with them being made to stand or sit alternatively, and every 20 minutes through the night having shot guns poked through the doors of the cells. Being deliberately kept awake by screaming and shouting.

With one or two exceptions these were just average guys off the street. They would

not claim to be particularly strong characters. So some of them signed the confessions fairly readily.

**SWR:** But the confessions proved to be wrong?

**CM:** Yes. They have the same people bombing both pubs simultaneously. They have different numbers of bombs: two, three or six depending on which confession you believed. They contradicted each other in almost every significant detail.

If you or I had blown up these pubs, we would have remembered every step of the walk up from New Street Station, down New Street, to the two pubs. And indeed, the people who did it do, because I have met one of them!

These confessions dismiss the bombing in a few words; in under 100 words in most cases. There are no technical details of how the bombs were primed, where they were collected from, or of who made them.

**SWR:** There does seem to be a contradiction between the police and the prison officers as to who really committed most of the brutality. Is that important?

**CM:** It is very important. What saved the police and the confessions at the trials was that the men were beaten up twice effectively; once in police custody and once when they arrived at Winson Green prison. There is some evidence to suggest that the police, mindful of the fact that they would have to explain injuries on the men, provoked the prison beatings.

Certainly one of the policemen is alleged to have said to Callaghan as they were waiting to be taken to the prison on remand, "We've set up a good reception for you in the Green", and certainly a good reception was what they got. They really got a going over there.

**SWR:** Roy Jenkins and subsequent Home Secretaries were lobbied by relatives and were in a position to know the inconsistencies. What did they do?

**CM:** Once the machinery of justice had started to roll, all they had to say was that there is a trial pending and it will all come out in the court. Which, I suppose, if you believe in British justice, is not an unreasonable point of view.

But it didn't all come out in the courts, and the legal system has, in fact, been bent from top to bottom to sustain these results. To be fair, I think they genuinely believed they had the right people. Most of them still do to this day.

But they also knew that the men had been done over and that if this was proved the confessions would disappear.

Fantastic mental gymnastics on the part of the judges have been indulged in, in order not to face up to that problem. Lord Denning's is the most remarkable



These pictures were taken after the six had been beaten up in Winson Green—the second of two beatings they received

judgement where he says that this case shows what a civilised country we are!

He says were it to be proved that these men had been beaten up then the confessions would be invalid. If those confessions are invalid, those men might have to be released.

As this is such an appalling vista, every sensible person in the land would say this case must go no further. It must be stopped. And stopped it was. That's the most naked statement.

**SWR:** It's that sort of attitude that made it all take so long.

**CM:** Again I must be fair. There have been politicians of all parties prepared to take up this case. Had it remained just a left-wing cause it would not have taken off.

For example, the Conservative MP Sir John Farr had come to the conclusion, even before I came onto the scene, that these were the wrong people, largely because one of the six men, Paddy Hill, is a constituent of his. But I do think that the powers that be are quietly confident that the judges will put the lid back on again. I am not optimistic about the appeal.

The two main strands of the appeal will be the forensic evidence and the evidence of Tom Clark, the policeman who came forward and said he had been in the police station and had heard and seen the results of them being mistreated. That ex-policeman is a very courageous man. Enormous efforts are going on to discredit him.

It's a most unusual state of affairs because normally if there is a police investigation it precedes the announcement by the Home Secretary. I was told there were 34 police working on this case. There is only one of me.

Their remit does not permit them to spend any time on the whodunnit aspect of the case which would resolve the case ultimately. If you can state with confidence, as I can, that you know the people inside didn't do it because you know who did, then the whole ball game changes.

**SWR:** Presumably that evidence from you would be inadmissible.

**CM:** It's inadmissible because it's only my word and was obtained on the basis that I can't give their names—and I will not. Even if those people ever did stroll into the Home Office and sign that they did it, it would merely be announced that we never said we had got all of them!

The fact is, however, that the four people responsible for the bombings are all in Ireland. I have interviewed three of them. Two have owned up. One didn't.

I haven't been set up by the IRA because I

found these people on my own.

**SWR:** It is unusual for the IRA to say these people didn't do it, isn't it?

**CM:** I find IRA statements on whether people are innocent or guilty are remarkably accurate. When someone has been convicted who clearly was responsible for the offences charged, the IRA, if it doesn't own up, at least doesn't mount a campaign saying these men are innocent.

**SWR:** Clearly there was deep confusion within the IRA themselves as to whether they had done it.

**CM:** Yes. The IRA announced that it wasn't their policy to blow up pubs full of civilians and that there would be an investigation and the results would be published "however unpalatable". The results were extremely unpalatable because they were never published.

The reason, I discovered, was that when the people who had done it got back to Ireland, they were indeed interviewed and there was an inquiry, and they said as one, oh no, that wasn't us. That must have been the Brits trying to discredit the IRA.

I subsequently interviewed a senior member of the IRA who had been on that inquiry who confirmed that that was what happened, and they let the matter drop. However, he said 18 months later he was sitting in a house in Dublin, and there were a few people who came back from Birmingham there, and the drink was flowing, and suddenly it became clear to him that they had done it. So they held another inquiry, and concluded that they had been lied to by their own side.

**SWR:** You are a prospective Labour candidate. If Labour got into power would justice be done?

**CM:** This a genuine example of the difference between the parties. The Shadow Home Secretary, Gerald Kaufman, has said in writing that there will have to be a review of cases dependent on confessions. And if I am an MP in a Labour government I will certainly hold him to that, as I know a large number of other Labour MPs would.

It is also a hard example of where parliament can make a difference. The campaign that has led to the re-opening of the case has taken place in parliament.

**SWR:** But going back to the time of the bombing, the Labour Party differentiated themselves hardly at all from the Tories. If you look at Broadwater Farm it seemed that in the hysteria that followed, Kinnoch and others wanted to clearly detach themselves from being associated with the black youth, and the silence has been deafening since the trial.

**CM:** Yes, the silence has been deafening. I think you're right—there are always pressures on politicians seeking election and mindful of opinion polls. This doesn't apply often to a lot of back benchers, and it wouldn't affect my approach.

There is a problem on the left. Before you go on about the horrors of the judges, legal system, etc, you have to start with the simple statement that it is wrong to place bombs in public places and blow up civilians. Or you can discuss the causes of the riots, but at some stage you have to say it is wrong to put 40 stab wounds in a policeman.

**SWR:** The starting point in the bombings, for example, is hypocrisy. The same people who condemn the bombings quite happily support the sinking of the *Belgrano*.

**CM:** Yes. You can make all those points after you have passed the first obstacle.

**SWR:** We criticised Birmingham. First of all, because it killed innocent working class people, and secondly because it was counterproductive. But still the blame lies with the British ruling class.

**CM:** But even had it been productive, it would have been wrong—to bomb indiscriminately, like bombs over Hanoi.

**SWR:** The IRA said they would accept criticism from people who supported them and were consistent, but they wouldn't accept it from the likes of the *Daily Express*.

**CM:** That's right.

**SWR:** If you say that in this instance Kinnoch has to have an eye on whether he can form the next government, and therefore he makes concessions, then there is a greater problem. If Neil Kinnoch were prime minister, he would have a duty to see that the judiciary, the police, etc, are protected and upheld. Therefore in power the problem can become greater, not less.

**CM:** I think that's right, and that's the reason why people like us inside or outside parliament, have to keep up the pressure on those who are elected to make sure they deliver on a simple matter like this.

This is an example where we might get them to deliver. We may never get nuclear missiles out of the country, we may never have a workers' state in Britain, but it is perfectly feasible that we may rescue these unfortunate people, and we are within sight of this.

If the judges turn down this appeal, I and many other people, will not rest until these people are released and compensated. And when they are released, those who put them there will have to answer a few questions about how they came to be there. ■

# Confessions and repressions

THE TRIAL of the Broadwater Farm Six for the killing of PC Blakelock seemed to end in a "draw". Three defendants were unanimously found guilty of murder. Three others walked free from the court. But the draw was, in reality, an outright win for the police. The three juveniles were acquitted on the direction of the judge who said that the confessions which had put them in the dock in the first place were "repressive" for people under age. Since there was no other evidence against them, he ruled, they could not be found guilty.

Exactly the same conditions applied to the three older men in the dock. Statements had been extracted from them in the harshest possible conditions—after many hours of intense interrogation in police cells, where none of the three had any access to lawyers or to friends. These statements were the only evidence that the three had had anything to do with the killing of PC Blakelock. They were not even confessions.

Indeed, Winston Silcott, the man who gut the brunt of the abuse from the press before, during and after the trial, specifically had *not* confessed, claiming that there could not be any witnesses against him. This claim, the prosecution alleged, was clear proof of his complicity in the murder!

Confessions have been much in the news lately. They were the main evidence against the six men convicted of planting the IRA bombs in Birmingham pubs in 1974; against the four people convicted of the bombing of pubs in Guildford and Woolwich in the same year; and of the four men convicted of the killing of newspaper boy Carl Bridgewater in 1978.

The Broadwater Farm case was worse than all of these. At least, in the Birmingham case, an explosives test (recently discredited) had proved positive on two of the six men's hands. At least, in the Guildford case, one of the defendants had apparently voluntarily, spilled out the names of the other people who later confessed. At least, in the Bridgewater case one confession led to another, and back to the first one again.

The importance of the Blakelock case is that police now know that if the press is on their side and if the crime is dramatic enough, they can get a conviction just by picking on anyone in the street and taking notes of a conversation which can be construed as a confession or a part-confession. It is the random nature of the arrests of all six people who allegedly "confessed" to the Blakelock killing which has the most chilling consequences.

The power and confidence of the police has increased hugely since the case. Until the Blakelock case, a jury would have insisted on some corroboration before sen-



tencing anyone effectively to life in prison. Now that a jury has so obliged the police, the police have responded with a renewed public relations campaign to take away the powers of the jury.

Even government ministers are being forced to admit that the staggering increase in crime is associated with unemployment and poverty. How else can they explain the impotence of their law and order campaigns; their doubling of the funds available to the forces of law and order; the huge increase in police manpower? Poverty, destitution, alienation have beaten all these hollow—and crime of every kind is soaring. When people at every level of society are taught to take care only of themselves, those at the bottom can only put it into practice by stealing or savaging their neighbours. One of the saddest aspects of the crime statistics is that the poor and lower middle class areas are always the ones most affected by burglaries, assaults and rapes.

When five or six million adult people in a population of some 40 million adults are struggling on the very rim of existence, utterly without hope, the people with property get scared.

The greater their property, the more ill-gotten their gains, the more scared they become. They seek for their protection bodies of armed and powerful men who will keep the mob at bay. The more desperate the mob become, the more repressive is the power ranged against them.

This explains the recent popularity of uncorroborated confessions. It is quite a simple matter to put a stop to all the doubt about these confessions. Technology for tape-recording, and checking tape-recording is almost infallible. But such devices are unpopular with the authorities. They prefer to leave what they call "the criminal classes" at the mercy of human beings, who know that their role is to protect property. Better by far, therefore, to have police taking down confessions in their own notes, with no way of checking their accuracy.

As the old army saying has it: "An acquittal at a court martial is bad for discipline". The same is increasingly true in what are laughably known as Courts of Justice. ■

Paul Foot

# Lazy workers?

*Are British workers to blame for the fact that productivity levels and rates of profit have been so much lower in Britain than in other major capitalist economies?*

Many of these questions have arisen in SWP educationals (I've more than enough, but suggestions are always welcome). One educational recently gave me a salutary lesson in the dangers of taking too much for granted.

I was talking away about the low levels of productivity in the British car industry compared with Japan when one of the comrades in the room said, "when you say that workers in Britain are less productive everybody thinks you mean that's because they work less hard."

That's not what I'd intended to imply at all. But the comrade was right. Many people do think that the problems of British industry are the result of workers being too lazy, or too greedy, or too militant. Unions are blamed for resistance to new technology, for pushing up wages, and what the bosses like to call, "restrictive practices."

Of course the very way the question gets posed reflects the dominance of ruling class ideas. Why should workers work harder when the rewards will go to the bosses? Why should they accept new technology if it means that half of them will lose their jobs?

Yet the sad truth is that workers in Britain are amongst the worst-paid in Western Europe, have hardly any say in how their work is organised and, according to one recent survey, have put up virtually no resistance to the introduction of new technology.

The argument that wages are to blame for the relatively low profit-rate in Britain is the easiest to dispose of.

A survey in 1979 found that when National Insurance contributions and the like were included, labour costs in Britain were lower than Japan's and every country in Western Europe except Spain, Ireland, Greece and Portugal. They were barely half the level of Sweden and West Germany.

If profit rates in Britain have been so much lower than elsewhere it is not because workers are well-paid but because productivity levels in Britain have been so much lower.

But productivity levels do not just depend upon how hard workers work. If that was the case sweatshop workers in India would come near the top of the league tables, and workers in West Germany with their long holidays and shorter working week would come well down the list.

Productivity depends above all upon the amount and quality of the available machinery and technology. It depends also

upon the way in which managers organise the production process, upon the skills of the labour force, and upon whether a factory is working up to its fullest capacity.

There is ample evidence that in Britain workers have had to operate machines held together with elastic bands, in factories which are thirty or forty years old or older, under managers who are hopelessly incompetent.

In the 1970s British Leyland workers were the butt of countless editorials on the subject of the state of the British economy. A report commissioned by the Labour government was widely quoted as having proved that workers in Britain took 50-60% more time to produce a car than on the continent.



**Leyland workers: the butt of the press**

Michael Edwardes was sent in by that same Labour government in 1977 to smash shopfloor organisation in British Leyland. Yet he admitted in his book *Back from the Brink* that the biggest problems he faced were chaotic managerial organisation and the "vast investment needed to make an impact on the Dickensian facilities at most of our factories."

It is not just the media with their fondness for headline stories about workers having a kip on the night shift who are responsible for the myths about the lazy British worker. Academic studies are frequently quoted as having "proved" that even where workers here work with the best

machinery available their output is lower.

But then academic studies are not exactly free from shoddy methods and lazy thinking either. One exception however is an excellent book, called *The British Worker Question*, recently produced by Theo Nichols.

What Nichols has done is to examine sceptically every piece of so-called evidence concerning the productivity of British workers. That doesn't involve as much work as you might think, as there are only two serious studies which seek to compare workers in different countries using the same machinery.

Nichols shows the authors of these two surveys relied entirely upon the evidence of managers, and mostly British managers at that. They never asked the workers themselves. They never even went onto the shop floor to examine what was happening. They simply took management's word for it.

They ignored the evidence that even where the machinery was similar, the design of factories in Britain, and the overall organisation of the work were often major handicaps to continuous production.

Even then when the surveys are examined in detail they fail to prove what they claim. The only reference to the role of workers which is frequently mentioned is "overmanning".

Yet it's doubtful if even this "overmanning" was the result of workers having strong organisation. In the 1970s and early 1980s many factories were simply working below full capacity, because they couldn't sell all the cars, or whatever, that they were capable of producing. Since then the "surplus" workers have been consigned to the dole queue.

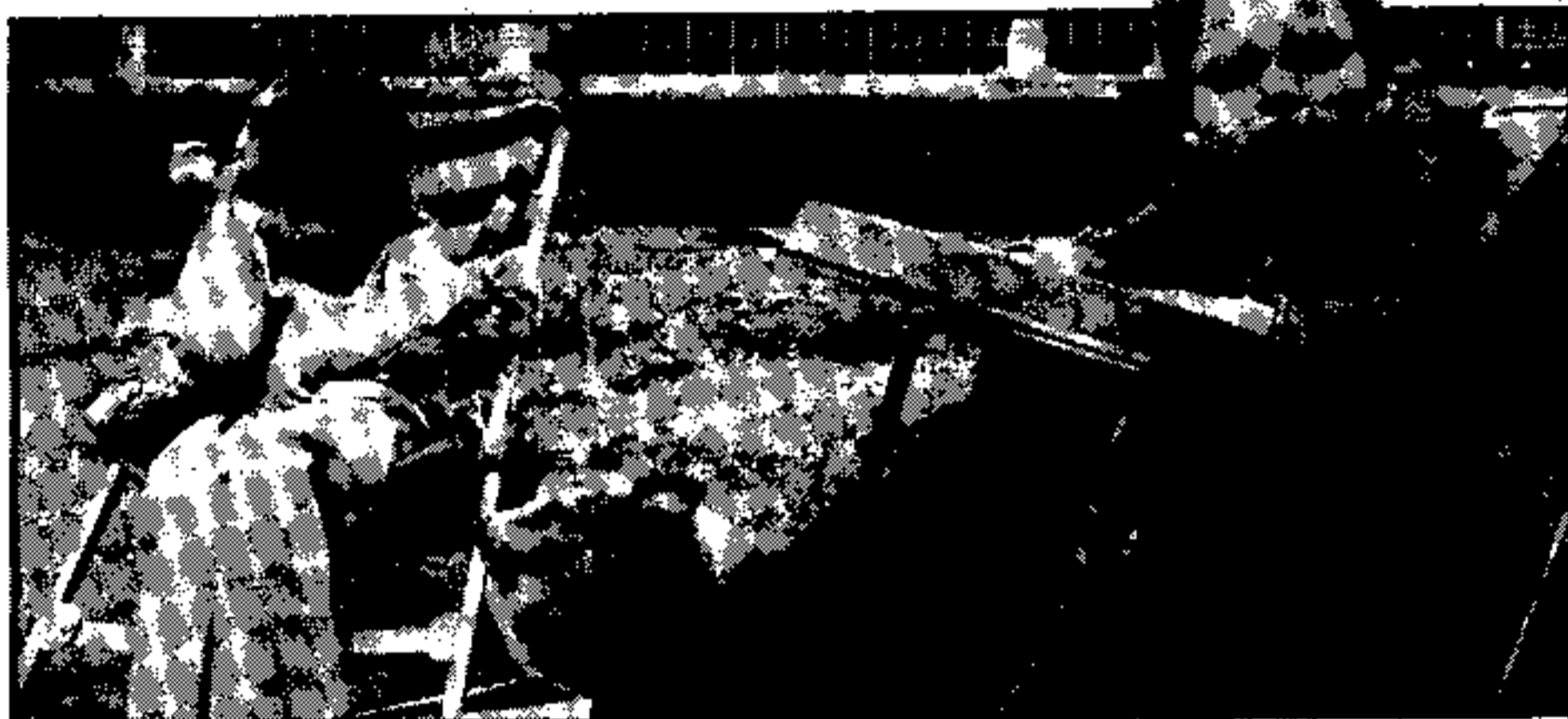
Nichols doesn't provide a definitive answer to the question of why productivity is still so low in Britain compared to other advanced capitalist economies. He puts more stress than I would on low levels of training and skill.

To my mind that is a marginal factor by comparison with the fact that capital investment in Britain has been low for decades—and much of what did occur was wasted on arms, nuclear power stations, Concorde and steel mills which started producing just when the bottom dropped out of the market.

What *The British Worker Question* does show is that most of what passes for academic research in this country is, as Marx once put it, governed not by "whether this or that theorem was true, but whether it was useful to capital or harmful, expedient or inexpedient, in accordance with police regulations or contrary to them." ■

**Pete Green**

# Hidden from view



Have these children got a future?

MENTAL HANDICAP has featured heavily in the news of late. Usually it scarcely merits a mention.

Revelations about cousins of the Queen being "put away", plus the case of the young woman who is waiting for judges to decide whether or not she should be sterilised, have combined to highlight the oppression which most people with a handicap face under capitalism

Segregated from the rest of society, often living in Dickensian hospital conditions, mentally handicapped people are denied most fundamental human rights—to work, have a home of their own, to have sexual relationships, children, and even the vote!

It may seem fairly obvious that socialists should defend the rights of those with a mental handicap to be able to lead a full and "normal" life—but in truth, ignorance and stereotype can combine to cloud the issue.

For instance, mental handicap is often confused with mental illness. Whilst it is true that people in either category tend to be stigmatised and segregated in capitalist society, being seen as "mad" or "loony", in reality the two are quite different.

A mental illness, such as depressive neurosis, can happen to anyone and be a temporary condition. A mental handicap remains with someone throughout their life, although it is important to stress that anyone with such a handicap can learn and develop, albeit slowly.

In the case of the 17 year old woman Jeanette, another common stereotype was widely bandied about—that she had a "mental age of five". Mental age is based on IQ assessments, first developed by the reactionary scientist Cyril Burt and notorious for their class and cultural bias.

Even if the IQ test was an "objective" measurement of a person's intelligence, its value is questionable as it ignores other aspects of human functioning and that everyone can learn, regardless of IQ. Few pointed to the contradiction of Jeanette having a "mental age of five" yet becoming increasingly "sexually active".

Contrary to popular belief most mental handicaps are not physically inherited. Approximately 20 out of every 1,000 children have some form of mental handicap—but in less than a quarter are they "severe". There is considerable evidence that the vast majority are caused by social conditions and an inflexible educational system rather than any inherent disability.

Of those with severe handicaps, 43 percent were born with genetic or chromosomal "abnormalities" such as Down's syndrome. Other handicaps stem from infections (such as rubella and meningitis) or from injuries occurring either before or after birth.

Clearly a socialist society which maximised human potential could eradicate many of the forms of handicap that result from disease and social conditions. Genetic counselling for prospective parents may be able to reduce other types of handicap. But however we reduce the likelihood of handicap, there will always be some people with mental handicap—socialism or not.

This is not to say that these individuals could not lead a full and rewarding life. Not all societies have treated people with mental handicaps as "defective", "feeble-minded" or "idiotic".

There is little doubt that their objective situation has deteriorated under capitalism. Mentally handicapped people have become increasingly marginal to the production process. As industrialisation accelerated whole families were sucked into workplaces leaving fewer people around to give support to less able relatives.

Secondly, as capitalism entered its imperialist stage and competition with other national capitals grew there was also a growth of ideas about "purity" of the "national stock".

It was believed that people with mental handicaps necessarily produced children with handicaps thereby polluting the "race" and diluting the "national intelligence". It was the Nazis who developed the "eugenic scare" and they took it to its logical conclusion when they gassed thousands of mentally handicapped people.

Another conclusion, less dramatic but just as final, was a segregated life in a large institution. The numbers of handicapped people in specially built institutions rose from 2,000 to 50,000 between the wars.

Today's trend towards "community care" gives the illusion that the bad old days are over. But socialists should be clear why "community care" is so popular with the government today.

The Tories are happy to employ progressive rhetoric as a cover for cutbacks in health and social services. "Community care" in effect means shifting the burden of care back onto the family (and especially onto women).

Indeed the case of Jeanette has come to prominence precisely because of the expansion of "community care". It is said that she faces two choices—being sterilised and living in the community or life in a hospital. This is a lie dictated by economic expediency.

If she and her family could draw support from comprehensive caring service provided by the state, then Jeanette could easily live in the community. She could receive intensive help and advice regarding contraception, relationships, and day-to-day living.

However such services would require the staffing and resources which the ruling class actually needs to cut back on. Sterilisation is the cheap option which is underpinned by "eugenic" fears about mentally handicapped peoples' sexuality.

Socialists should denounce this reactionary rubbish whilst arguing for better services and resisting the cutbacks. But it must be added that in order to create a society in which everyone is valued, we need to smash the existing system which is driven by the pursuit of profit, replacing it with a socialist society organised around the fulfilment of needs. ■

Steve Coulson

## AIDS

Duncan  
Blackie and  
Ian Taylor

### THE SOCIALIST VIEW

The AIDS virus is deadly, but fighting the disease isn't the only problem. Rumour and misinformation have led to attacks on gays, while the Tories use the health campaign to push 'Victorian values' which threaten us with a new dark age of guilt and repression. This pamphlet sets out the facts — and the politics — of AIDS. 40 pages.

90p from SWP bookstalls or by post (add 20p postage) from BOOKMARKS, 265 Seven Sisters Road, London N4 2DE.





# The decent view

Homage to Catalonia

George Orwell

Penguin £2.50

FIFTY years separates us from the momentous events Orwell so vividly describes in *Homage to Catalonia*.

Why did this former policeman from imperial Burma go to Spain? With characteristic honesty he wrote:

"If you had asked me why I had joined the militia I should have answered: To fight against Fascism; and if you had asked me what I was fighting for, I should have answered: Common decency."

By chance, since he was carrying ILP papers from Britain, he joined a militia organised by the POUM, the independent Marxist workers' party.

His concerns may initially have been liberal. Progressively though, under the impact of his direct experience he became more partisan, more political. The depth of class struggle in Barcelona made this process almost inescapable.

He arrived there in December 1936, five months after the working class in city after city, town after town across Spain had seized the initiative the Popular Front government had lacked, and had risen directly against Franco.

"If they had not acted spontaneously and more or less independently it is quite conceivable that Franco would never have been resisted", Orwell says.

In Barcelona the revolutionary transformation went deepest and made a profound impression on Orwell.

"It was the first time that I had ever been in a town where the working class was in the saddle. Practically every building of any size had been seized by the workers and was draped with red flags or with the red and black flags of the Anarchists... Every shop and cafe had an inscription saying that it had been collectivised, even the bootblacks had been collectivised and their boxes painted red and black. Waiters and shop walkers looked you in the face and treated you as an equal. Servile and even ceremonial forms of speech had temporarily disappeared... Tipping was forbidden by law; almost my first experience was receiving a lecture from a hotel manager for trying to tip a lift boy... Above all, there was a belief in the revolution and the future, a feeling of having suddenly emerged into an era of equality and freedom."

Behind these more external features of the revolution lay a bitter political struggle for control of its direction. It was in the political infighting of the cities, rather than at the front that the real fate of the war and revolution was being decided. While power



Working class in the saddle—anarchists in Barcelona 1936

had gravitated towards the workers' committees and the rural collectives and while the capitalist state had been severely undermined, the revolution had not been completed. The state was still intact.

As long as this unstable situation of dual power continued, the danger of counter-revolution existed, with attacks on all the gains the working class had made. Orwell understood this retrospectively when he wrote

"Even when the workers, certainly in Catalonia and possibly elsewhere, had the power to do so, they did not overthrow or completely replace the Government."

He dates the beginnings of the swing to the right in October/November 1936 when the USSR started supplying arms to the government. Along with the guns came strict political conditions which can be summarised thus: "Prevent revolution or you get no weapons." In the specific, it meant the first attacks on the revolutionary elements, the expulsion of the POUM from the Catalan government, the Generalitat.

The strategy of "pin-pricks" against working class power began. The militias, crucially, were broken up and incorporated into an embourgeoisified Popular Army.

Tragically, both the POUM and the Anarchists (mainly organised in the CNT) for a time put up with restrictions on their freedoms when faced with the logic of the need to win the war at all costs. Everything was heading towards a showdown, as the authorities understood the need to get the guns off the armed workers and the anarchists.

Orwell was a particularly acute observer of this process, having arrived back in Barcelona on leave only days before the May fighting. The contrast with December was stark.

When three lorry loads of Civil Guards attacked the telephone exchange on 3 May the provocation was deliberate. It amounted to a direct challenge to what was left of the revolution, and it was met by what may best be described as the second uprising of the Catalan working class. Throughout the city barricades were thrown up as again the workers took control of the streets.

As in July a similar process occurred in the surrounding towns. Again the opportunity to take power and to spread the insurrection throughout Spain was lost. After this decisive battle the leadership of the CNT sent people back to work and entered negotiations with the government. The POUM, too, tailed events rather than attempting to lead them, looking all the while to win over the CNT leadership.

This defeat was the vital step for the counter-revolution. From now on revolutionary opportunities evaporated. The POUM was declared illegal and its leaders were killed by Stalinist agents in secret prisons. Increasingly, in the atmosphere and language of the Moscow trials, any left wing criticism of the government was declared a "Trotsky-fascist" crime punishable by death.

The latter stages of *Homage to Catalonia* are a clinical exposé of the Stalinist lies. Orwell ridicules the *Daily Worker* reports of events as "completely worthless", in particular their notion that the POUM was a vast spying organisation in the pay of fascists.

Orwell himself was threatened by the reaction.

"The Stalinists were in the saddle and therefore it was a matter of course that every 'Trotskyist' was in danger."

Having been shot through the throat by the fascists and demobilised from his militia, he had to flee Spain to avoid the fate that befell thousands of socialists and anti-fascists: imprisonment and death at the hands of the Communists.

The strengths of the book are many. Its descriptions of workers' power are superb, as are those of the war and street fighting. He is merciless in his criticisms of Stalinism at a time when almost everyone refused to believe him.

As he says, "In every country in the world a huge tribe of party hacks and sleek little professors are busy proving that socialism means no more than a planned state capitalism with the grab motive left intact."

The book does have weaknesses but these pale beside Orwell's inspiring portrayal of the realities of revolution. ■  
Phil Taylor

# A question of roots



WAS anti-semitism in the Roman Empire the result of economic conflict based on their special trading role? This seems a smallish, if interesting point but it has practical consequences for some current arguments.

Errors can arise as a consequence of uncritical acceptance of whatever Abram Leon says. There is a parallel with Engels' *Origins of the Family*. While the core of the argument has remained valid subsequent research has shown that some of the facts upon which it was based were wrong.

First a potted history of the Jews. They occupied a small, hilly and unimportant territory which produced no valuable export articles. Nor, except for two brief and untypical periods, did they ever control any major trade route. It was Phoenicians in Tyre, Sidon and Carthage who were traders. The Jews were hill farmers, tribalised freemen with a fairly egalitarian society typical of peripheral upland groups and relying on outsiders for trade goods, iron and luxuries.

One matter alone made them significantly different. As the Iron Age progressed there was a growth of "imperial" states at the expense of city/tribal structures. Like other elements of the superstructure, religion reflects the economic base but with a much longer time-lag than law or the state form.

Between 500 and 200BC there was a growth throughout the civilised world of new "imperial" religions which were universalist rather than parochial. Ezra, Nehemiah and their sidekicks converted the old tribal Jahwehism into a moral system applicable to the world and were paralleled in time and type by Zoroaster in Persia and Buddha in India. This new religion was still thoroughly agrarian orientated.

Now for Ann's weird idea of the economy of Rome. True the prime source of income for its ruling class was land and it was bad form for senators to indulge in trade. That was equally true, say of Tudor England. But peers and the Crown were the biggest investors in trading voyages; so too in Rome.

Besides, from the earliest times Rome had a politically differentiated "middle" class, the knights or equites. Excluded from political power, they dominated the mercantile field. Once the empire contained virtually the whole civilised world, the profits made by these knights and their



Abram Leon

Graeco-Syrian counterparts from Ephesus, Antioch and Alexandria were phenomenal. And that trade was not just in luxuries. There were factories for mass production of pottery and textiles, mines for metal and building materials. By and large these were state owned and leased to the same class of knights.

Even bulk goods like grain were regularly transported 2000 miles and more in ships the size of which were not to be seen again for 1,000 years. And they were owned by Romans organised in a guild.

I cannot recall a single piece of evidence to indicate that Jews had a specially high share of the trade. Given that at the height of the Empire's boom as much as one in seven of its population was Jewish, a disproportionate share would have been clearly apparent. And since in 100BC they had practically no share, for them to have, say, half in 200AD would require a political or economic shock that would have been recorded.

And yet both Ann and John Molyneux are right in saying that there was anti-semitism then. There was an economic element to it; the fight of a peasantry to retain or recover freedom from a severer feudalism, but in the main it seems to me that it was a straight political fight. By 100AD the Jews represented the one internal threat to Roman rule. For just like the other new imperial religions it was a proselytising one. The invention of the synagogue had removed the geographical constraint of the Temple in Jerusalem. In Mesopotamia and North Africa they were the actual majority in many places.

Twice, in 68 and 130AD, whole legions were destroyed in revolts that shook the Empire and these continued as late as the fourth century. Apart from the one-off by the Sicilian slaves under Spartacus, Rome never faced an internal enemy remotely like it. Looked at that way it is the comparative

lack of anti-semitism that is surprising.

Ann is wrong too about the course of the economy after the barbarian invasions. In Marseilles, Cadiz, Naples or Ravenna, life was little changed save that the warlord was even less likely to speak good Latin. No doubt bulk trade in such commodities as grain collapsed but wine, metals and textiles continued. The traders themselves probably moved base eastwards to avoid political upheavals so it is unsurprising that in Merovingian records "Syrian" (not "Jew") and "trader" were synonymous.

The break comes later around 600AD. In the hitherto untouched East a hundred years of warfare first with Persia and then the emergent Arabs devastated the cities and their trade with it. In the Balkans, Gaul and Spain, newer barbarian kingdoms now destroyed the old Roman forms rather than copying them. When the dust settled the supply end of the trade routes was largely in Muslim hands, unacceptable to the Franks and other newly Christianised states. But there still remained substantial Jewish communities on the Mediterranean shores from Barcelona to Narbonne. Acceptable on both sides of the religious divide, they took over the trading role. For the rest of the story it is safe to return to Leon.

The period is littered with examples of peoples drawn into the world economy and adopting Judaism as a concomitant and none were traders. There were peasants in Tunisia, feudal lords in Asia Minor or Ethiopia, even nomads like Berbers or Beduin (the Yemen is the one possible mercantile exception). All chose Judaism not for its greater suitability to mercantilism but because the local ruling class, whatever its economic base, wished to keep political independence. ■

Danny Phillips



IT IS A pity that Ann Rogers' otherwise excellent article on the class origins of anti-semitism should be spoiled by the silly statement that all Roman citizens were forbidden by law to own large ships and therefore prevented from trading.

Abram Leon's book, from which most of the information in the article comes, states quite clearly that the Roman aristocracy of senators and their relatives were banned from owning ships above a certain size, not all Roman citizens. There were plenty of rich Romans who were not aristocrats who were allowed to own such ships and profit from trade.

At the same time it is true, as Leon's book argues, that there was no Roman commercial class as such. It is necessary to draw attention to this because many books in use in schools and colleges refer to the equestrians—the next rank of citizens below the aristocracy—as the “bourgeoisie” or even “capitalist class”.

This is very misleading, as some of the best Marxist historians have shown (Moses Finley and Geoffrey de Ste Croix for example) the equestrians' main interest was, and always remained, landed property with slaves and tenants. It is therefore quite true—as Ann Rogers' article argues in substance, and Leon's book in detail—that there was no powerful competition confronting the Jews as a trading group in Rome, and the Jews were not singled out for racist attacks.

Roman racists, such as the poet Juvenal, attacked the poor citizens of Rome who were descended from freed slaves of Middle Eastern origin. In terms remarkably like modern Powellism (“jangling harps and timbrels” for jungle music, and “stowaways with the figs and plums from Damascus” for banana boats) they attacked Greeks and Syrians more vehemently than Jews.

The old aristocrats and their hangers-on hated the ordinary citizens of Rome because these citizens supported the new emperors who replaced the old Roman senators with representatives of the landed class from all over the empire. Racism was in this case the final outburst of a dying city elite about to be taken over by an internationalised ruling class, drawing its leaders from places as far apart as Spain, the Balkans and North Africa.

Any serious study of ancient history shows, as Leon's book and Ann Rogers' article argue, that there is always a class explanation for anti-semitism or any other kind of racism. ■

Norah Carlin



MICHAEL ROSEN accuses Ann Roger's article on anti-semitism of lurching into vulgar Marxism (March *SWR*). Yet his counter-argument effectively abandons historical materialism as a tool for understanding the origins of ideas.

We disagree with the entire thrust of his letter but we'll settle for challenging just one of his points; one that we feel is central to the whole debate.

Ann, drawing on Abram Leon's analysis in his book *The Jewish Question*, argues that Judaism survived, and anti-semitism could be explained, through the specific economic functions of Jewry in the ancient, medieval and developing capitalist world.

Rosen scorns this concept of the people-class as a “lovely idea”. But the category was not invented, as he would have it to give Marxists a soft explanation of why people behave in a certain way, neither

crucially, has it been just Jews who have fitted the description.

Nathan Weinstock, in his introduction to the 1974 edition of Leon's book, points out that the circumstances of groups like gypsies, the Armenians living in exile, or Chinese merchants living in South East Asia can also be explained in terms of the people-class theory.

We would like briefly to give a further example. Asians from northern India settled in Kenya from around 1908, imported by the British Empire as indentured labourers to build the railways.

They arrived to find an Asian trading presence in the region that had been built up over 200 years. Gradually they moved into trade, swelling and developing the Indian community.

The British were too concerned with their major farming interests to be concerned with such small-scale business. And the Asian initiatives had the advantage of helping open up the country without allowing the development of a potentially hostile African trader class.

Asians, barred from land-owning, remained as traders, slowly accumulating surplus until an import boom in around 1940 gave them the clout to move into manufacturing, retail trade and property.

Meanwhile the British colonialists had turned African peasants into wage labourers by forcing them to pay taxes in cash. By preventing the Africans from cash cropping, the big landowners ensured a plentiful supply of cheap labour.

In effect, Kenyan society became economically stratified on racial lines—white land owners, Asian traders and shop-keepers, and later manufacturers, and African servants, workers and rural masses.

Post-independence, in the 1960s, the government Africanisation campaigns

exploited and amplified class tensions on racist lines. Indians risked being beaten on the street. But this was not, as Rosen might argue, because of their culture, religion or food, but because of economic envy. Those racist ideas, however crudely they may have been expressed, had material roots.

Rosen also challenges the people-class analysis by pointing out that not all Jews in pre-capitalist society were traders. He is undoubtedly correct. But the theory is not meant to describe the function of every individual member of the community but to lay bare the economic dynamic that gives it its particular form. So the Jews who were butchers, bakers and candlestick makers may not have been major traders, but their religious identity was anchored in their relationship of service to those Jews who were.

In the Kenyan Asian community there was a substantial minority who were teachers, Indian restaurant owners, priests etc, servicing the dominant trader and business group. They were at a remove from the African population but their fate and identity was determined by those petit-bourgeois who dealt daily with African blacks.

As Asian traders and shopkeepers displaced or threatened by Africanisation began to leave for Britain or India they were followed by people from the other sections as their economic existence was threatened as a consequence.

The people who benefited from this process—and it's one that continues as there is still an Asian community—were the new black ruling class and the Western capitalists.

For them the function of racism was to consolidate their power and influence. Michael Rosen's analysis cannot explain that. ■

Naina Kent and David Glanz

# socialist worker Review

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## Death without glory

### PLATOON

OLIVER STONE'S film *Platoon* won several Oscars before its British premier. In examining the American experience in Vietnam it follows such films as *The Deer Hunter*, *Apocalypse Now* and *Rambo*. Unlike Sylvester Stallone, who despite his macho image avoided fighting in Vietnam, Stone was actually there.

His film shows Vietnam through the eyes of one American soldier. He goes in dew-eyed and wanting to fight and leaves disillusioned. Early in the film he tells of wanting to be a war hero like his father and grandfather. He tells how he thinks it's wrong that only the poor and disadvantaged fight and die for America.

That's why he dropped out of college to enlist. The black soldier he tells this to replies in amazement, "Man you gotta be rich to even think like that". He gradually moves closer to a group of mainly black soldiers, who Stone shows as not understanding why they're fighting and just wanting to do their time and get out.

On night patrol in the forests for the first time he's forced to stay in pouring rain, sleeping for only a few hours amidst mud and insects. You almost feel his fear as they're surprised and attacked by the Vietnamese.

He gets drawn into the conflict between Elias and Barnes, two officers in his platoon, who argue violently over Barnes's brutality to the Vietnamese. Virtual civil war erupts in the platoon and Barnes shoots Elias. To say more might spoil the ending but the main character clearly sides with Elias.

No American in *Platoon* admits that they can't win but the film gives you a strong sense of this and a little understanding as to why. Towards the end of the film the Americans are overrun by the Vietnamese. Many Americans just keep their heads down trying to stay alive. In contrast a Vietnamese runs straight into the US command post blowing it and himself up.

The Americans win no battles and are shown being forced to fight on ground chosen by the Vietnamese, or else falling foul of booby traps. The Vietnamese are shown as more determined and prepared to fight a long guerilla war. The Americans can't cope even with their own weaponry and helicopters.

As a result, perhaps, of its focus being the war as experienced by one GI we are not shown why it is that the Vietnamese are more committed. There's no sign of saturation bombing or napalm. Only once do we see Americans brutally treating

Vietnamese villagers. This is shown as being a result of Barnes's nastiness and the fear and edginess of other Americans. The brutality is stopped by Elias.

Some critics have argued that the film is weakened by this "liberal" concession of having a good and bad officer at its heart. It is true that *Platoon* is not an expose of American imperialism or a defence of the Vietnamese. However compared to the *Deerhunter's* racist portrayal of the Vietnamese or *Rambo's* attempt to persuade us that the problem with Vietnam was the softness of American politicians, the film is a good one.

Not only is it superbly filmed but it doesn't vilify the Vietnamese. You don't sympathise with the characters who do hate them. It shows the horrors and violence of war without glorifying it and gives you some feeling of what it must have been like for ordinary American soldiers.

It's the best film yet about Vietnam. Definitely one to be seen. ■  
Russ Escritt

## Tangled up in blue

### BLUE VELVET

*BLUE VELVET* opens to idyllic shots of small-town middle America. A middle-aged man is watering his garden. Suddenly he collapses with a heart attack. From then on the film is dominated by mysterious images of violence—a severed ear found in the middle of a field, a possible murder, kidnapping, and most disturbing of all, sexual sadism and masochism.

The young man, Jeffrey, who discovers the severed ear, starts his own amateur investigation into the mystery. Rapidly, he is pulled into a world of violence, dominated by a psychopathic drug-dealer, Frank. In particular, he becomes sexually and violently involved with the victim of the drug-dealer, singer Dorothy Vallens.

As his girlfriend, the daughter of a police inspector, says it is difficult to know whether Jeffrey is a detective or a pervert.

Much of the discussion around the film has centred on the sexual violence, and especially on Dorothy's masochism. The accusation is that the film portrays relationships in such a way as to reinforce the male myth that violence towards women can be condoned because women ask for or even enjoy it.

It is difficult to agree that the film does this. However, what can legitimately be levelled at the film is that no woman is shown as independent. They are wives, mothers, aunts, girlfriends. The one exception is Dorothy who has some independence as a nightclub singer. Arguably, she is punished for her

independence—and the film implicitly supports this by showing Dorothy "welcoming" her punishment.

In similar fashion, Jeffrey is forgiven by his girlfriend for his sexual involvement with Dorothy (he is only trying to help), and the film ends with the girlfriend's truly soppy dream of robins and a world of domestic bliss being realised.

The film is tongue in cheek by this time, and probably has been for a long while. But how we take the ending indicates a more deep-seated problem than just the question of violence.

Interestingly, like other recent American films (*Back to the Future*, *Peggy Sue Got Married*), it is a return to the unpolitical fifties and early sixties. In this apparently uncomplicated world of cosy homes, teenagers, high school and dating, protection is provided by kindly law officers against any threat from the outside.

Many different types of Hollywood film, including the more interesting thrillers, flourished on this theme. In the very different world of the eighties, when political confidence to change the world is at a low ebb, it is only too easy to understand the reactionary growth in nostalgia for this period.

The problem is that any intelligent director knows that there is no return. It is impossible, unless the film is pure pastiche, to ignore the change between then and now. In the absence of political analysis to explain what underlay those apparently eternal fifties values, and what brought them to an end, other explanations have to be found.

The director of the film, David Lynch, seeks them in psychology. There are abundant hints that the violence and sex that comes to dominate are products of Jeffrey's subconscious. When he first discovers the ear, the camera tracks right into the ear as if into the brain. At the end, there is a reverse sequence, as if delivering the hero back from his nightmare into "normality".

There are hints, too, of paralleling between characters. Frank (brilliantly acted by Denis Hopper) is the openly violent double of the hero, who is guilty about his own sadistic feelings. Dorothy is the sexually masochistic double for Jeffrey of his sweet and innocent girlfriend. The ex-boyfriend and his college friends are mistaken in a car chase for Frank's gangster associates, who have beaten him up.

The trouble with all this is that psychology won't do as a concrete explanation of the unreality of American middle-class society. The technical brilliance of much of the film cannot compensate. Consequently, the film topples into pretentious absurdity. Perhaps even Lynch gave up three quarters of the way through and decided to play it for laughs. ■

Gareth Jenkins

# All you need is love

NORTHERN Ireland has on the whole inspired about as much originality for TV and film dramatists as mothers-in-law have for stand up comics. Such dramas seem to have a basic theme around which there are then a limited number of variations.

The theme is essentially the Romeo Juliet model: Catholic boy meets Protestant girl, or vice versa, Catholic girl meets British soldier, Ex-Provo meets widow of RUC man he helped to kill, on and on it goes. It would seem that the whole of the war in Ireland has been fought merely to disrupt the love lives of the population of that island.

*Lost Belongings* is just the latest in the long line of such programmes. Despite the fact that it started from such a basis I couldn't resist taking a look at it. And while I don't know how the series will end, already by part three it is doing badly.

Part three saw the introduction of a Provo character. He is cold, hard, calculating, and thoroughly unlikeable. His role is every bit as sinister as that of the Loyalist who rapes his own niece. He is one more obstruction on the road of true love.

What strikes me about all these series is how unambitious and lazy the writers of them are. Let's not attempt to really explain anything, certainly don't attempt to challenge anything, just rehash a sort of liberal view of it all. In this view of things Northern Ireland is a divided society. It is not one, though, divided by class, or sectarianism. No, it is two nations, one of love and another of hate.

And the problem with the Irish is that traditionally their "naturally violent tendencies" out-do all that "celtic romanticism". This was the picture painted by one of the least likeable characters in *Lost Belongings* (whose politics seemed akin to what used to be the official IRA) when she explained the legend of the "Red Hand of Ulster". A story of self mutilation for the sake of ruling Ulster.

I suppose I will stick with the series through to the end, but I fear it will get even worse.

When all is said and done the whole formula reminds me of some lines from the Talking Heads song "People Like Us":

## BolsheVision



"we don't want freedom  
"we don't want justice  
"we just want some one to love"

That's the problem with the Irish you see, too much politics and history and not enough good old fashioned love.

All of this is so annoying, the struggle in the North could and should present gifted writers with many opportunities to raise real questions, to struggle to find real answers, but it appears that few do. Still I suppose it's better than watching "Five Go Raving Bonkers at Buckingham Palace", otherwise known as "The Alistair Burnett Show" or *News at Ten*. ■

Pat Stack

# Strokes of genius

## THE TURNER EXHIBITION

THE newly-assembled collection of Turner paintings at the Tate Gallery was opened to much publicity by the Queen last month. It has taken well over a hundred years to bring these paintings together.

Turner died in 1851. His will stipulated that the paintings and watercolours still in his possession should not be sold off but kept together in a specially constructed gallery. They should be freely available for viewing by the general public. The money to pay for all this was to come from his estate.

Turner's family contested the will. In the end, they got the money, and official society was too stingy to carry out Turner's wishes.

The idea behind the bequest was not the whim of a silly old man. In a way, Turner was striking a blow against the privilege of the powerful and the wealthy to derive pleasure from beautiful objects just because they owned them.

But then Turner was a bit of a rebel. He was born in 1775 and so was a young man in that turbulent period when it was impossible not to be influenced by the French Revolution of 1789.

Turner's father was a barber, so he could

rely on neither birth nor breeding to make his way. The idea of achievement through individual merit (a bourgeois idea, revolutionary for its time) had been boosted enormously by the events in France. Ordinary people were now in principle the equals of monarchs.

Something of that confidence is captured in his superb self-portrait of 1799. Turner stares full-face at the viewer in a kind of challenge, as if to say: I am your equal and with my talent I shall conquer the world of art.

And conquer it he did. In that same year he was elected to the Royal Academy. He proceeded to triumph in every sphere of painting, whether it was the humble art of landscape or seascape painting, or on the more heroic field of historical scene painting.

Why was Turner so fascinated by nature, particularly nature in a turmoil of clouds, waves or storm? Why does it so overwhelm the human figures in his paintings?

Again the answer is to be found in the ferment of ideas associated with the French Revolution. Nature, in the form of elemental forces of energy, comes to represent hitherto unimagined possibilities of human activity and creativity unleashed by revolution.

Accordingly, the only situations in

which human beings become worthy of these forces, are ones of titanic struggle. So Turner paints huge canvasses on themes from Roman history, like Hannibal and his army crossing the Alps, or from the Bible, like the Deluge, in which humanity perishes beneath the waves.

These are all themes of heroic failure. Perhaps this is not surprising. The French Republic had been strangled by the rise of the Napoleonic Empire—a venture which appeared heroic in some ways, but despotic in others.

In the confusion and demoralisation, very few members of the liberal bourgeoisie retained any confidence in radical principals. Reaction was triumphant in England.

Turner lived well into the Victorian period. The bourgeoisie of his old age had long since ceased to be anything other than staid and conservative. Turner was increasingly viewed as an immoral eccentric who failed to paint in the way any decent painter would. His later, very free and original paintings were criticised for their improper use of colour. He was never knighted, probably the most famous Royal Academician ever to be so honoured.

Nobody should be put off going to see Turner's paintings because they are "Art". We can claim Turner for our side. Without the profound revolutionary upheavals of his period we would never have had an artist like Turner able to provide us with a new, revolutionary way of looking at the world. ■

Gareth Jenkins

## The proud tradition

**A Proletarian science: Marxism in Britain 1917-34**

Stuart MacIntyre  
Lawrence and Wishart £6.95

According to one fairly influential school of thought, that of the *New Left Review*, there was no British Marxist tradition worth speaking of until 1962/3 when Perry Anderson, Tom Nairn and their associates took command of the journal of that name.

Of course, that view was always nonsense: an absurdity. As E P Thompson, who was then still in some sense a Marxist, wrote sarcastically in 1965:

"We hold our breath in suspense as the first Marxist landfall is made upon this uncharted Northland. Amidst the tundra and sphagnum moss of British empiricism they are willing to build true conventicles to convert the poor trade unionist aboriginals from their corporative myths to the hegemonic light ... There is a sense of rising suspense as they—the first White Marxists—approach the astonished aborigines."

There has, of course, been a "native" Marxist tradition in Britain since the 1880s. How then could the NLR thesis ever gain any credence at all? For four reasons.

Firstly, and understandably, intellectuals in revolt in the late fifties and early sixties identified British Marxism with British Stalinism, which they rightly rejected. Second, they were utterly remote from any involvement in any actual working class struggles (of which there was no lack). Third, and consequently, they were obsessively concerned with the well-funded, institutionalised cold-warriors who dominated British universities, the BBC and ITV, the National Union of Students and much else besides.

They reacted against all this, but they reacted only in terms of ideas, and their own ideas were heavily influenced by the nature of those of their chosen opponents. Fourth, by chance, their advent more or less coincided with a massive expansion of higher education in Britain which gave a material basis (theses, jobs and more jobs) to the "academic Marxism" which was and is their constituency.

It is a great merit of MacIntyre's book that it cuts across all this. His starting point is 1917 but he rightly looks back to the "great unrest" (1909-14). This period, together with 1916-19, was one in which for the first time basic Marxist ideas gained currency among a significant layer of advanced workers. They were, of course, very much a minority—but a minority which, at crucial points, could influence the course of events.

It is no exaggeration to say that the whole ideology of labourism (which MacIntyre beautifully describes) could never have arisen in the form it did *except* as a reaction to working class Marxists who fought the TUC leaders (often Liberals for the most part) on the basis of *class* politics.

Of course, these predecessors of ours had many faults. Their Marxism was fairly primitive. Anyone who reads today Mark Starr's *A worker looks at history* (1918), which was a most influential text (10,000 sold on first printing and nearly 30,000 before 1925) can pick holes in it. But why were so many sold? Because, between 1910 and the foundation of the CPGB in 1920, a layer of working class militants looked for and found, in Marxism, an alternative world view to the dominant Liberal-imperialist ideology of British capitalism (which the Labourites accepted, albeit critically).



A cartoon from *The Communist* a weekly Marxist paper 1920-1

They had practically no help from any bourgeois intellectuals. Why not? From around the time of Engels' death "Marxism", of some sort or another became the majority or a big minority in the workers' movement of much of Europe. This, in turn, produced an important bourgeois intellectual reaction (Weber, Pareto, Saussure and so on.) Why did this not happen in Britain?

For the obvious reason. The European bourgeois intellectual reaction against "Marxism" however defined, was a necessary reaction against the growth of working class movements which had a "Marxist" flavour.

To coin a phrase, without Kautsky, no Weber. But the British working class movement, for good, Marxist reasons, lacked that colouration. Hence, before 1917 it neither produced first class intellectual opponents *nor* many "renegade" bourgeois intellectuals (the only sort that, broadly speaking, existed).

And so Marxism in Britain was, as

MacIntyre says, a "proletarian science". Think of the outstanding theorists: John McLean, James Connolly, J T Murphy, Tom Bell, Willie Paul and the rest. It is a tradition of which we must be proud.

All of them passed the great test of 1914—they opposed the imperialist war. All of them passed the test of 1919 (except Connolly who was shot by a British imperialist firing squad in 1916) and supported the Communist International. All, except McLean, went into the CPGB in 1920 and sought to build a Leninist Party in Britain.

MacIntyre's thesis is, in part a "myth of the golden past"—and he has written a very sympathetic account of proletarian Marxism in Britain up to 1924. Its weakness, an enormous and definitive one, is that he does not understand the impact of Stalinism. Amazingly, given the period he has chosen, he does not seriously discuss the CP and the General Strike. And the "Soviet Marxism" which replaced the "proletarian science" he lovingly describes was Stalinism.

His Eurocommunist politics prevent him from grappling with this central fact. As a guide to revolutionary politics from 1917 to 1934 this book is worthless. But as a quarry, a source of information and "feel" about the movement, it is well worth reading. ■

Duncan Hallas

## With friends like Bea's...

**The Iron Ladies: Why women vote Tory**  
Beatrix Campbell  
Virago £4.95

FOR MOST socialists, Bea Campbell's interview with Tory minister Edwina Currie will have put Campbell beyond the pale. Unfortunately, that is not the end of the matter.

Bea Campbell represents one end of the spectrum of socialist feminism, Lynne Segal another. Both have recently had books published by Virago, a highly successful feminist publishing house. The two books indicate that socialist feminism is in deep crisis.

Essentially, Campbell takes to its logical conclusion the commonly accepted premise that women in capitalist society form a community with common interests which transcend class differences.

The book does nothing to explain why women vote Tory. The simple proposition that female members of the ruling class share the same class interests as their male counterparts because they benefit from the exploitation of working class men and women is inadmissible to Campbell, so is never investigated.

Equally, because Campbell starts from the premise that women's oppression is rooted in the benefits that working class men gain from it, she is unable to investigate why working class women vote Tory. To do that would mean explaining why both working class men and women sometimes vote for the exploiting class.

The purpose of the book is not to explain anything. It is based on propositions which are simply asserted. For example, that women are the more progressive sex, that all political parties let down women, that all women fear the power and violence of men.

Such assertions can only be made by avoiding any serious review of empirical facts. So the assertion that women as a sex are more progressive than men is based on a Gallup poll which found women more hostile to nudity in public. The same poll established that more men than women supported contraception for girls under 16 without parental consent and abortion on demand. So who is the progressive sex, Bea?

The argument about violence is even more cavalier. Endless interviews with Tory women are used to show that they too opposed Cruise missiles. Campbell never asks, however, what the attitudes of such women were to the Falklands war or police violence during the miners' strike. The "community of interest" is established by avoiding questions of class violence. But it is precisely on this question that Campbell wants to establish the common ground of the Women's Liberation Movement and Tory women.

"Conservative women express, albeit hesitantly, a common sense shared among women that has often been expressed by women's movements, not least the modern Women's Liberation Movement, which in the late 1970s added to its programme of fundamental demands an eighth demand for women's freedom from violence. It is on the terrain of fear that feminism and Conservatism meet. And it is on that terrain that socialism has until recently been absent, and by its silence has appeared to distance itself from the preoccupations of women, not least when they demand the reform of men."

Campbell's book is profoundly reactionary both in its aim—arguing that socialists should ally themselves with Tory women—and in its content.

Lynne Segal's book, *Is the future female?* (reviewed by Lindsey German in February *Socialist Worker Review*) attempts to reject the kind of conclusions which Campbell has drawn. Segal writes:

"The real problem with the popular 'new feminism' which sees women as essentially virtuous and men as essentially vicious is that it serves the forces of reaction as surely as it serves the forces of progress."

Unfortunately Lynne Segal's con-

clusions are the same as those drawn by Bea Campbell in *Sweet Freedom* in 1982:

"Concretely, it means women gaining real power in the women's sections of the Labour Party and the TUC, but as centrally, creating and supporting policies which open up these institutions to the ideas and activities of radical groupings of women (and men) on the outside."

Lynne Segal forcibly rejects Campbell's "new feminism" and is infinitely preferable to Campbell. But both inhabit the same terrain. They both reject Marxism, the centrality of the working class in human emancipation and the need for a revolutionary party. They accept the theory of patriarchy as the explanation of women's oppression.

Their ideas reflect a strata of women in modern capitalist society—the 600,000 who earn more than £12,000 a year—whose interests lie not in overthrowing capitalist society, but in modifying it. Some have professional jobs in local government and the welfare state—jobs which pull them towards a Labourite, collectivist reform of capitalism; others work in the private sector and are pulled by the priorities of the capitalist market.

Lynne Segal represents the aspirations of the former. Bea Campbell, leading Communist Party member notwithstanding, is rapidly moving towards an accommodation with the latter.

Her book is neither worth buying nor reading—unless you want stomach ache. Socialist feminists like Lynne Segal are worth arguing with. (Her book is definitely worth reading). Some socialist feminists in the context of major social upheavals, can be won to a consistent socialist position and support for the revolutionary overthrow of society. Bea Campbell has clearly rejected that path.■

Sheila McGregor

## The Reich and the rich

German Big Business and the Rise of Hitler

H A Turner Jr  
Oxford UP £9.95

UNIVERSITIES in the United States are full of scholars who are just burning to refute Marxism. Usually their method is to construct some gross caricature of the ideas and then gather masses of evidence which prove they don't work. Henry Ashby Turner, Jr, wants to belong to this band of people but unfortunately he seems to suffer from intellectual honesty.

His intentions are unremarkable enough. He wants to prove that big business cannot be held "responsible" for



Hitler's base: bourgeois or petit bourgeois?

the Nazi rise to power. His tactics are unreasonable enough: he alludes to the writers he wants to criticise rather than presenting their ideas for a systematic examination. His methods are dubious enough: he excludes the large state sector in Weimar from his research by claiming to believe that nationalised industries cannot operate as "free agents" in politics. There are enough theoretical and empirical issues raised in this book to sustain a dozen academic hit-men.

The trouble for Turner is that he seems to be right. He produces a mass of evidence to sustain his claim that "Aside from a few minor executives who belonged, for the most part, to the younger generation ... only one capitalist of note, Fritz Thyssen, became a loyal adherent of Nazism before 1933" and that: "It was amongst lesser businessmen, not among the great capitalists of Germany, that Nazism made inroads during its rise to power."

Along the way he punctures quite a few myths. For example he looks in detail at the famous 26 January 1932 meeting of the Industry Club in Dusseldorf, which has been seen as turning point in the relations between the Nazis and big business even by hardened anti-Marxists like Bullock. Turner presents convincing evidence that Hitler's speech did not, as Bullock and others have claimed, turn an initially-sceptical audience of big businessmen into raving Nazis.

There is an account of the rise of the Nazis which argues that they were the puppets of big business and were thus essentially declassed gangsters without any social basis.

That position originated with the Comintern in 1929 and has been a thread of Stalinist thinking ever since. In the ultra-

left phase of the "Third Period", it could be used to justify down-playing the threat of the real fascists and concentrating on the more dangerous "social fascists" of the social-democratic parties.

After 1935, in the period of the "Popular Front", the notion that the fascists were simply the tools of big business could be used to justify alliances with all sorts of unsavoury political forces. The fact that Turner knocks a large nail into the coffin of this particular bankrupt idea can only strengthen revolutionary Marxism.

It is notable that, in his limited discussion of the "Marxists" he wants to attack, Trotsky and his various followers are studiously ignored. The Trotskyist interpretation of fascism has always stressed its mass social nature amongst the petty bourgeoisie and the extent to which it is a political force operating outside of the direct control of big business.

Turner does not take any account of this sort of analysis yet his painstaking empirical analysis succeeds in proving Marxism correct on two key points. First, he shows that fascism was a mass movement dependent upon the enthusiastic support of millions for its financial and political health and that the classic small businessman was an important part of the class mix that made up this movement.

Second, he shows that this mass movement was forced on the German big bourgeoisie when all other political alternatives were exhausted: it was no more their direct tool than are the trade union bureaucrats who form the backbone of reformism. But just as, by making some concessions, big business can do a deal with the reformists, so, by making different concessions, it can do a deal with fascists. Either way, it keeps a firm grip on its factories, its banks and its profits.

This book is probably too detailed and leaden to be of much interest to the general reader, but any socialist who is making a special study of the Nazis should definitely read it. It is one of the pleasures of life that,

however ill-intentioned those who dig it out may be, the truth turns out to confirm revolutionary Marxism. ■

Colin Sparks

## Days of red carnations

Portugal's Revolution Ten Years On  
Ferreira & Marshall  
Cambridge University Press £25.00

OPPONENTS of revolutionary socialism are fond of pretending that it is a thing of the past. But in real (and recent) history, masses of workers have often discovered that revolutionary ideas are a great deal more modern than our rulers claim. The Portuguese revolution of 1974-5 is one such instance.

The revolutionary movement was not initiated by Portuguese workers; indeed it did not originate in Portugal at all, but in the national liberation struggles of its African colonies. Discontents amongst hard-pressed colonial troops, denied expression by the Caetano dictatorship, rapidly focussed into a movement of junior officers for political reform, culminating in the overthrow of the regime on 25 April 1974.

The officers intended merely a change of management—what they got was a festival of the oppressed. The secret police and the most despised representatives of fascism were jailed and their victims freed. Red carnations replaced bullets in the gun-barrels of the troops in Portugal's cities.

Amid the indiscriminate fraternity, however, the reality of the class struggle began to assert itself. For millions of workers, freedom meant an end to drudgery and poverty, and the opportunity to shape their own lives. For the country's new military rulers, freedom meant that

while class society might be administered in a more benevolent style, it would continue to be class society.

For eighteen months this central contradiction was revealed only fleetingly, in endless governmental combinations and re-combinations, and in clashes of authority between loyal and radicalised branches of the state machine.

The state was incapable of imposing consistently the "rule of law"; important sections of its troops were more impressed by the slogans of workers' demonstrations—"the soldiers are the sons of the workers"—than by the orders of the generals. Eventually the Portuguese ruling class was able to purge its army, and through the agencies of the Socialist and Communist Parties, to effect a return to "normality".

Those who want to find out how this was achieved will not find it here. The authors view the revolution in a sympathetic light, and they have collected some interesting material about how it was seen by leading army officers of varied political standpoints. Even the most left-wing of these, however, did not reach a clear understanding of the role of the reformist organisations, even less of a strategy which might have undermined it.

Order it from your library—it will lighten the gloom of almost any history section. But it will not explain what went wrong. ■

Steve Wright


## Inside the struggle

*The Beggars' Strike*  
Aminata Sow Fall  
Longmans £2.95  
*Master and Servant*  
David Mulwa  
Longman's £3.95

BOTH NOVELS are part of the African Classics series. They both relate to the liberation of African countries, one before the event and one after. In different ways, the stories reveal aspects of the anti-colonial struggle from the inside.

Conflicts in the post-liberation economy are the setting for *The Beggars' Strike*. Tourists must be encouraged but the streets are cluttered with disease-ridden unemployed. Public officials decide to act and good careers are in the offing anyway. The events of the campaign and the beggars' response make interesting reading. In particular, the pictures of the street wise down-and-outs are an insight in themselves. The plot develops with flashes of irony, bitter humour and some sharp comments on Senegalese society.

Tony Cliff  
**Lenin**  
1917-1923



**Revolution Besieged**

On the day after the October insurrection in Russia, Lenin calmly told the Congress of Soviets: 'We shall now proceed to construct the socialist order.' The years that followed are crucial for any understanding of socialism: years of achievement, but years of ultimate failure. Originally as two volumes, this completes Tony Cliff's biography of Lenin. 496 pages

£8.95 from SWP bookstalls or by post (add £1 postage) from BOOKMARKS, 265 Seven Sisters Road, London N4 2DE.

If revolutionary socialism is to offer any solution for a world in crisis today, then some tough questions must be answered: Exactly what happened after the Russian workers' revolution of 1917? What led to the rule of the bureaucracy under Stalin? To these hard questions, this book offers hard answers. 112 pages.

£2.50 from SWP branch bookstalls or by post (add 30p postage) from BOOKMARKS, 265 Seven Sisters Road, London N4 2DE.

**Russia**  
WORKERS' STATE TO STATE CAPITALISM

Peter Binns, Tony Cliff and Chris Harman



A less extravagant theme runs through *Master and Servant* in colonial Kenya. Growing up amid repression, missionary schools, collaborating Chiefs and double dealing traders, the boy Kituku observes and suffers. The central figure, Hamad struggles heroically with the forces ranged against himself and the other labourers.

With his own development, Kituku comes eventually to see the destructive and divisive effects. The story is told sensitively and simply, and the final resolution is no less dramatic for being foreseeable.

These two novels together make a useful introduction to African fiction. They also look beyond the South African scene and cast a light into an overlooked area of literature. ■

Alan Woodward

## A change of masters

Revolution Postponed: Women in contemporary China

Margery Wolf  
Methuen £6.95

Margery Wolf writes with wit and clarity, knows enough about Chinese society to ask the right questions, and possesses a finely-tuned bullshit detector. The combination of the three make this probably the best book available on the status of women in China today.

It has to be said that the competition is not fierce. Most writing on the subject proceeds from the assumption that because the state says that women are liberated, therefore it's true. Other books have been written which challenge this assumption, but this is both the most up-to-date and the most accessible.

The book was researched through interviews with several hundred women in selected areas of China throughout 1980. The questions covered practically all aspects of women's lives in China today, and many of the quotes she gives makes fascinating, if depressing reading. The material on women at work is the least satisfactory, though this has more to do with problems of access than with the author's politics.

The underlying theory of the book is that the problem is a particularly Chinese form of patriarchy, which as she defines it means male sexist attitudes rather than any sort of conspiracy between the ruling class and male workers. Yet the material she has collected contradicts this theory time and again. For what it shows is precisely the way in which those attitudes have their roots in the material realities of both women's and men's lives.

The fundamental constriction on

women's equality is the family. The revolution of 1948 did not abolish the family, nor even try to do so. Rather there was an attempt to reconstruct the family in order to break the power of clan lineages over society, while retaining the nuclear family as the basic unit of society. Hence the roots of women's oppression remained. Their roles as mothers and as wives (in that order, as the book makes clear) have continued to structure the rest of their lives.

Yet this process is not uniform. For peasant women it is fundamentally different from what it is for women workers in the cities, who are much more likely to be able to choose who they marry, to be independent of their husband's family once married, and finally to be independent of their children in old age. And the crucial reason for this is their access to work outside the home, which has led to a

weakening of the absolute ties of the family, which still persist in the countryside.

It is the position of women in the workforce, rather than the attitudes of men, which crucially determines the extent to which they can have any control over their own lives. And it is their subordinate position, not to men but to the ruling class, which perpetuates their oppression.

Margery Wolf does not try to suggest how that oppression could be overcome; she merely describes it. But the very honesty of her description is valuable enough. As she states in her conclusion "... a revolution imposed on a population is not a revolution but a change of masters." It is a basic truth about China too rarely stated, and any book which starts from that perspective is to be welcomed. ■

George Gorton



Victims of a Chinese patriarchy?

## Bookbrief

*Pre-colonial black Africa* by Cheikh Anta Diop (Lawrence Hill £6.95) breaks new ground in its detailing in the rise of African societies before the advent of colonialism. Though at times too detailed for the general reader, it's a powerful refutation of the myth of imperialism bringing "civilisation" to Africa. Well worth reading.

Imperialism gets a further savaging in this month's most important reprint—Eduardo Galeano's *Open Veins of Latin America* (Monthly Review £6.95), one of the best committed histories of Latin America ever written. Because of the author's third-worldist perspective, the sections dealing with this century are less satisfactory, but it's nevertheless a powerful and compelling read.

Closer to home, the AIDS industry has now moved into publishing. Best of the recent crop is *Women and the Aids Crisis* by Diana Richardson (Pandora £3.95). Our reviewer described it as "a good, factual

account of what AIDS is, how it is transmitted and how to deal with the disease, though it makes no attempt to give any political analysis."

Dennis Kavanagh's *Thatcherism and British Politics: the End of Consensus* (Oxford £5.95) has coincided nicely with the pre-election fever. Our reviewer thought that "its scope is wider than the title suggests. As a survey of the debates inside the Tory Party since the early seventies it is useful; but its treatment of the economic crisis and its analysis of the class struggle is weak." A better book than you'd expect from an Alliance academic.

Among the best of this month's fiction: Carlos Fuentes' *The Old Gringo* (Picador £3.95) is a moving study of loneliness and old age; *World's Fair* is the latest novel from E L Doctorow (Picador £3.50) and Penguin have reissued Philip K Dick's classic science-fiction novel, *The Man in the high castle* (£3.95). ■

Charlie Hore

## Wrong on gays?

THE SWP has always had problems with lesbian and gay politics. Working as I do alongside SWP comrades in the campaign around Positive Images in Haringey, I know that you can be very committed in your defence of lesbian and gay rights. But four articles in the April issue of *Socialist Worker Review* illustrate all too clearly your lack of theoretical understanding of lesbian and gay politics.

John Molyneux's article on Gramsci contains a sentence which I see as indicative of your lack of any politics of oppression. He says: "The rights of gays, women and blacks will be defended by workers' actions in the workplace". While the support of the organised working class is very important to all these struggles, he fails to address himself to the historical nature of "workers' action in the workplace".

Most workers' action in the industrialised world has been dominated by the interests of white, heterosexual men and has often, particularly through its support of differentials and the family wage, discriminated against those groups whom John Molyneux mentions. This is not to suggest that workers' action is essentially heterosexist, sexist and racist but the fact that it has historically often been so means that the concept of workers' actions needs to be subjected to a deeper analysis than John Molyneux allows.

On a personal level, it has been my experience, after 16 years' work in my own union and in solidarity with other unions, that initiatives around heterosexism, sexism or racism have *never* come from the mainstream organisations of workers, not even from the left. They have always come about following the self-organisation of the particular oppressed group in question and that self-organisation has often been based outside the workplace.

Noel Halifax's article on "Gays and the Labour Party" (is it sexism that prevents him from mentioning lesbians?) displays the same theoretical blinkered vision. He is absolutely correct to denounce Michael Foot for his shameful treatment of Peter Tatchell and also the recent utterances of Hewitt and Kinnock. But he fails to recognise

why so many lesbians and gay men (such as myself) have joined the Labour Party. After the election of a Labour GLC in 1981 we found that there were forces in the party that were prepared to listen to and address themselves to the expressed needs of the lesbian and gay movement. Although we have never had—nor ever sought—the right to formal recognition within the Labour Party, self-organisation of lesbians and gay men did become a meaningful activity within the party.

The emergence of Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners also marked a new confidence among lesbians and gay men in the wider labour movement. Not only was solidarity offered to the major working class struggle of the decade, but it was offered and accepted on our own terms. Lesbian and gay rights moved on to the agenda of the labour movement in a quite unprecedented way. The adoption of the policy of positive images of lesbians and gays (which had been a central demand of the lesbian and gay movement since 1970) by Haringey Labour Party, for example, is just one illustration of this new climate.

The space created by the GLC and LGSM enabled a whole new lesbian and gay politics to flourish—a non-monolithic politics which recognises both the general nature of heterosexist oppression and the different forms of oppression which exist among lesbians and gay men, among black and white, among able-bodied and disabled, among working class and middle class. Lesbian and gay politics can no longer be said to be dominated by the interests of white, able-bodied men. (Can the left say as much of itself?)

The organisation around difference has made it possible for lesbians and gay men to work together more effectively on our own terms than was ever possible in the 1970s. Anyone who doubts this should visit the Haringey Civic Centre the next time there is a protest against the Parents' Rights Group there. The protestors come from all sections of the lesbian and gay communities and, despite all the odds against us, it is in this that our new found strength lies.

Pat Stack's article on AIDS reflects this same pattern of hostility to autonomous lesbian and gay self-organisation. For several years now, gay men's organisations such as the Terence Higgins Trust, have been advising gay men to adopt Safer Sex techniques to ensure our survival until such time as a cure for AIDS has been found. The THT have made some mistakes but their



Patricia Hewitt

advice has had a major impact on lifestyles in the gay male community. But for most of this period SWP has talked purely in terms of picketing government ministries and has allowed Safer Sex to be represented as self-oppression. Suddenly, it seems, the SWP line has changed and we find Pat Stack singing the praises of Safer Sex. I am glad about that, but nowhere in his article, of course, does he acknowledge that it is as a result of gay male self-organisation that Safer Sex has become part of our common sense.

The article from the SWP Party Council, entitled "The Way Ahead", does, however, give the clearest indication of the SWP's attitude to the autonomous self-organisation of lesbians and gay men. Despite the media attacks on lesbians and gay men, despite the virulent hostility of many traditional politicians, despite the moral panic about AIDS, despite the growing violence on the streets lesbians and gay men and their struggles do not even rate a mention in this key article.

This invisibility comes as no surprise to ageing gay socialists such as myself. But it is indicative of the failure of the SWP—and indeed of all Leninist groupings—to address themselves to the reality of oppression and to the articulated politics of the oppressed. That failure is central to understanding the inability of the left to emerge from its own ghetto. It is a failure that no socialist—Leninist or non-Leninist—can take any pleasure from. ■

Bob Cant  
Haringey

## Labour gave way

AS NOEL HALIFAX shows the Labour Party's disgraceful attitude towards gay rights is nothing new (April *SWR*). Another example occurred during the last Labour Government in relation to Northern Ireland.

In 1976 laws were drawn up to

bring Northern Ireland into line with Britain in the areas of divorce and gay rights. Divorce reform went through, but in early 1979 the plan to legalise homosexuality was ditched. James Callaghan was so desperate to keep his government from toppling that he did a deal with Unionist MPs, promising to drop the proposed reforms in return for Unionist votes. Labour capitulated to Ian Paisley and his "Save Ulster from Sodomy" campaign to stay in office.

Because Labour's politics revolve around elections and getting into parliament they repeatedly compromise with racist, sexist, anti-gay ideas to win votes. Despite the claims of the Labour left any future Labour government will be just as bad—or worse. Callaghan gave way on gay rights towards the end of his period in government. Kinnock has sold out before he even reaches Downing Street. ■

Linda Moore  
Belfast

## The weak spies

I MUST take issue with the letter from Ian Garriock attacking John Rees's article "What Intelligence?" (April *SWR*). The extract that seems to offend Garriock most is the reference to the ineptitude and inconsequentiality of Secret Service work. Yet it takes very little research into the subject to bear this point out.

Over the years a number of spies have often acted as senior members of the British Secret Service. Yet this has had no effect on my life as a railway guard. I've not noticed Russian tanks at the corner of the street and it has not helped me as a trade union and political activist.

Perhaps a little closer to home, apologists for the Special Branch can point to how quickly they captured several Irishmen after the Birmingham pub bombing. There is, however, one minor detail that should be considered; whatever time that they knocked on the door, it was the wrong door!

Malinovsky, who was on the Bolshevik Central Committee, was a police spy, yet he could do nothing to stop the Russian Revolution. The reason for this is twofold. Despite its brutality and certain undeniable successes, the Russian Secret Police was generally inept. More

importantly, no amount of spying or police oriented work will stop an entire class that is on the move.■

Dave Hammond  
Lewisham

## The wrong songs

IN REPLY to Simon Peters (April *SWR*), *Handsworth Songs* is not a major leap forward in inventive documentary. A similar style was used in the 1960s by Jean-Luc Godard (as well as hundreds of advertisers).

Racism is such an important issue that a film made about it should encourage black and white people to do something about it. This is what the Black Audio Collective needed to address.

What they were successful in doing in *Handsworth Songs* was to guilt-trip white people. It was meant to be a film about racism. It is one's duty as a fighter against racism to pose a solution. But because the Black Audio Collective see white people (irrespective of class) as the cause of racism, they therefore end up making a misleading movie about it.

In the late 1970s racism reared its ugly head in the overt form of the National Front. The nazis were holding rallies, demos and public meetings. In omitting this fact, the film omitted the existence of the Anti-Nazi League.

The ANL and its success is an important example of black and white unity. The fascists were smashed off the streets to the extent that they are extremely weak today. It is a vital part of history for anyone who is interested and is likely to encourage people to fight racism.

Why shouldn't black and white people feel angry about racism? Why shouldn't we want to fight against the rotten capitalist system which creates racism and benefits from it?

If the Black Audio Collective were really looking to show a factual documentary on racism I'm sure the archives could have provided them with film on black people fighting against their oppression. For example, Grunwicks, where black women fought against their employers. For example, the black workers at Imperial Typewriters in Leicester challenging the racism of the unions by strike action.

*Handsworth Songs* actually fuels the ideas of black nationalists that racism is a white problem and not a class one. The

seriousness of presenting a film on racism as a white problem and not even hinting at a solution *does* leave you feeling passive (if you're black) and guilty (if you're white).

The film in fact reinforces the passivity in people which capitalism instills.■

Amerjit Kang  
Kilburn

## She's got no answers

I THOROUGHLY disagree with Simon Peters' review (April *SWR*) of the film *She's Gotta Have It*. This is a film about sexual politics but the politics are dubious.

Bar the odd line, this is not a funny film as Peters suggests unless gross stereotypes of the type of Nola can be seen as humorous.

The main characters in this film are cardboard cut-outs, which makes the movie stilted and really very boring.

Peters' point that using an all black cast "caused consternation among film critics" seemed to suggest that all black casts are a recent phenomena. Hollywood would not balk at showing black people making love, as they've produced numerous films in the past showing this, ranging from the excellent *Blue Collar* to *Piece of the Action*, *Car Wash* and even soft porn like *Black Emmanuelle*.

Independence for women does entail control of their own bodies but concurrent sexual relationships are not the central means by which women can express their independence.

Women, especially working class women, cannot express sexual independence, if they are economically dependent on men.

Nola's dilemma is one faced by many women. Her response to this dilemma (accepting it as her problem) gives few indicators of how working class women, without Nola's economic independence, can resolve it.■

Moyra Roxburgh  
Notting Hill

## A peace party?

YOUR editorialist ("Cruise Turn," April *SWR*) shouldn't describe as "a cynical view" the realistic appraisal that the Labour leadership's ability to pander to



A scene from *She's Gotta Have It* not the first film to show blacks making love

electoralism is literally infinite.

Kinnock's U-turn on Cruise does indeed leave CND looking a sorry mess. It's a scandal that the SWP's past abstentionism from any serious involvement in the anti-war movement means that you can't be in there now urging CND to stand candidates in every constituency where the Labour candidate fails unequivocally to endorse the policy of independent (unilateral) nuclear disarmament.

Really CND should start preparing now to build a political alternative to the Labour Party, and the SWP should be trying to help such a development, combatting the inevitable pro- and anti-trade union sectarianism which will arise.

The SWP is the only group on the left which has had a credible orientation to the Labour Party in recent years, but how possible is it going to be now for you to play a leadership role in helping CND to part company from Kinnock and the rest of them? I hope you can.■

W Hall  
Athens

## Ruskin changes

DUNCAN HALLAS's article (December *SWR*) set out the Marxist view on Ruskin College and put in the historical context of the debate on working class education.

However there is one recent development which is worth our attention—the continued shrinking of the size of the trade union bureaucracy (such as the AEU). This means Ruskin can now no longer be considered a

passport to a full-time official's job.

This is important, as is the increasing proportion of people going to the college who are unemployed. Some of these are "serious reformists" as Hallas points out and some of them are open to revolutionary ideas.

During my time at Ruskin College *Socialist Worker* was the best selling socialist newspaper in the college. We held regular meetings attracting a handful of people—and recruited a couple of comrades.

In addition there was struggle against the college authorities we are currently defending in the much publicised Selbourne case. Students blockaded right-wing union bureaucrat Alistair Graham from the college after he had condemned the mass picket at Warrington by print workers and their supporters in November 1983. When victimisations followed this, a determined and well-organised occupation got them reinstated. This was the high point.

In conclusion revolutionaries are active and give leadership no matter where we find ourselves. Any dunghill is high enough for us and Ruskin College is no exception. In the short term we have gained a little through our intervention: the possibilities in the long term may be much greater.■

Greg Challis  
Sheffield

We welcome letters and contributions on all issues raised in *Socialist Worker Review*. Please keep your contributions as short as possible, typed, double spaced if you can, and one side of paper only. Send to: *SWR*, PO Box 82, London E3 3LH.

# Reclaim the Day

**BACK  
CHAT**



*Women fighters, class fighters*

HAVE YOU ever been sickened by International Women's Day?

I remember one March 8 a couple of years back, hearing the inane chant "Take the Toys from the Boys"—the reference was evidently to the similarity between a penis and a missile—which managed to encapsulate in six words how the modern women's movement has turned the idea of collective strength into a sort of sub-Freudian moralism.

But does it have to be like this? Women's Day began—like May Day—to commemorate the deaths of workers fighting against exploitation. Like May Day, March 8 was meant to be a festival for the workers and the oppressed. And wasn't the movement which overthrew the Tsar and started the Russian Revolution begun by the demonstrations of the women textile workers of St Petersburg on 8 March 1917?

It was only this year that I found out what Women's Day was meant to be.

If you look hard at a good map of Brazil and go inland from the city of Joao Pessoa in the state of Paraiba, you'll see a small town called Alagoa Grande. It's about 7 degrees south of the Equator and 35 degrees in the shade. It is one of the centres of the sugar cane industry.

The workers and their families live in small townships, seven or ten to a hut, built of mud bricks, 500 families in a settlement. Apart from the huts, there are perhaps two beer shops and a cemetery. The health centre might open one morning a week. It might not. There is no sanitation. But the police post is permanently manned.

Many men and women have seasonal work in the plantations. Sugar factory labourers are picked up and dumped back once a week. They are treated like cattle. Literally—the rest of the time the truck carries meat to the slaughterhouse.

This is a centre of new militancy and struggles over the land: struggles pun-

ctuated by gunfire in the night, when the landowners' thugs attack the groups of squatters and their supporters. It's been going on a long time. In 1962 the husband of Dona Elizaveta, one of the workers' leaders was shot dead. Three years ago Margarida Alves was also left dying in a pool of blood. The union she led was becoming too much of a threat.

On March 8, about 1,500 people gathered for the demonstration in the town of Alagoa Grande. Delegations of sugar workers from different local towns were led by a banner carried by their sons: "Long live women's unity for liberation". Behind them came 60 members of the Association of Laundrywomen and Maids. One woman carried a placard aloft: "Organised women

are liberated women. Long live the women fighting for a new society."

The crowd listened patiently to the speeches for 2½ hours. The husband of their murdered leader made an emotional appeal. But it was when Dona Antonia and Maria Penha called for "land reform in the fields, not in the news reels" that the crowd responded. The gunmen did not appear. There was not a policeman to be seen.

That evening there were two memorable items on the news. The first was the pictures of tanks and soldiers as the army occupied the oil refineries to prevent a work-to-rule. But the outrage this caused was nothing compared to the cry of rage which greeted Margaret Thatcher as she insinuated herself into the grief of the survivors of the ferry disaster. There is a straightforward response to Tory women, whatever some feminists might think.

Of course there are good reasons why Women's Day in Brazil is above all about working women, not least the fact that nearly 10 million workers have been on strike there during the past two years. It may be some time before we can make Women's Day a workers' day here, but we can start by ensuring that we take part in such events, not as bystanders but as socialists who want to reclaim the day.

And we do not have to apologise to anyone for class politics. For over there, half a world away, there are women fighting for a new society, as it says on the placard.

Half a world away, but at the same time very close. ■

**Dave Beecham**



*Those were the days: International Women's Day, Moscow 1917*