

socialist

REVIEW

Monthly Magazine of the Socialist Workers Party



Ressurrecting the Social Contract

- the new TUC
Labour Party plan

Keeping the lid on the box

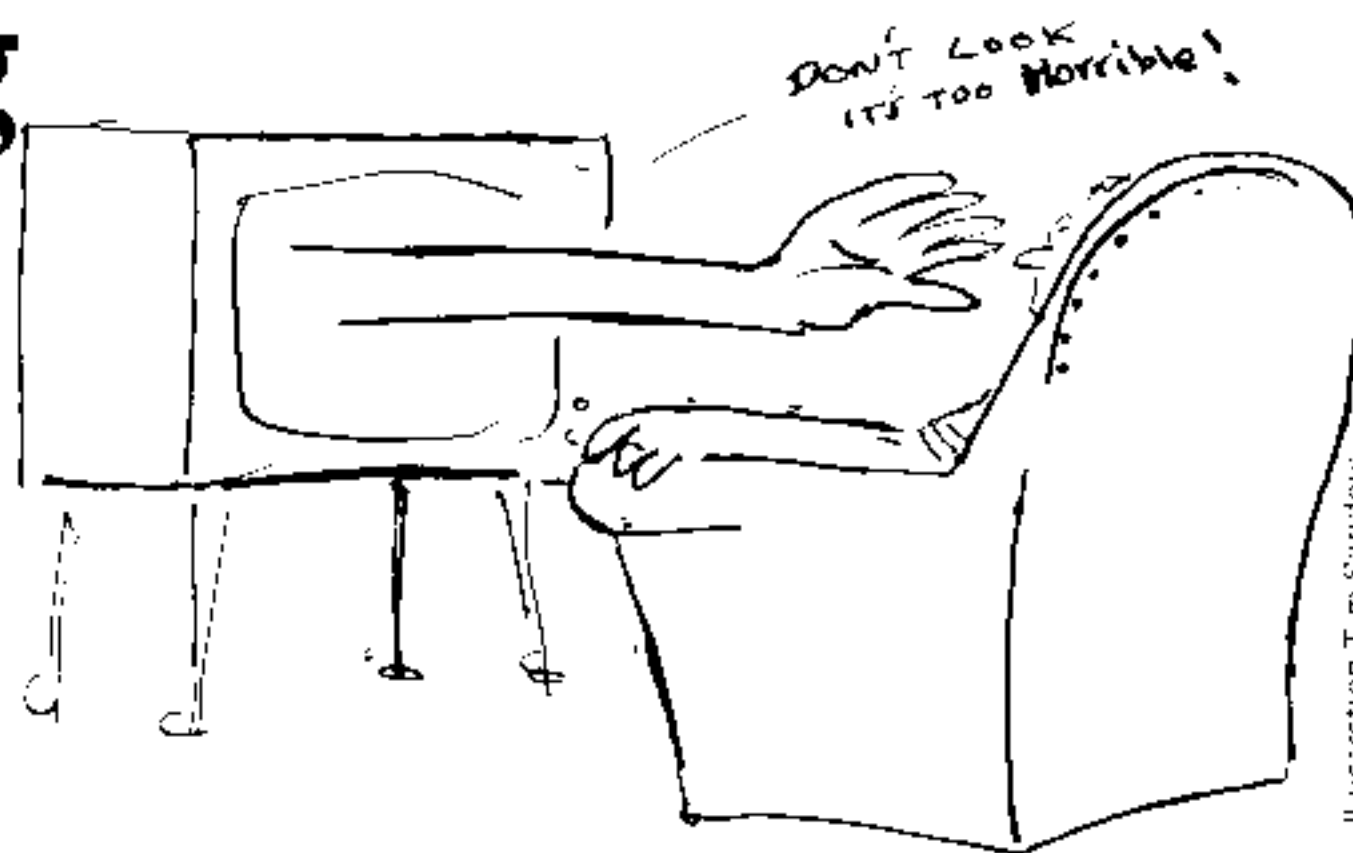


Illustration T.M. Saunders

The withdrawal of the invitation to EP Thompson to give the BBC's annual Dimpleby Lecture has brought the issue of TV censorship into the open. Colin Sparks shows that such censorship is the rule rather than the exception.

Since January 1980, the BBC, the IBA and the commercial TV companies have directly intervened to censor at least 19 different programmes.

Such censorship varies from Harlech TV's refusal to broadcast a film *Curious Journey*, made by Kenneth Griffiths from interviews with nine veterans of the Easter Rising, through Thames TV cutting a 2½ minute film of London school students arguing against the bomb from the *Help* series, to the BBC's refusal to repeat a series based on Harold Robbins' (*The Pirate*, during the visit of King Khaled of Saudi Arabia.

The subjects of direct censorship are familiar ones. They start off with Ireland and the Bomb, run through state security, the sensitivities of major trading partners, Russia and racism, right through to dear old sex.

But direct and overt censorship, while it raises a public row, is very much less than half the story. Thousands of hours of programmes are transmitted without ever raising a ruling-class eyebrow, mostly because they do not contain anything even the most reactionary bigot could object to. In general, the broadcasting system in this country serves its masters very well.

The way that this happens is a very curious and British one. Unlike some broadcasting systems, the French ORTF under De Gaulle for instance, the BBC and ITV networks are not subject to direct political control. They claim some sort of independence from the state.

But this 'freedom' is entirely illusory. It has its origins in the great crisis of the 1926 General Strike, when some hotheads in the government, led by Winston Churchill, wanted to take the BBC over. Baldwin, the prime minister, had a shrewder idea, and he worked closely with John Reith, the Director-General, in order to maintain the fiction of independence while making sure that the BBC toed the official line in practice.

The deal was summed up by Reith in a famous letter to Baldwin:

'Assuming the BBC is for the people and that the government is for the people, it follows that the BBC must be for the government in this crisis too. It should be allowed to define its position to the country. It must assist in sustaining the essential services of the country, the preservation of law and order, and the life and liberty of the individual and the community.'

And after the strike, Reith explained it again to his staff:

'There could be no question about our supporting the government in general, particularly since the General Strike had been declared illegal in the high court. This being so, we were unable to permit anything which was contrary to the spirit of that judgement, and which might have prolonged or sought to justify the strike.'

Among those subversives refused air time was the Archbishop of Canterbury!

It is upon that sort of cynical independence that the 'freedom' of British broadcasting has always been based. Just in case anyone might happen to forget, the government is only too happy to provide the occasional reminder. Thus, in 1980, the BBC broadcast an interview with a representative of INLA and film of Republican activity, which provoked a sharp letter from Sir Michael Havers, the attorney general, which stated:

'Although I have reached a decision not to institute criminal proceedings in respect of these two incidents I should like to make it clear that I regard conduct of the nature which took place as constituting, in principle, offences under section 11 (of the Prevention of Terrorism Act) as well as abhorrent, and unworthy of the high standards the public expects from the BBC.'

Within that general framework there are numerous other mechanisms of control. Broadcasting institutions are very hierarchical, and like all hierarchies, recruitment and promotion policies tend to favour those who conform to already-established values. In general, those who run broadcasting are either from the ruling class or well on the way to being integrated into it, so the standards of the organisations themselves are conservative, consensus ones.

In the case of the BBC, there is also a strong tradition of links between the news staff and military intelligence. Back in 1976, Paul Foot reported that four senior BBC newsmen held reserve commissions in military intelligence and a fifth had served in the past with the SAS.

Given that sort of leadership, it is not surprising that junior staff tend to toe the line. Anyone who wants to get out, or to keep a well-paid job, will pretty soon get a good idea of what sort of thing he or she should be churning out. The system encourages that.

For example, the official BBC publication *Principles and Practice of Documentary Production* discusses the 'journalistic freedom which is envied all over the world', but goes on to add:

'With some subjects, particularly those of a current affairs or political nature, there are more clearly defined policies which must be observed. For example documentaries about Ireland, or racial intolerance, or the nation's defence policy, or the taking of drugs, may not be made without observing the BBC's general policies in these matters... A simple system of reference upwards through heads of departments makes it possible for producers to get guidance on these matters.'

What tends to happen is that anybody with a critical turn of mind either gets out or starts to censor themselves. A good example of this comes from the area of drama, which in the past produced a good crop of dissidents. A number of quite famous radicals, like Tony Garnett of *Days of Hope* fame, now find it impossible to work in television and have moved to cinema films. Others tend to keep their heads down in order to keep their hands on their meal tickets. Troy Kennedy Martin, chairman of the Writer's Guild censorship committee argues:

'The climate of opinion has been really cautious. The horse trading with American money has neutralised things a lot.'

This 'climate of opinion' is hardly surprising, since in 1979 alone the BBC censored the plays *Solid Geometry*, *Scum* and *The Legion Hall Bombing*. But it also lets the bureaucrats off the hook; with writers playing safe, there have been no major banning incidents in drama since then (although a Loach film on the steel strike got only a limited showing, a year later, on ITV.)

And behind all of this there is another force at work: the deadening weight of common sense which assumes all viewers are white, male, heterosexual non-strikers. It is a common sense which is shared by many viewers, so that when the newsreader 'hopes' that a strike may end, or 'fears' that negotiations might break down, or when a 'defence correspondent' tells us yet again about those thousands of Russian tanks menacing our sceptred isle and explains the pressing need for the neutron bomb, it sounds like the most natural thing in the world.

To return to Reith. He suffered, it is true, from bouts of insanity and some of his views were rather odd—he insisted, for instance, that radio newsmen wear full evening dress—but he gave the ruling class some advice back in 1925 which they have never forgotten:

'In broadcasting there is to hand a mighty instrument to fashion a public opinion.'

It is that view which means that, openly and secretly, subtly and crudely, the overwhelming bulk of what gets on the screen is 'good and safe.'



Through the smoke of the summer

'Brixton, then, was an absolutely typical product of two linked circumstances. On the one hand, there is rising unemployment, misery and desperation. On the other there is the racism of British society which drives young blacks into inplacable hatred of every manifestation of white authority. A logic follows from this: that St Pauls in Bristol and Brixton in London are the harbingers of further storms. The conditions which exist in those places are conditions which exist in a dozen other places. The anger and militancy which burst out there will burst out in a dozen other places.'

Looking back through the smoke of the summer, there is hardly a word of what Colin Sparks wrote in our May issue, following the first Brixton riot, that we would change. We have had the riots since in 'dozens of other places'. In Toxteth and Moss Side they were on the same scale as St Pauls and Brixton. Elsewhere, they varied in enormously in size and seriousness, from major riots in places like Southall, Leeds, Leicester, Handsworth, Bolton to the smaller 'copycat' riots that hit scores of localities. But what was revealed virtually everywhere is that there are huge quantities of highly inflammable tinder in the heart of Britain's cities.

There is a debate taking place among the various groups of those who would 'reform' the present system as to what was the cause of the riots. Some ranging from the 'wets' inside the government to Michael Foot, are arguing that the sharp rise in the number of unemployed youth on the streets is the cause, and that there must be an immediate extension of the YOPS youth training programmes to defuse the situation.

Others from their base in the CRE and the local CRCs are criticising this appraisal for neglecting the problems of the black youth who played such a prominent part in the riots. A third group have been digging up a survey made for Tory minister Peter Walker during the time of the Heath government to prove that the real culprit is the long term decline of the inner cities.

Finally, a sector of the Labour left point the finger at what has been happening to the police, with the independence of chief constables from 'democratic control' and the shift away from the 'bobby on the beat' to the panda car and the transit van.

It is not a debate in which we are going to get involved. It assumes that the different issues—youth unemployment, the condition of the inner cities, increased racialism and the trend to 'hard' policing—are sepa-

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able. They are not. They are all consequences of single cause, the deepening of the crisis of the system.

The deterioration of the British economy is most evident in the inner cities. It was in these same inner city areas that immigrants who came to fill the gap in the labour market could find somewhere to live in the 1950s and 1960s and where today, racialism on the one hand and the effects of the crisis on house-building programmes on the other, force most of them to remain. Racialism meant that even in times of full employment black people had to make twice as much effort to find a job as white people; today it means that black unemployment has doubled in the last 18 months and is rising at one and a half times the average rate. Within the inner cities and among black people, those hardest hit by unemployment (whether directly, or indirectly by being forced to accept boring and ill paid work) are those least bound by traditions of deference and least beaten down by past defeats—the young. Hence it is that the general bitterness created by the effects of the crisis finds its most concentrated expression among those who are young, those who are black and those who live in the inner cities. It is hardly surprising that under these circumstances the police come to see young, black, inner city dwellers as their main problem: old racist stereotypes are given a new sharpness as those paid to protect property from the propertyless find groups of unemployed black youth hanging around street corners with every conceivable incentive to improve their miserable living standards through a little petty thieving.

Rioting is a very old response to unemployment—whether you take the Bilston riot of 1841 (when unemployed iron workers attacked the annual open air dinner of the 'Bilston Conservative Operatives Association', causing some of the dignitaries addressing it to be hospitalised), the riots in central London in 1886, the fighting between unemployed youth and the police in Wood Green in 1919, or the huge confrontations on the streets of Birkenhead, Liverpool and Belfast in 1932. It is hardly surprising that we have seen this response again in 1981—or that those hit disproportionately by the crisis have been most heavily involved.

Those who are cut off from the main stream of economic activity have no other way of expressing their discontent than by rioting. The choice for them is a frontal attack on property and the symbols of authority, or no battle at all. They have no other method by which they can exercise leverage over the system. Hence the way in which apparently apathetic and atomised individuals are suddenly fused into a fighting force on the streets—and then just as rapidly become atomised and 'apathetic' again, once they have lost control of the streets.

The rioting this time round has differed in one important respect from the previous cases we have mentioned. It has not been an explicit protest at unemployment as such. The 'sparks' which produced the riots have been acts of police harassment (Brixton, Toxteth), reports of racist attacks (Southall, Bolton) or simply the example of other riots.

These differences are not surprising, given the way in which the effects of the crisis are concentrated in a different way this time round from in the past. In the 1880s, unemployment was concentrated among men in their mid-to late-20s who took to sleeping out en masse in Hyde Park and Trafalgar Square; the rioting tended to be in these localities. In the 1930s, the hardest hit were in the 'depressed areas' of the North, Scotland and South Wales, where the unemployed of all ages were forced to queue long hours each day to get a diminishing dole: bitterness was concentrated in the dole queue and easily gave rise to demonstrations, clashes with the police and looting.

Today the authorities have learnt a lesson. They have removed the dole office as an effective centre of discontent—fortnightly signing has all but eliminated the queues and—centralisation of benefit rules has reduced almost completely the possibilities of agitation to enforce local improvements.

But bitterness continues to accumulate among those who are young, black and in the inner cities. It is brought to a head when the police attempt to stop unemployed youngsters doing the only things they can do—hang about, waiting for something, somehow to happen. In places like Handsworth, Toxteth, Moss Side, Brixton, most young blacks report direct experience of police harassment. And as unemployment

rises, the experience is no longer one of blacks only. As the note left by two white teenagers from the North West who committed suicide put it: 'There's nothing to do but stand around on the streets, and the police move you on all the time.'

And so, especially for youth of Afro-Caribbean descent, all the bitterness at the effects of the crisis becomes crystallised in resentment at police behaviour

But once police harassment has provoked a fight back, it ceases to be the only question involved. As we emphasised in our May issue, the riots have not been in any sense *race* riots, riots directed by one ethnic group against others. They have been *class* riots—or, more accurately, riots of certain working class communities—directed at the symbols of oppression. The upsurge of the most oppressed group in the inner city areas has provided a focus for the bitterness of wide sections of other people, especially for white youth.

In the 1970s there were a number of clashes between Afro-Caribbean youth and the police—particularly in 1976, the year of the last big increase in youth unemployment, culminating in the fighting at the Nottinghill Carnival of that year. But in these clashes, the only non-black support came from a handful of white socialists. By contrast, in almost all of this year's riots between a quarter and three quarters of the rioters have been white.

Riots, like strikes, can have fantastically important effects on the consciousness of participants. They tear people from their normal, humdrum, confined existence and give them, briefly, a feeling that they, together, are in control. As a number of reports testify, there was an almost festive atmosphere in the middle of the fighting zones.

Among white youth, the effect will have been, temporarily, to undermine the racist agitation of the various Nazi groups. Even in all-white areas not involved in the rioting, there are reports of skin heads previously under Nazi influence wanting to join the riots against the police. This does not mean that racism has been eradicated and that the Nazis cannot enjoy new successes. But it does mean that the task of countering the Nazis' agitation will be somewhat easier and that growing numbers of white youth can be expected to identify with the ANI and Rock Against Racism.

Among some sections of black youth, the effects will have been just as dramatic. Until the riots their opposition to the symbols of authority was all-too-often an isolated opposition, gaining little sympathy from the white youth they had gone to school with. Not surprisingly, this found expression in a defensive stance based upon mistrust of all whites, a turning away from existing British society rather than a fight back against its racism, an identification with aspects of Rastafarianism, with its emphasis on cultural separateness from white society, a certain tendency to say that black people should identify with Africa and not worry about the conditions they face here. A militant approach and a black separatist approach tended to be seen as the same, especially among young Afro-Caribbeans.

The riots have shown that there is an alternative. Despite being a small minority



Photo: JOHN STURROCK (Network)

in Britain, black youth can fight back effectively and do not need to withdraw into themselves. For they can *lead* whites in a common struggle.

Again, this does not mean that the pre-riot political trends are simply going to disappear. Since the riots we have seen a number of cases where the demand in localities by separatists for all-black defence committees—although in most places at least half those arrested were white—have led to the paralysis of all defence activities. But there will now be greater receptivity among some black youth to the idea that multiracial *struggle* is an alternative to separatist withdrawal—a trend which was already beginning to show itself in the increased participation of black youth in certain ANL events (such as the Leeds carnival) even before the riots.

However, riots have one disadvantage compared with strikes when it comes to changing consciousness. They are invariably short-lived. The longest the rioting lasted in any locality was three nights, and when 'repeat' riots occurred (two in Brixton, one in Southall, one in Toxteth) they were even shorter than the originals.

This shortness is inevitable: while the national power of the forces of the state remains intact, they can always overcome their initial surprise and impose that power in any locality. After a couple of nights, rioting becomes a very hazardous occupation and the movement is rapidly atomised. The riot always rises like a rocket and drops like a stick. But this means there is much less opportunity for those involved to argue through with each other and with sympathetic socialists what is really involved in the struggle, how it ties in with wider social struggles, and what the way forward is.

Historically, riots have prepared the ground for the later development of enduring social movements, but have themselves left very little in the way of permanent organisation. Indeed, it has been possible for one study of 'poor peoples movements' in the US to conclude that permanent organisation only results when it suits the authorities to encourage this in order to control rebellious groups:

'Insurgency is always short lived. Once it subsides and the people leave the streets, most of the organisations which it temporarily threw up simply fade away.' But those who rule society 'seek out whatever organisations have emerged among the insurgents and encourage them to air their grievances before formal bodies of the state... Organisations endure, in short, by abandoning their politics' (Piren and Cloward, *Poor Peoples Movements*).

However, there are ways in which the militancy engendered early in July will endure. Some of it will endure as individuals draw revolutionary conclusions and join a revolutionary organisation—even if the shortness of the riots means that here we are talking of ones and twos in each locality. Some of it will be revived if organisations like the ANL and the Right to Work Campaign are successful in launching particular campaigns in the areas which had the riots and in drawing youth to them on a more permanent basis.



Photo: JOHN STURROCK (Network)

And a good deal of it will eventually find its way into the workplaces.

Conditions are different in the factory and in the inner city area. But there is not a watertight barrier between them. Despite deindustrialisation, a third of those of working age in the inner cities are employed in manufacturing industry. Despite the high levels of unemployment the majority of youth—black as well as white—have jobs.

The very measures the government aim to use to defuse the tension in the inner cities—the expansion of phoney underpaid jobs through YOPs and the new subsidies for low paid work—will have the effect of drawing bitter, discontented youth into some of the workplaces. It will be up to revolutionary socialists to ensure that these more permanent new concentrations of angry youth act as a catalyst for struggle on older workers.



The bosses new bomb

What is the neutron bomb? And what do the arguments over it within the Western Alliance signify? **Pete Binns** explains.

Reagan's move toward building and stockpiling neutron bomb warheads is part of a general American offensive designed to achieve decisive military superiority over Russia at every level. Over the summer a further \$700m was earmarked for chemical and biological warfare, and recent months have seen a reversal of Carter's decision to scrap the B1 (the new strategic bomber incorporating some of the new 'stealth' anti-radar technology), plus a host of more minor projects.

What of the neutron bomb itself? The neutron bomb is an atom bomb of a specific type. Atom bombs themselves are lethal for three main reasons: First of all there is—just as with conventional bombs—the blast effect, which pushes down walls and tears off limbs. Then there is the heat that the bomb radiates which is so great that people can be incinerated even when outside the range of immediate blast. Finally there is nuclear radiation, most of which is of very short-term duration lasting just fractions of a second. This consists of a variety of very high energy waves and particles, among them neutrons. The neutron bomb minimises blast but maximises the output of high-energy neutrons, so that, for instance, a typical neutron warhead delivers the same radiation as a standard bomb but with only one tenth its blast.

Now all forms of radiation kill people, but neutrons have much the greatest facility in penetrating and passing through even the hardest and most dense of metals. So the neutron warhead will kill soldiers in tanks and concrete bunkers while leaving the hardware relatively intact. It is seen therefore as a *tactical* weapon, to be launched from short-range rockets or even artillery shells.

Dangerous assumptions

As we put it earlier this year (*Socialist Review* March 1981):

'Its supporters claim that as a 'limited blast' weapon it will make an all-out nuclear war *less* likely. They argue that it will merely replace existing tactical nuclear weapons which possess a larger blast and give out much more long-term fall-out. Therefore it will not so easily lead to escalation—or so the argument goes.

'There are several things wrong with this argument. First of all it is based on an unreal assumption of a massed Russian tank attack in central Europe. As we have shown elsewhere (in the SWP pamphlet *Missile Madness*), the Russians do not at present have the strength to undertake such a blitzkrieg. Secondly, even if they did, the West's *current* provision of more than 200,000 precision-guided weapons would be more than enough to stop them. Finally, it is an attempt to divert attention from the real role

of Nato's tactical and short-range nuclear weapons, which is not so much to stop a mass tank invasion as to break up any mass armoured force before it could be got together in the first place.

'In which case the tactical nuclear weapons would be used not *after* an attack and on Western soil, but *before any attack was possible* and on *Eastern* soil. Such attitudes can only fuel the Kremlin's tendencies to adopt more and more desperate measures.'

Even its supporters recognise distinct problems with the deployment of the neutron bomb. Based on the admittedly questionable assumption that it will be used on Russian armour after it has already invaded the West, *Flight International* concluded that:

'Given the frontal area of a tank battalion, the detonation of a single neutron warhead will probably cause more problems for the side that fired it than it will solve. Those tank crews falling into the transient incapacitation or latent lethality zones will know that they will soon die. This will lead to a 'Kamikaze' effect which friendly troops may have even greater difficulty in containing than the original attack.'

Unhappy allies

On the more likely assumption of its preemptive use by Nato on Eastern soil, however, similar conclusions follow: stricken crews could be replaced by reserves, others could get the tanks back to transportation places before becoming incapacitated and so on. And that, of course, is why Nato's generals would *not* use the neutron warhead in ones or twos but in *repeated salvos* of up to *forty or so at a time*. All of which makes utter and complete nonsense of the claims that there is something small, limited, or even semi-conventional about this weapon.

The weapon's arch supporter in Britain, the *Economist*, also notes problems, but of a purely political character. Deployment of the bomb, it says, 'could further weaken Western Europe's willingness to deploy the medium range Cruise and Pershing 2 missiles that Nato needs as a counterbalance to Russia's SS-20s'. That is why it concluded that Reagan ought to have dressed up his escalation as 'replacement', by dismantling an equivalent number of the most defunct warheads from America's huge 20,000-strong stockpile of tactical nuclear weapons.

The West's cold warriors have every reason to be worried about Europe and the Nato alliance. Apart from Britain and tiny Luxemburg, none of the other member countries have upped their defence expenditures by the 3% in real terms that they were required to by the decision of December 1979. It has now been announced that even Germany—the lynchpin of the alliance in Europe—is cutting defence outlays to 43.8 billion DM in 1982. That represents only a 4.2% increase over 1981 in money terms. In real terms, given inflation (especially in military costs), that will repre-



Illustration: Sophie Grillet

The Nato Umbrella

sent a fall which even the most conservative estimates put at 1%.

In spite of all the help that Thatcher has been extending to Reagan, America is facing a huge task in keeping Europe in line. Europe's reluctance derives from three main sources. The first is the expansion of trade with the East, with machine tools and advanced technology going east and natural gas, primary products and semi-manufactured goods going west. West Germany in particular plays a central role here, and will fight hard to preserve it.

Secondly there is the continuing move away from the notion of war as involving the mutual assured destruction (MAD) of East and West to one of tactical confrontation confined to one or another theatre of war. Although confining the war to one continent is implausible as a real scenario, the fact that the Pentagon *believes* in it means that the USA is more likely to launch it in, for instance, the most favoured theatre—Europe. The importation of the weapons that would make this possible—Pershing 2, Cruise missiles and now the neutron bomb—has therefore led to the massive and growing anti-weapons movements in Europe.

The Western European ruling class too is split. On the one hand they co-participate with their US cronies in the exploitation of the two thirds of the world that they own and therefore want to defend, on the other they do not want it to be defended at the cost of their particular patch. The new weapons are making them more aware of how unlikely it is that they will get the one without the other.

Finally there is the depth of the recession itself. Faced with Japanese inroads into traditionally German markets, the German economy can no more afford to go on shelling out money to the military, particularly when the Japanese themselves continue to resist increasing military expenditure (still less than 1% of Japan's GNP). And what is true for Germany is true also, and to a greater extent, for the rest of America's partners.

The neutron bomb will therefore increase the tensions and fractures in the Nato alliance between the Reagan-Thatcher hawks and the rest of the variegated European doves. But this is not just confined to

Europe. Within America too, Reagan is finding it difficult to hold the line.

To begin with the new and re-opened military projects will involve huge sums of money: the MX strategic missile and the new manned bomber will each cost hundreds of billions of dollars to complete and thousands of millions of dollars are to be spent on nuclear torpedoes. No project, however crazy, seems to get axed by the Reagan administration. The MX missile is a good case in point. The original plan was for this missile to be ground-based in America's mountain states, but environmental objections have now ruled this out. Instead it will now probably end up as an air-launched missile system—an absurdity for an inter-continental range weapon.

This relentless pursuit of the military's pet projects has been followed—until now—with an extraordinary lack of foresight by Reagan. For if objections in Nevada can get the MX removed to the skies, what remains of the arguments that Cruise and Pershing 2 missiles *have* to be sited in Europe? They, after all, are eminently weapons that could be air-launched too. Reagan's determination to have the MX is already undermining all his arguments over why the theatre nuclear weapons need to be sited in Europe at all.

But Reagan's insensitivity to the Europeans is much less important than the contradictions he has got himself into at home. He does after all want the impossible. On the one hand massive tax cuts and on the other hugely increased arms expenditure, along with a reduction of inflation to 5% plus a balanced Federal budget by 1984! Just to spell it out is to indicate how totally absurd it is. The attempt to follow it has however produced the skyrocketing American interest rates that have disturbed the world's money markets and added further to the recession in the world economy. In America itself it has led to the plummeting of the Dow Jones index to its lowest level for 13 months.

A frightening future

In the slightly longer term the prospect is somewhat more frightening. By the latter half of the 1980s the USA could have taken a decisive technical and strategic lead over Russia in space and under the oceans. In many related fields—in particular electronics and communications—it is already years ahead. Reagan, at the beginning of this month, has already threatened the Russians with an arms build-up. And the greater the escalation the more likely it is that Reagan, Weinberger and Haig will feel inclined to press the button.

The development of the neutron bomb has shown decisively that the introduction of the Cruise missile, the go ahead for the Trident system and so on, are no isolated events but rather a slippery slope leading to the abyss of nuclear war. The demand to disarm Thatcher, Reagan and Co embodied in unilateralism and expressed—in however confused a manner—by CND, has become that much more important. There should be no let up in building the campaign, and in particular in building for a really massive demonstration in London on 24 October.

Breaking the barriers

Jerry Fitzpatrick and Pete Goodwin look at the attempts to build solidarity in Britain with the H-Block prisoners.

Micky Devine was the tenth hunger striker to die. Yet another demonstration of the heroic determination of the H Block prisoners, and yet another demonstration of the callous intransigence of the Tory government.

So far the hunger strike campaign has raised the struggle in the North of Ireland to heights not reached since the aftermath of Bloody Sunday in 1972. It has had a significant effect in the South and has generated considerable international pressure on the Tories.

But what of the effect in Britain? That is a very different story.

Republican prisoners in the North won special category status after a hunger strike in 1972. It was removed from new prisoners in 1976 by Labour Northern Ireland secretary Merlyn Rees. From then on all prisoners convicted by the no-jury Diplock court were to be treated as criminals. Kieran Nugent, the first person convicted under the new system, began refusing to wear prison uniform in September 1976. So began the prisoners' campaign, first 'on the blanket', then escalating to 'no wash, no slop out' and finally culminating in the hunger strike.

From 1976 to 1980 there were twice yearly national demonstrations in Britain organised by Sinn Fein and the Prisoners Aid Committee, speaking tours were organised, and publicity stunts carried out, like the incident where shit was thrown from the gallery of the House of Commons. In all these activities the SWP played a significant part, and we also took our own initiatives like mounting national speaking tours with the Relatives Action Committee and Brendan Gallagher. The high point of mobilisation was in August 1979 when prisoners' relatives spoke to a demonstration of 10,000 in London.

The campaign in Britain was, however,

largely confined to the far left and republicans. By 1980 it was clear that, against the advice of the Provisional leadership, the prisoners, were being driven to considering escalating the dirty protest to a hunger strike. Something had to be done to break out of the far left and republican ghetto in Britain, and, especially to reach into the trade union movement.

It was with this aim that the Charter 80 campaign was initiated. The idea and much of the initial organisation came from SWP members. But by October 1980 Charter 80 had held a large launching conference and gained a wider range of sponsorship from Labour left MPs and leading trade unionists. Charter 80 was important in reaching a significant number of union branch meetings on the prisoners' five demands. But once the hunger strike started on October 27 the sponsors in the main ran from the issue.

During the course of the first hunger strike Charter 80 evolved into the Don't Let Irish Prisoners Die committee. There was a period of intensive activity. Speaking tours were organised, press conferences held, and there were national demonstrations on 15 November and 7 December. However, each of these demonstrations was only about 3000 strong (about a third of them SWP supporters). They were almost entirely composed of the far left and republicans. The ghetto had not been broken out of. Far from it, the demonstrations were significantly smaller than that of August 1979.

It had already been demonstrated during the first hunger strike that Thatcher's portrayal of the prisoners as murderers attempting to blackmail a democratically elected government was by and large accepted by shop floor trade unionists. The real success Charter 80 had had in taking the prisoners arguments into the unions evaporated when it came to *activity* by trade unionists after the start of the hunger strike. The confused circumstances in which the first hunger strike ended also made the prospects for organising support for the second one look bleak.

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Propaganda in support of the second hunger strike was based far more clearly on the issues of political status and troops out, rather than the 'humanitarian' approach which had failed to win support once the first hunger strike started. Bobby Sands' election victory on 9 April should have provided a massive boost for the campaign, and should have made it easier to counter the argument that the prisoners were criminals without mass support.

H Block/Armagh committees were set up in a number of towns but with the same limited base. Another national demonstration was planned for 26 April. It fell under a police ban. Several hundred SWP members and others broke the ban and, though they were stopped after a few hundred yards, they did achieve some important media coverage.

But when Bobby Sands died on 5 May only a few hundred mobilised for the protest picket in London. As Bobby Sands' death was followed by others, demonstrations were organised in London and Manchester in June. They were no bigger than the demonstrations in support of the first hunger strike the previous autumn, and very much the same composition — republicans and the far left (with again large SWP contingents).

If these national activities won no new support, nor did attempts (largely by SWP members) to win support in the workplace

fare much better. A few resolutions of support were passed, but more indicative of the general response were threats to stewards' credentials of militants raising the issue. This happened in a Newcastle engineering factory and in a Manchester NUPE branch. The hostility or sullen indifference did not just come from the bureaucracy. Almost everywhere the issue was raised that was also the response of the rank and file.

No wonder then that as mounting numbers of pickets and demos exhausted the activists but drew increasingly little response, moralistic frustrations began to engulf many of the campaigners, in for instance, the H-Block/Armagh committees. They began to blame each other and blame the left, as if somehow by simple grim determination we could break the impasse. Such

a response is understandable, but it is counterproductive.

If we are serious about building real support rather than making gestures we have to face up to the reality of our isolation during the hunger strike and look if there is a lever to change it.

There is one. The one substantial effect the hunger strike has had in Britain is to begin to open debate about British presence in Ireland, particularly in the Labour Party and among broad left trade union activists. In general these people have shied away from the hunger strike, and continue to shy away from troops out *now*. But they are increasingly willing to raise their voices against bipartisanship, and for some sort of policy of British withdrawal and Irish unity.

This shift is evidenced in the large number of resolutions on Ireland at the Labour Party Conference, in some well publicised statements by Benn and, most importantly in the willingness of a number of Broad Left union leaders to sponsor a trade union delegate conference entitled 'Ireland — time for Tory policies to go' on 28 November.

Clearly such a conference will not be massive. Clearly its political basis is weak. But it has the potential to build a campaign for withdrawal in the unions. Within this we have an opportunity to argue to a far wider audience that withdrawal must mean fighting for troops out *now*. Every *Socialist Review* reader should be trying to get their union branch and shop stewards' committee delegated.

Labour and Ireland

Is Labour Party policy on Ireland changing? Sue Cockerill and John Rogers look at the record.

When in 1949, Eire became the Republic of Ireland and left the Commonwealth, it was a Labour prime minister, Attlee, who guaranteed to the Loyalists of Northern Ireland

that they would remain in the UK until they made a 'free' decision to leave. Now there is talk that Labour will remove the guarantee; that Labour policy on Ulster, after decades of bipartisanship, will take a new and radical direction at this year's Labour conference.

The history of the Labour government's actions in that period is pretty well known, but because of the bipartisan policy, it is worth noting a few facts about Labour's specific responsibility.

It was, of course, a Labour government which sent British troops to Northern Ireland in August 1969. James Callaghan made a famous visit to the Catholic areas of Derry and Belfast in the honeymoon period after the troops first arrived, when many Catholics saw the troops as protectors from the rampaging Unionist security forces. Promises of a new deal for Catholics in jobs, housing, abolition of the electoral abuses and so on abounded. It soon became clear that the troops were there only to shore up the existing order, although there were weak-kneed attempts at reform.

When Labour returned to power in 1974, it continued the policy of internment instituted by the Tories. Merlyn Rees, secretary for Northern Ireland, strongly defended the need for detention without trial, until the no-jury Diplock courts could be made to do the job just as well.

In the wreck of the power-sharing Sunningdale agreement, smashed to bits by the Loyalist strike of 1974, Labour had nothing

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to offer but more repression. It was this government which introduced the Prevention of Terrorism Act and kept it on the statute book, year after year, with only faint rumblings from the left when it came up for renewal.

Now, it seems, all the assumptions underlying this record are to be challenged. There is no doubt that the hunger-strike deaths have put more pressure than ever before on Labour's leaders to break with the bipartisan approach and Foot's solid support for Thatcher's 'stand against terrorism' provoked considerable unrest in the backbenches.

The question of Ireland has also become an issue in the Healey-Benn election fight, following Benn's call for the replacement of British troops with a UN peace-keeping force. Healey lost no time in pouring scorn on the idea, but without coming up with his own solutions.

But the main focus of speculation has been on the Labour study group report to be submitted to the conference. The membership of the group isn't encouraging, including as it does Merlyn Rees, Roy Mason, Stan Orme and Don Concannon, the man who made a special trip to the H-Blocks to tell Bobby Sands on his deathbed that Labour wouldn't support him.

The group's decision to see the reunification of Ireland as the ultimate aim has been the headline catcher, but it is a very ultimate aim indeed. The original decision to include an effective veto on unification by the Protestants by means of a referendum has been dropped, since it made nonsense of the commitment to a united Ireland. But the need to obtain the 'consent' of the Northern majority remains.

The document favours a transfer of power from Westminster, via a power-sharing devolved government, to a united Ireland. Why power-sharing, pursued by every government since 1969 without success, should work this time is a mystery. Beyond talk of discussions with Dublin on modifying aspects of the Republic's social laws and the constitutional position of the Catholic Church, so 'allaying Protestant fears', the group doesn't spell out how reunification is to come about.

The group's fundamental continuation of previous policy is shown in its opposition to withdrawal of troops, either immediately or at a specified future date, and its rejection of any concessions on political status. It suggests instead some reforms in the working of the Diplock courts, for example on the admissibility of confessions as evidence, but opposes the return of trial by jury under present circumstances.

Speaking about the report, Foot has, of course, stressed the aspects of it which continue present policy — the rejection of troop withdrawal and political status, and the vague formulation on unity with consent. But on any interpretation, the group has given birth to a mouse. The true state of feeling in the parliamentary party can be gauged by the fact that the plan to have a two-line whip against the Tory measure to bar prisoners from standing as MPs was dropped, and a free vote allowed.

Benn has at least tried to raise the issue of

troop withdrawal, but only with the suggestion of a UN force, which indicates a total lack of understanding of the nature of the British occupation and of the UN itself, despite the many historical examples of its role in supporting various imperialisms. A few other backbenchers have also consistently opposed the bipartisan policy, but Labour as a whole in parliament is far from reappraising Irish issues. They merely want to distinguish themselves from Thatcher's 'inflexibility' and dredge up the old slogans of political initiatives and economic revival.

There are signs that the constituency parties are very restive with the policy and there are a lot of resolutions to conference, rang-

ing from the granting of the five demands of the hunger strikers, to immediate troop withdrawal. But the composite resolution will probably emerge as weak and watered down as the study group report. For, the issues have hardly been raised in the unions. Even on the left of the party, Ireland has been ignored for many years, and the utterances of leftwingers about the 'labour movement' in Northern Ireland show that the real nature of Ulster hasn't been grasped. Their brand of reformism cannot cope with supporting either national liberation movements against 'our' army, or seeing that only socialist revolution, not talks with Dublin, will produce a free, united Ireland.

Solidarity at the cross roads

Chris Harman looks at Poland one year after the Gdansk agreement.

The first anniversary of Solidarity was an event few of us expected to see. We thought the Polish workers' movement of last summer would either be smashed by Russian tanks, as were the Hungarians and the Czechs, or would be strangled by the internal bureaucracy—a fate that befell the Poles themselves in 1956-7. Instead, the independent workers' movement is still alive and kicking.

Yet all is not well within Solidarity. All the signs are of a leadership which is confused and divided. One week it calls for a cessation of all strikes and for workers to volunteer to work Saturday shifts for nothing; the next it tells printers throughout the country to stop the government presses. Reports of the national meetings of Solidarity tell of 'sharp differences between radicals and the moderates led by Lech Walesa' (*Financial Times*, 14 August 81). At the same time, 'fears are mounting in the Solidarity leadership that events are moving beyond the union's control.' (*FT* 13 August).

Many of the local strikes—for instance, the strike in Radom for a full inquiry into the repression of 1976, the print strike in Olsztyn over TV 'slanders' on the union, the

Gdynia dockers' refusal to move food destined for export—have been taking place despite the clear disapproval of the majority of the national union leadership.

The confusion inside the Solidarity leadership follows from the basic strategy almost all activists in the movement shared a year ago—the idea that what had to be done was to build a countervailing power to the regime, which would work for workers' interests but which would *not* do anything to overthrow the regime.

Syndicalism

The strategy was justified with references to 'the need to take account of the international situation' (ie the Russians). But it is by no means a *new* strategy in terms of the history of the international workers' movement. It is a version of classic *syndicalism*—the belief that workers' problems can be solved by building up strong union organisation, without paying any heed to the question of *state* power.

It has always been a strategy that can work ... up to a certain point. A weak workers' movement can often build up its strength without having to worry about national politics. All that it needs are militant tactics in particular local struggles—and such militant polices are quite

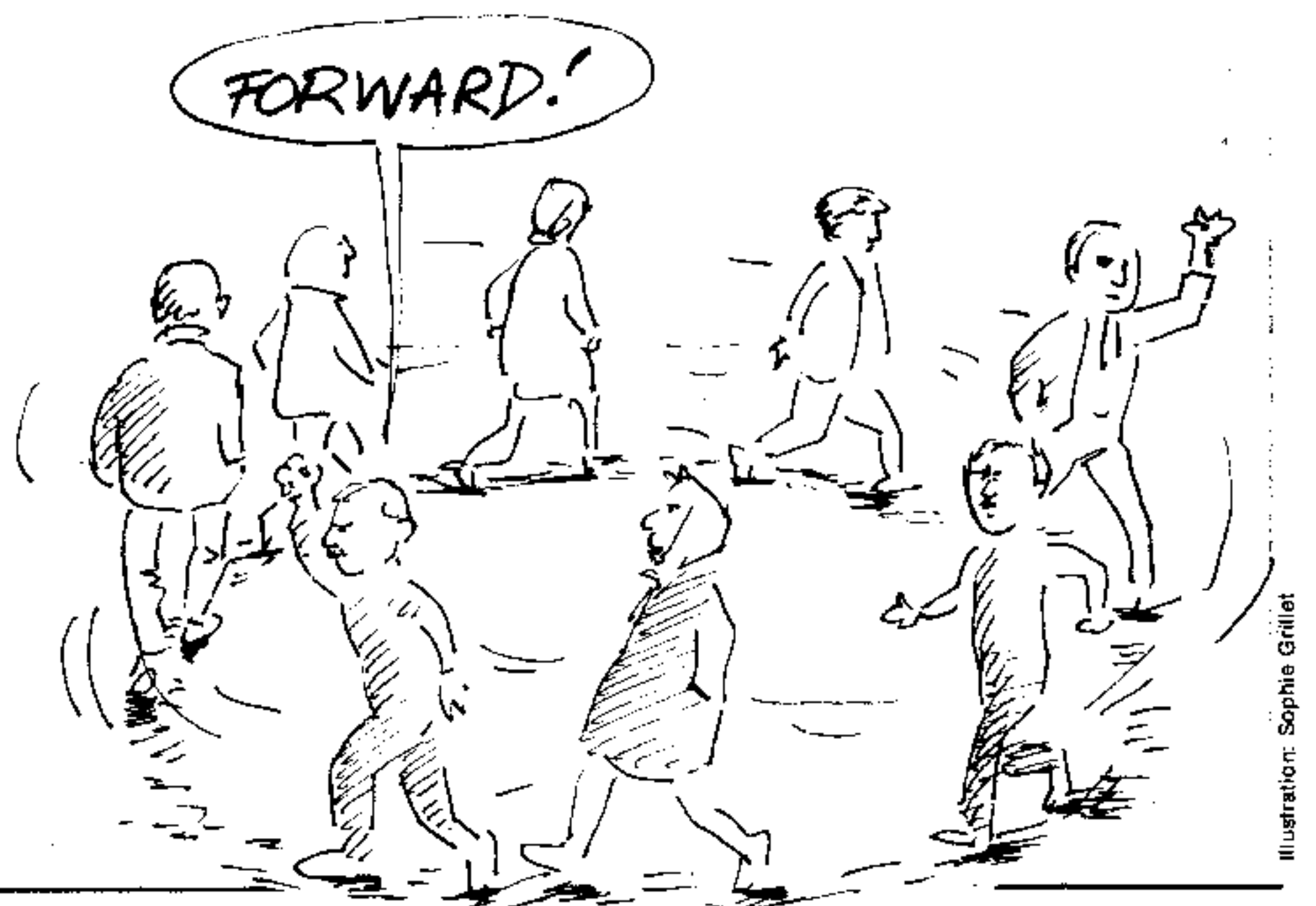


Illustration: Sophie Grillet

compatible with syndicalism. The problem comes when the power of the unions has been built up.

In Britain in the years 1910-19 syndicalist ideas inspired a whole generation of activists inside the trade union movement, some of whom gained national influence. It played a very important role in building union strength to an unparalleled degree. But then in 1919 came the moment of truth. As the miners' leader Bob Smillie told it to Aneurin Bevan, the leaders of the three most powerful groups of unions were summoned to see the prime minister, Lloyd George.

'He said to us: "Gentlemen, you have fashioned in the Triple Alliance of the unions represented by you a most powerful instrument. I feel bound to tell you that in our opinion we are at your mercy. The army is disaffected and cannot be relied upon. Trouble has occurred already in a number of camps... If you carry out your threat to strike, then you will defeat us.

"But if so," went on Mr Lloyd George, "have you weighed the consequences? The strike will be in defiance of the government of the country and its very success will precipitate a constitutional crisis of the first importance. For, if a force arises which is stronger than the state itself, then it must be ready to take on the functions of the state, or withdraw and accept the authority of the state. Gentlemen, have you considered, if you have, are you ready?" 'From that moment on,' said Robert Smillie, 'we were beaten and we knew we were.'

(*In Place of Fear*, pp10-21)

Now, the British trade union leaders of 1919 were a pretty spineless lot. But what is remarkable is that history repeated itself 17 years later, and with syndicalist leaders of an undoubtedly revolutionary hue. Ronald Fraser tells, in his book *The Blood of Spain* of a near identical meeting in the summer of 1936 between the bourgeois president of Catalonia, Companys, and the leaders of the anarcho-syndicalist union, the CNT. Among those leaders was the organiser of several terrorist attacks and of three insurrections, Durrutti.

The CNT-led workers of Catalonia had just completely smashed the fascist coup in that part of the Spanish state, in the process arming themselves, disarming the police and taking over the factories. Companys told the CNT leaders he recognised that because of this, their organisation wielded effective power and that he had no choice but to offer them state power. Without hesitation the syndicalists told him they would not accept the offer, but instead would cooperate with his government.

Deepening crisis

Solidarity's syndicalism is now facing the same dilemma. The regime is weak, incapable of either continuing in the old way or of launching itself along a new path. Yet the economic situation alone does not allow it to stand where it is. Its Western creditors on the one side, its Russian overlords on the other, are urging it to take bold action. Yet it cannot. As one of the more radical of Solid-

arity's leaders has put it:

'There is no programme in Poland for developing the country. No-one knows where to start. All the actions taken are chaotic and haphazard, impossible to put into effect in the long run...'

There is, however, one thing the regime can do in this situation. It can repeatedly throw the ball back into Solidarity's court. It can say to the union leaders: the country is in deep crisis; neither the Western bankers nor the Russians will bail it out; if you insist on pushing your members' claims, the crisis will get deeper still, threatening the collapse of whole industries and hunger on a very wide scale; if that happens, both the state and the unions can be destroyed.

Because they are not prepared to bid for power themselves, the leaders of Solidarity do not know how to respond.

The so-called 'moderate' wing around Walesa is, under the influence of the Church, making the classic syndicalist about-turn. A year ago the union was born out of strikes in reaction to food price increases; now it is urging acceptance of even larger price increases. In December and January it showed its real strength in the fight against Saturday working; now it is urging workers to give up their free Saturdays.

Above all, the union was indestructible because as an alternative to the regime, it became the focus for the aspirations of all the exploited and oppressed sections of the population. Now the Walesa wing is trying to disown the actions of those who identify with it, as Walesa urges people to 'approach problems as citizens, not merely trade unionists'.

The self-management movement

Within classical syndicalism the response to the dilemma posed by state power was not always quite as we have described it. There was a somewhat more radical alternative—but it was one which evaded rather than solved the problem. It involved turning away from the crisis of society at large and instead concentrating on taking power at the most local of levels alone: in the case of Spain in 1936 building local collectives, socialising local industry, forming local defence militias, but ignoring the national issues.

Such seems to be the predominant mood among the 'radicals' in Solidarity today. They have developed a very extensive movement for self-management in the factories. The 'Network', as the movement is called, succeeded in July in organising a national meeting of representatives from 1000 plants. It sets itself the aim of replacing plant managements associated with the old order by workers councils. A founder of the movement, Jacek Merkl from the Gdansk shipyards, says the aim is the 'transformation of state ownership into social ownership' (quoted in *FT*, 28 August).

This is a much healthier response than that of Walesa. It counterposes a continuation of class struggle to class collaboration.

But from a *working class* standpoint there remains a fault in the self-management approach. The crisis of the economy requires more than just the seizure control at the

local level. It requires the imposition of national solutions. Workers can struggle successfully to take over the individual plants in a locality—and still be demoralised and turned one against another by the *national* food shortages, the *national* resources wasted as Poland's contribution to the Warsaw Pact, the *national* destruction of jobs as new investments are cancelled.

The problem of power

These questions cannot be dealt with unless you talk in terms of a struggle for power at the *centre* as well as in the localities, a struggle to replace the mechanisms of state capitalist competitive accumulation by those of socialist production for human need.

Revolutionary socialists in the West have learned the hard way that it is no good having a revolutionary 'programme' without having the working class self activity to enforce it. But in a situation of deep social crisis, the converse can also apply; the self activity means nothing unless it is raised to *self-conscious* self-activity, directed to solving society's problems by the imposition of revolutionary measures.

That was why Lenin could write a book shortly before October 1917 called *The coming catastrophe and how to avert it*, saying that unless the revolutionary working class took power and imposed its programme, the disintegration of society could pull the working class down with it.

In Poland today the same danger exists. Without a working class struggle for power, all the bitterness engendered by the crisis—until now channelled behind Solidarity—can fragment in a thousand directions.

People in one locality can begin to blame workers in another locality for their problem. The peasants can turn against all those living in the towns, including the workers. Those in the small factories can turn against those in the big factories. And in that situation, old traditions can blind people to their real interests.

Such is the *real* chaos that can threaten Poland—a chaos which will be encouraged by certain 'hard liners' in the regime who would hope to build a popular base for themselves out of nationalists and anti-semitic demagogues.

It is impossible to see what the eventual outcome would be then. It might be an authoritarian nationalist regime. It might be a Yugoslavia type 'managerial' state capitalism in which individual managers would sacrifice workers to the competition between themselves. It might even be that in the chaos, the Russians would feel strong enough to intervene. But in any such eventuality, everything gained by Solidarity in the last year would be lost.

Such an outcome is still far from inevitable. The workers' movement still has the strength and the prestige to pose an alternative. The only thing that is preventing it doing that is its own subjective condition. The heritage of Stalinism means that the 'radicals' in Solidarity do not have the traditions of genuine Marxism that would provide them with a real notion of workers' power or the theory that would explain the alternative to state capitalist crisis.

Roots country

John Rogers looks at the background to the crushing by Senegalese troops of the left wing coup in Gambia.

About 25,000 European tourists are enticed every year to a 200 mile 18 mile-wide trading enclave, which stretches on either side of the river Gambia into the heartland of Senegal. Posters and brochures headed 'Come to Roots Country' have lured them because Alex Haley's TV saga has made the name of the former British territory famous for its 'beautiful sun-drenched beaches'.

Few of the tourists have any idea of the areas inland, away from the beach and the river and over the border into surrounding Senegal. There, over the last few years, millions of peasants have been driven further and further into impoverishment by the Sahelian drought.

When Kukoi Sanyang, the 28 year old leader of the Revolutionary Socialist Party of the Gambia, (RSPTG) attempted a coup, Britain's press made the affair typically unreal by expressing outrage over the fate of 'our' tourists at the hands of this 'blood-thirsty black Marxist.'

The RSPTG had taken advantage of president Sir Dawda Jawara's attendance at the Royal Wedding in London to attempt a take-over with the aid of a third of Gambia's 900 police and paramilitaries. The *Daily Mail* managed to present the suppression of the rebels in racist terms as mindless looting being stopped by two British SAS men rescuing one of Jawara's eight wives. Bronzed tourists arriving back at Heathrow were interviewed expressing undying gratitude to the SAS, with one quote headlined: 'It was like Toxteth ... utter destruction.'

In reality the rebellion was crushed by 3000 out of Senegal's 5000 troops after prolonged fighting, and the SAS rescue was a media sideshow. The Senegalese implemented an anti-Communist defence agreement signed earlier this year in response to an Xmas attempt by the RSPTG to start a rural rising on Gambia's northern borders. That rising had also been crushed by Senegalese troops.

Although he retired from the Senegal presidency last year, the legendary poet proponent of black pride, Leopold Sedar Senghor, still calls the shots in Senegal. Champion of a black-is-beautiful philosophy called 'negritude' in numerous books during the 1930s, 40s and 50s, Senghor typifies the kind of African intellectual who carved himself a niche in European 'civilisation' during the de-colonisation period.

Now 77, the 'old man' of West African politics has long been described by Senegalese workers as a 'black Frenchman'.

Senghor's faith in France's civilising mission stretched to him giving the crucial legitimacy of his 'Pan-African' fame to the suppression of the June 1978 Shaba rebellion against the Mobutu regime in Zaire. After French paratroops had saved Mobutu, Senghor sent 600 Senegalese troops to join 500 Moroccans to police

Shaba on behalf of France's mining interests.

The overwhelming presence of Senegalese troops in Gambia since the end of the July rising has led to the merger of the 500,000 Gambians and 5½ million Senegalese into Senegambia. Senghor's chosen successor, president Abdou Diouf, and the reinstated Jawara ended the artificial separation of the two countries on 22 August 1981. Gambia's existence dated back to 1783 when British slavers wrested control of the river valley from French slavers. Two hundred years later Mitterrand's new 'socialist' government in Paris is eagerly bankrolling the Senegalese incorporation of Gambia in order to safeguard the 80% of Senegalese industry that is owned by French capital.

Mitterrand won his election campaign against Giscard partly because of the bad odour left by Giscard's buccaneering interventions in Africa. In power, Mitterrand has made no attempt to dismantle France's main West African military base in Senegal. On the contrary, the new French foreign minister has accepted Senegalese invitations to strengthen the 2000 strong garrison.

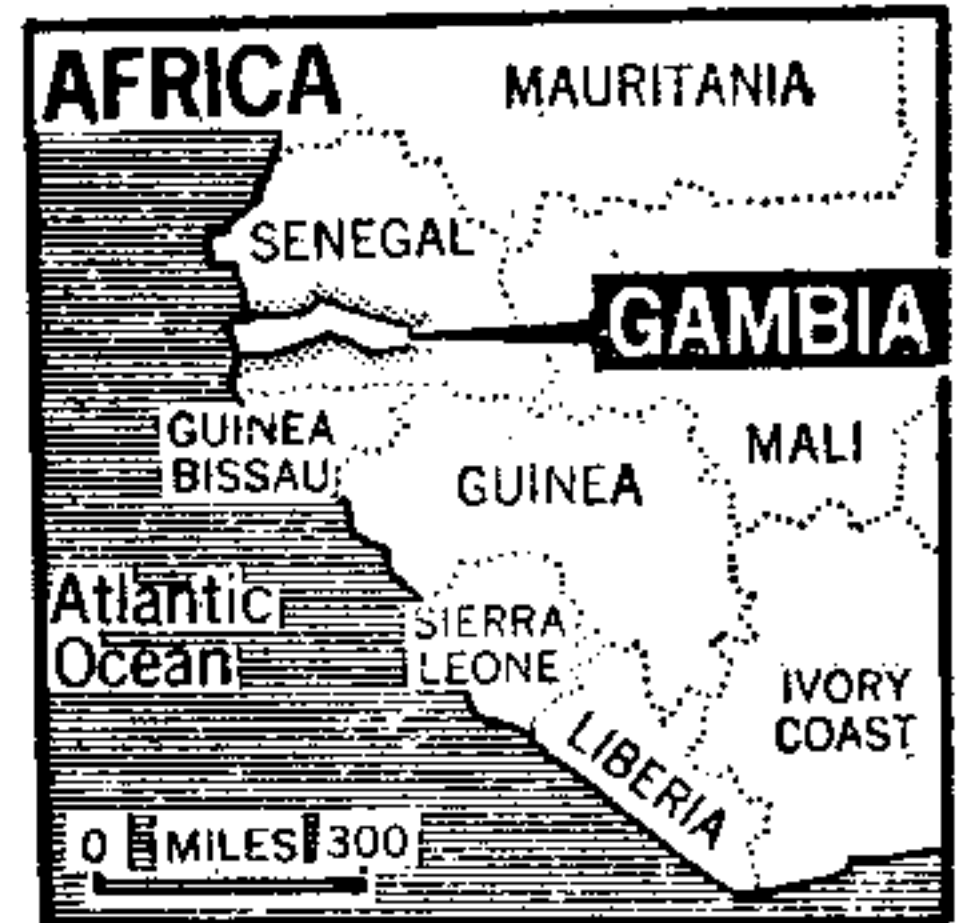
Senegambia as a whole is groundnut dependent. Gambia's production has been brought down by the drought from 151,000 tonnes in 1979 to 75,000 in 1980 to a projected 45,000 for 1981. The economic consequences of a fall in production should have been catastrophic. But Gambia's peasants have kept their head above water by smuggling Senegalese groundnuts over the border. Militant trade unionism of workers in the Gambian groundnut processing industry forced the Gambian government to pay Gambian peasants in cash for their product during the 1970s. This is less corrupt than the scandal ridden tax collection system in Senegal.

Groundnut republic

Senegal is slightly less dependent than Gambia on groundnuts. The 1980 harvest of a million tonnes earned 60% of Senegal's revenue. This year's drought-hit 650,000 tonnes had included 200,000 smuggled into Gambia, however—in itself a powerful economic incentive for the French owned Senegal groundnut processing industry to encourage the entry of Senegalese troops into Gambia, particularly when 25% of Senegal's total export receipts are spent on servicing debts to French banks.

In August 1981 the International Monetary Fund finally brought to an end Senghor's dream of harnessing French capitalism in the development of the black state capitalism which would embody his philosophy of negritude. All the major state capitalist projects fostered over the last 20 years of 'independence' have foundered.

A Dakar Free Zone to persuade Western companies to exploit Senegalese labour went bankrupt in 1976 because only two companies had joined in. Dakar-Marine, which was intended to repair giant oil-tankers, has been scaled down to carry out river boat repairs. A petrochemical and mineral complex, begun with finance from

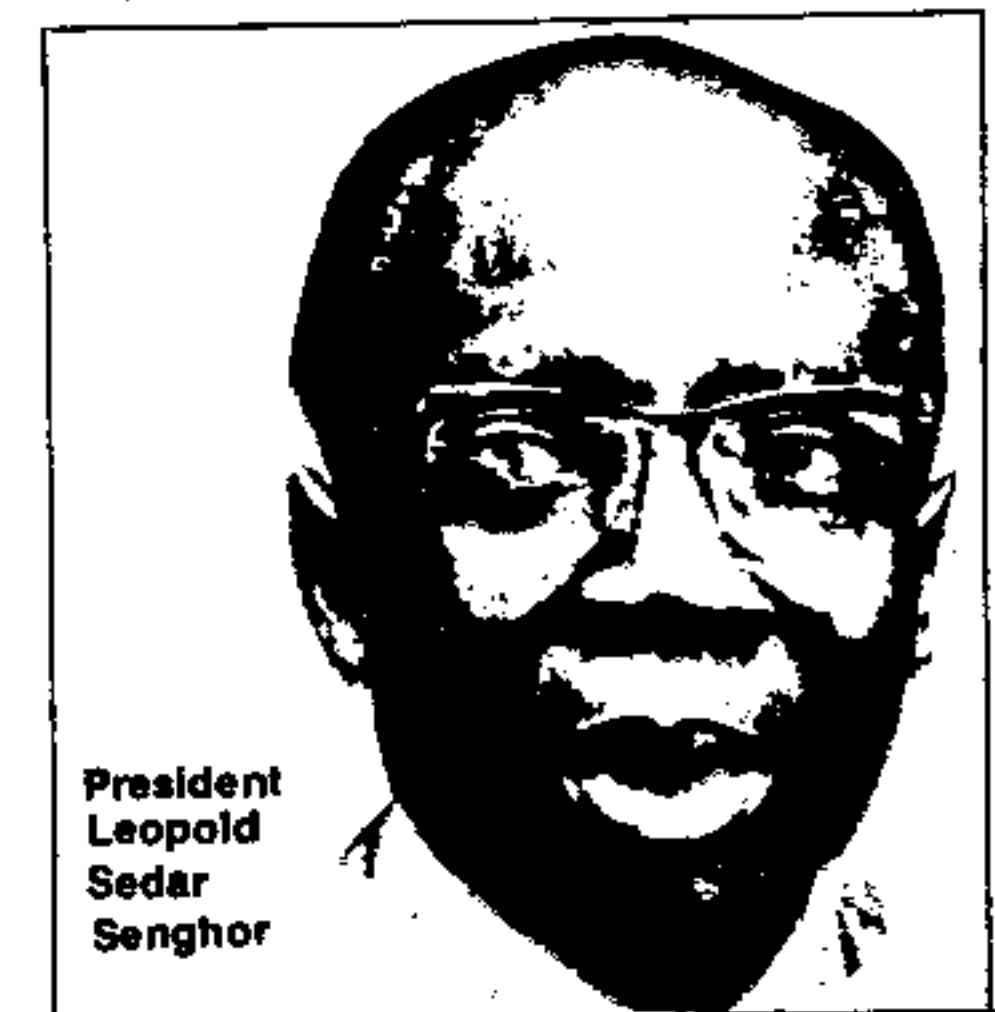


the Shah of Iran, is now in a state of limbo. And the hugely ambitious Senegal River Project, designed to defeat the desert with irrigation for the whole country, is just in the process of going bust because the American financiers are getting cold feet.

Yet the IMF have demanded the cutting of the 25,000 workers who remain in the smaller, more viable state distribution, retail and wholesale trading companies. Food prices are to be raised and wages frozen in both Senegal and Gambia, while the IMF's suggested economic salvation rests on greater tax concessions to tour operators. It suggests a 20% increase in Senegal's 300,000 tourists for this year.

The view from below

The most biting observer of the rise and decline of Senghor's negritude has been Sembene Ousmane. Senghor went from mission school to seminary, French university, membership of the French parliament, a seat in the 1953 French government, and finally leadership of 'independent' Senegal in 1960. Ousmane started out as a fisherman, became a plumber, bricklayer, and apprentice mechanic in Dakar, a docker's shop steward in post-war Marseilles, writing up his experiences in *The Black Docker*, and celebrated independence with the publication in 1960 of his powerful reminder that the 1947-8 railway strike on the Dakar-Niger line, not negritude, brought about independence. This novel, *God's bit of wood* (90p and postage from Bookmarks, 265 Seven Sisters Road, Finsbury Park, London N4) evokes how those long days on strike affected the lives of the people who lived along the hundreds of miles of track.



President
Leopold
Sedar
Senghor

During the 1960s and 1970s the success of his books frustrated Ousmane because only the urban elite could read. So he turned to making films in the Awolo language that the majority of Senegalese and Gambian peasants and workers speak. All his films have depicted the triple oppression wrought by economic exploitation, religious bigotry and state corruption.

Senghor, who is so francophile that he has never bothered to learn the majority language, fully realised the explosive message of Ousmane's films. In 1980 *Xala* (Impotence) was shown in full in London. In Senegal it had to have 10 scenes cut before it could be shown.

It is a bitter allegory about the budding Senegalese bourgeoisie. It traces the rise and fall of El Hadj Kader Beye, a prime specimen of the new breed of African businessmen that negritude has spawned. Seeking to confirm his social position with a third marriage (about 80% of Senegambians are Islamic), he experiences a temporary impotence on his wedding night—a transparent metaphor for the economic, social and political ineptness of the Senegambian elite. In the light of SAS's rescue of one of Jawara's eight wives, it is almost a prophecy.

Senegambia's working class has not been impotent, of course, since its emergence onto stage in the 47/48 rail strike. But Senghor and Jawara have always managed to fend off direct challenges by incorporating trade union leaders. In Senegal this has developed into the ridiculous situation where Senghor created by dictat in 1978 three separate trade union federations, each with its own officially sanctioned bureaucracies and each affiliated to political parties whose names Senghor chose for them. Needless to say Senghor's own party remains entrenched in power, dealing out patronage while the opposition parties squabble among themselves. In Gambia Jawara has been less successfully 'democratic'. A series of strike waves by the 11,000 members of the Gambian Workers Union in 1970, 1975 and 1976 over a basic minimum wage led Jawara to ban the union in 1977. Ex-militants later joined the RSPTG.

The crushing of the RSPTG can only dampen down the militancy of similar groups in Senegambia for a short period. Despite divisions within the Senegal unions there have been periodic strikes in the public service and industry. The drought has swelled the urban population to 30% of that of all Senegambia. With a quarter of the groundnut processing industry closing down and the rest on short time working, the ranks of the angry and restless unemployed are swelling. A relatively minor incident involving the embezzlement of high school funds sparked off rioting which rapidly spread, in January 1980, to the Senegal capital.

Ousmane's latest film *Ceddo* was shortly afterwards banned on the personal intervention of Senghor. 'If the government is banning the film' declared Ousmane, 'it has something to protect, to defend. After seeing the film, people are not necessarily transformed into revolutionaries, but it does make them think.'



HOW

In spite of its brutality and the extent of its repressive measures, the Turkish junta appears to have achieved a consensus both in Turkey and outside. On the first anniversary of the coup, **Ahmet Gezgin**, a member of **Kurtulus**, explains why the military came to power and takes a critical look at the Turkish left.

On 12 September 1980 a military dictatorship was established in Turkey. At its head sits a five-man junta which has so far hanged ten people, murdered around 200 socialists in the streets and torture-chambers, sentenced nearly 1000 people to death and jailed 12,200 people from all walks of life.

The junta has closed down all unions, professional organisations and parties, banned all political activity and replaced all elected civil servants and administrators by current or retired officers (even the manager of the national football team was not spared).

Most importantly, the junta has now been in power for one year facing almost no serious opposition or resistance. On the contrary, it has secured considerable popular support, though this is now on the wane.

The Turkish left was, prior to the coup, among the most thoroughly armed revolutionary movements in the world. It was a serious and influential force in the Turkish political arena, able to mobilise large numbers of people and fought deadly, armed battles with a powerful fascist movement. The latter was, similarly, the strongest civilian fascist movement in the world, with one million votes (10%), a parliamentary group and, most importantly, well-trained, fully armed cadres. The fascists were able, in places, to control the streets and were clearly within sight of making a bid for state power.

In addition to this, in Turkey's colony of Kurdistan 'national democratic consciousness,' as the Turkish left

wrote, 'had reached its highest point'. Along the border of Kurdish areas large-scale street clashes between fascists and the left were frequent, with barricades erected around which fighting raged for days. Across the country smaller towns and villages were shared out between fascist and revolutionary forces, with frequent raids into areas under 'enemy' control. About this time last year the death-toll was reaching 20 a day, some clashes leaving up to 200 dead.

At the same time the Turkish working class was involved in one of the largest strike waves of its history. 50,000 workers, mainly in the metal, textile and glass industries, were on strike, with a further 100,000 likely to take strike action in September-October. Deep in the throes of crisis, the Turkish economy could ill-afford such a scale of workers' militancy. Dependent to a great extent on imports, and unable to meet its yearly foreign currency requirements of over three billion dollars, industry was further crippled by the strike wave.

No Resistance

How is it that in a country with such an armed and apparently influential revolutionary movement, with a militant working class in the midst of great struggles, a military dictatorship was able to come to power with the minimum of fuss and no resistance? What also needs to be answered is why the Turkish ruling classes chose military dictatorship over the other options open to them.

In answering the first question we have to take a look at the revolutionary movement in Turkey. And the short answer must be that this movement was *separate from* the working class movement. It also failed to understand the nature of a successful anti-fascist struggle.

A socialist movement — numerically a very great one — was built in Turkey with only minimal links to the working class, without a solid class base. The left, which suffered very heavy blows after the 1971 coup, started to reorgan-

THE GENERALS KEPT THEIR COUP

ise in 1974, once again essentially on the basis of student youth and sections of the petty-bourgeoisie. Benefiting from the electrifying effect of the '71 coup on these groups, it was able in a short time to reach and mobilise large numbers of people.

With the increasing belligerence of the fascist movement from 1976-77 on, the left organised, with considerable success, unemployed youth, school students, younger workers in small workplaces and sweatshops, artisans and shopkeepers, particularly in areas under fascist attack. Mass work was indeed undertaken, but it seldom went beyond an anti-fascist basis. So, often when the fascist threat was lifted as a result of the left's armed struggle, the masses sympathetic to the left would retreat into passivity.

As the battles between fascists and the left intensified, becoming increasingly violent, the petty-bourgeoisie started rapidly to leave the political arena. Their activism of 1976-77 evaporated into panicky retreat in the period leading up to September 1980.

This, on the one hand, aided the fascists in their efforts to control the streets and, on the other, left the socialist movement even more isolated, albeit with a very large body of militant cadres. While this was going on, the economic struggle of the working class reached larger proportions every year. In each of the years 1978, 79 and 80, workers were involved in the most extensive strike waves of their history. However, the strike movement was unrelated to the revolutionary left, took place around economic demands and under the firm leadership of union bosses.

At a time when an anti-fascist struggle of such proportions was being waged, the working class was not part of this struggle. Conversely, in years which saw workers raise their struggle to its highest, the revolutionary movement was otherwise occupied.

Thus, a military junta was able quietly to come to power and very quickly deal crippling blows to the Turkish left, capturing and/or eliminating not only an immense number of its militants but also a large part of its leadership. The left's response could go no further than the token assassination of one or two soldiers or the unsuccessful hijack of an airplane to Bulgaria. The working class showed vague signs of passive discontent in the form of go-slows for three or four days (how widespread this was we don't know). As for the large mass of people who may previously have been sympathetic to the left, the military quickly gained their support by restoring 'law and order' in the streets.

Our second question concerns the choice of military dictatorship by the

Turkish ruling classes. Their other options included a coalition of the two major parties (Demirel's conservative Justice Party and Ecevit's social democratic Peoples Party), or an early general election. The latter would clearly have resulted in a greatly strengthened Justice Party, but also a strengthened fascist National Action Party. And this would have quickened the fascists' advance towards power. In order to understand the pros and cons of these solutions we have to consider the situation in Turkey together with recent developments in the Middle East as a whole.

Any line of development which took the fascist party closer to state power would clearly have led the socialist movement to increase its appeal to larger sections of the population. And weak as its class base was, the left would undoubtedly have resisted a transition to fascism very vigorously. Neither Turkey's economic situation nor the interests of imperialism in the area could allow prolonged and violent turmoil in the country.

National Struggle

In the period preceding the Turkish coup imperialism had lost Iran, one of its most solid footholds in the region. The Kurdish national struggle, both in Iran and Iraq, was on the upswing. The Kurdish movement in Turkey was heavily armed and increasingly influenced by the struggles in other parts of Kurdistan. The Gulf war, breaking out soon after the coup in Turkey, introduced still more tensions into the area. Apart from its importance in the Middle Eastern framework, Turkey constitutes NATO's south eastern wing and has 22 American military bases within its borders. The restoration of stability in Turkey was therefore crucial within the imperialist perspective.

Military dictatorship has turned out indeed to be a smooth and painless solution. What is it now that the junta has set out to achieve? What job are they expected to do?

The junta is very unlikely to remain in power for a period of decades. That is because it sits on top of a spectrum

ranging from social democrats to fascists *inside* the army. Also, Turkey is part of the European Community. As such, the dictatorship (in its more brutal and undemocratic aspects) has already faced criticism from Europe and will no doubt face more.

Within these constraints, the junta will attempt to smash — as permanently as they can — the organised socialist movement and take the measures they deem necessary to prevent the movement's revitalisation in the future. They will also try (as they have started) to carry out constitutional and legislative alterations which they hope will preserve political stability in the period following their departure. Finally, they will attempt to emasculate working class organisation in order to provide an economic breathing space of four, five, or perhaps ten years for the ruling class.

So far the junta have succeeded in dealing the left as crippling a blow as they could. However, their economic (rather than political) measures have begun to lose them some of the passive popularity they had initially gained. Workers whose wages have been frozen are clearly unhappy. Poor and middle peasants, shopkeepers and other middle strata are burdened with new and higher taxes. Inflation continues to be very high. These factors will ensure that what support the military have will recede and turn into discontent.

At that point, the most important problem will be the absence of a revolutionary leadership to channel and coordinate rising opposition. For the revolutionary movement the only way forward lies in a careful examination of its own past and a serious attempt to draw lessons from it. The struggle from now on must be directed to growing deep roots *inside* the working class, to create a *revolutionary working class movement* in Turkey. Failure to achieve this can only result in yet another repetition of March 1971 and September 1980, this time as a tragedy of even greater proportions.

If you would like more current information please get in touch with the Turkish Solidarity Campaign, BM Box 5965, London WC1N 3XX.

Socialist Worker

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The new social

'The Labour government of the mid-1980s found itself rapidly overtaken by events. Runs on sterling and flights of capital put it under strain, and the subsequent shifts in policy — including the emasculation of the wealth tax and the decision to put pension fund control in the hands of the General Planning Commission — were widely seen as the first inevitable shifts towards maintaining a fragile parliamentary position.

'On wages, however, the problem was much more serious. The 35 per cent annual inflation rate, provoked by a relaxation of the Tory government's wage-cut policy and the massive increase in raw material prices from the devaluation of the pound, led to a series of escalating wage claims, with shop stewards submitting new demands every three to four months instead of every year as previously. The crisis was slow to start but grew rapidly.

'Fortunately, Labour found itself a statesman in TGWU general secretary, Rex Toddkit. Speaking at a union rally in Poole, Mr Toddkit put forward his plan for flat-rate general wage increases, based on average earnings and linked to the cost of living: "this figure" he said, "should then apply to everybody at work, whether it is MPs, judges, civil servants or workers generally." In return the government should impose a price freeze. "Wages are not the main cause of inflation," said Mr Toddkit, "but the present trend for wages to increase faster than prices spells economic danger." Agreement could be reached with the CBI and a collective bargain struck. This approach would be "better than government intervention, and though there might be exceptional cases these should be dealt with strictly by arbitration."

'Three weeks later the government announced its new "Plan for Pay" which would limit increases to £5 a week, only allow price increases to firms declared efficient by the planning commission, and would "strictly control" dividends in the UK. A policy had been found which satisfied the international economic community...'

From *The Tragedy of British Labour*, Santiago 1996.

Sometimes truth is stranger than fiction. It is just over six years since the then T&G general secretary Jack Jones addressed the masses in Poole with the words ascribed to Rex Toddkit. It is only 2½ years since the Labour/TUC pact, the 'Concordat', the last desperate attempt to save a government that had presided over the worst attacks on living standards and welfare since World War II. Yet on July 24, the TUC published a document, somewhat hopefully entitled *Economic Issues Facing The Next*

Labour Government, which basically repeats the tired formulas of the past.

This document has already received the endorsement of both the TUC general council and the Labour Party NEC. By the time you read this article, it will almost certainly have been endorsed by the TUC congress and will be on its way to the Labour Party conference with the blessing of This Great Movement Of Ours.

The body which drew up the new plan is the TUC-Labour Party Liaison Committee, with representatives from the TUC, Labour NEC and Labour MPs. Among its members are such notables as: Frank Chapple, Tony Benn, Len Murray, Eric Heffer, Clive Jenkins, Frank Allaun, Alex Kitson, Denis Healey, Alan Fisher, Merlyn Rees, Terry Duffy and Michael Foot. It thus has the endorsement of a "broad spectrum of the labour movement".

Wages and Productivity

Essentially, a Labour/TUC programme to shore up capitalism has already been promulgated, endorsed by the leadership and is now being sold to the rank and file. Whether Labour's NEC, constituency Labour parties, Ken Livingstone or the *Militant* group draw up the next Manifesto is almost irrelevant. Those in control have already stolen a march. The terms within which a future Labour government will work with the TUC are now set, in Annex 1 to section G of the 1981 TUC General Council Report (for those with an eye to the record books).

It would be rather surprising in fact, if this were not the case. The history of the last Labour government, which came in to 'squeeze the rich till the pips squeaked' (Denis Healey) and ended up redistributing the tax burden in favour of the rich, was marked by similar deals. It was in fact the TUC, and various acolytes, who made the running.

There were various stages in the process of the moderate reformist Labour government in 1974/75 becoming the monetarist reactionary one in 1977/79. The new TUC/Labour document on the economy is very similar to the starting point last time round — except it is distinctly to the right.

It limits itself (correctly, in its own terms) to reconstructing the type of mixed welfare economy which existed up to the mid-1970s. It is in the mainstream of post-war Keynesian economics, with the only slightly radical tinge being talk about 'democratic planning'. That Labour's 'leftism' only seems left because of the general shift to the right is shown by the fact that the new plan is in the same mould as Labour's famous National Plan of 1965, which was the brainchild

of George Brown and was agreed with the CBI.

Under the social contract 'proper' which lasted from the election of February 1974 till the £6 wage policy in August 1975, wage controls were not seen as a priority. The language of the TUC's document *Collective Bargaining and the Social Contract* (26 June 1974) on wages is uncannily similar to the new document (24 July 1981).

The 1974 version:

'The new approach to collective bargaining problems (?) will be essentially different in purpose and structure from the statutory policy it is designed to replace. Negotiators should give priority to negotiating agreements which will have beneficial effects on unit costs and efficiency, and to reforming outdated pay structures.'

The 1981 version:

'We believe that, to meet the challenge which will be posed by the operation of effective price controls (!), negotiators within both private and public enterprises, including nationalised industries, should take into account the need to secure efficiency in the use of resources and have regard to the impact of settlements on prices.'

Both these passages have a further echo. In the build-up to the strikes which smashed Labour's incomes policy at the end of 1978 and which culminated in the 'Concordat' (of which more below), the TUC bureaucracy produced a document on a new deal on prices and wages. It was an attempt to rescue Callaghan's 5 per cent wage limit, written largely by John Hughes of Ruskin College (incidentally a supporter of the Labour Coordinating Committee, and the Institute for Workers Control, and a member of the 'editorial advisory panel' of *New Socialist*).

The 1978 version of the social contract was that union negotiators should 'seek stability in the price of the product wherever possible, and in all cases have regard to the impact on the overall price level.' The proposal was also that firms should disclose more information about the structure of costs in the enterprise to unions and that in return 'unions should be prepared to take full account of the information disclosed when considering a proper level of settlement.'

Unfortunately for the Callaghan government, the TUC deadlocked 14-14 on the document, and despite Len Murray's efforts it was not endorsed.

The major element linking all these statements, and which underlies all the social contract formulations, is increasing the efficiency of firms. At times under the 1974/79 government, Labour launched straight crude wage policies (in 1975 and 1976). But the rest of the time the objective was to harness wor-

contractors

kers into increasing the efficiency of the firm or public sector enterprise. This was the central aim in 1974, and today the entire thrust of *Economic Issues Facing The Next Labour Government* is that the need for industrial expansion requires accumulation of capital, planning and the more efficient use of resources. Hence there is a passage on the wastage of skills which contains veiled references to shorter apprenticeships and ending demarcation. There is also the magical reappearance of the Price Commission, the toothless wonder of the last social contract, in a more upmarket role.

The idea of a Price Commission is even older than the social contract of course (it goes back to the mid-sixties). But under the last government, with the direction of John Hughes (incidentally a supporter of the Labour Coordinating Committee, the Institute of Workers... etc. etc.), it increasingly tried to be the productivity policeman. Under the new regime its role would be enhanced.

'We would need,' the new document says, 'to take powers to enable any price to be investigated, controlled or reduced

and for any company or sector to be subject to an investigation or efficiency audit, whether or not they propose to increase prices. Price increases, on a wide range of goods, will thus have to be justified, whether they arise from increased costs, or from the need to increase profit margins so as to provide for the investment needed to meet our national objectives.'

Considering the same document also says that companies will need to rebuild profits, there is almost nothing more to add about what 'efficiency audits' might be like. But it is worth pointing out that while private capitalists might scream about state interference if this sort of Price Commission were set up (the CBI mounted a huge propaganda offensive against it last time) its real function would be to soften up workers for a productivity offensive.

The New Corporatism

A further element in the new plan, which would again be directly used against 'excessive' wage claims, is the call for a 'national economic assessment' along the lines of the German

'Concerted Action' forum. This is gaining support from all sorts of interesting people. The British Institute of Management has made it a central plank in its programme for a reform of wage bargaining. And on the other hand it has become a rallying cry for certain individuals from the Conference of Socialist Economists (CSE).

The new *Socialist Economic Review* (supposed to be an annual compendium) contains several pieces along these lines. One is actually called 'Towards a New Social Contract' (by David Purdy, last heard of on the right of the CP) and states

'There is much to be gained from moves towards synchronising pay settlement dates in the public sector; and likewise from an annual prices and incomes forum involving representatives of the principal socio-economic interest groups.' (He also calls for a permanent pay relativities commission, an idea advanced by Edward Heath.)

There is something wonderful about the formulation 'principal socio-economic interest groups' (it means the Government, CBI and TUC). It symbolises the tone of the debate, right across the social-democratic spectrum from the SDP itself over to many on the left of the Labour Party. It is as if the last government had never been. We have the same formulas, the same themes — workers must be patient, realistic, responsible, etc. — and even, as we have seen, the same phrases 'take into account', 'have regard to'.

Meanwhile Benn and his friends talk of a new era and the need to transform the Labour Party.

One of the great attractions of the Alternative Economic Strategy, and all that goes with it, is the number of jobs that it will create. Not unfortunately for workers but for the budding group of academics, economic specialists and potential bureaucrats which is getting in on the AES scene. Some of them have already been employed in this world — Michael Foot's new economic adviser, a member of the Conference of Socialist Economists, recently gave up his highly paid Treasury post in order to work on formulating the new economic policy. Assuming Labour do win an election some time, he will certainly benefit. And what the new TUC/Labour plan describes as 'new mechanisms for channelling finance to industrial investment on terms which meet industry's requirements and national planning criteria' should provide a lot of jobs for his co-thinkers.

The staff of the National Investment Bank, the architects of the National Plan, the members of the National Planning College, the draughtspersons of the new planning agreements and the staff

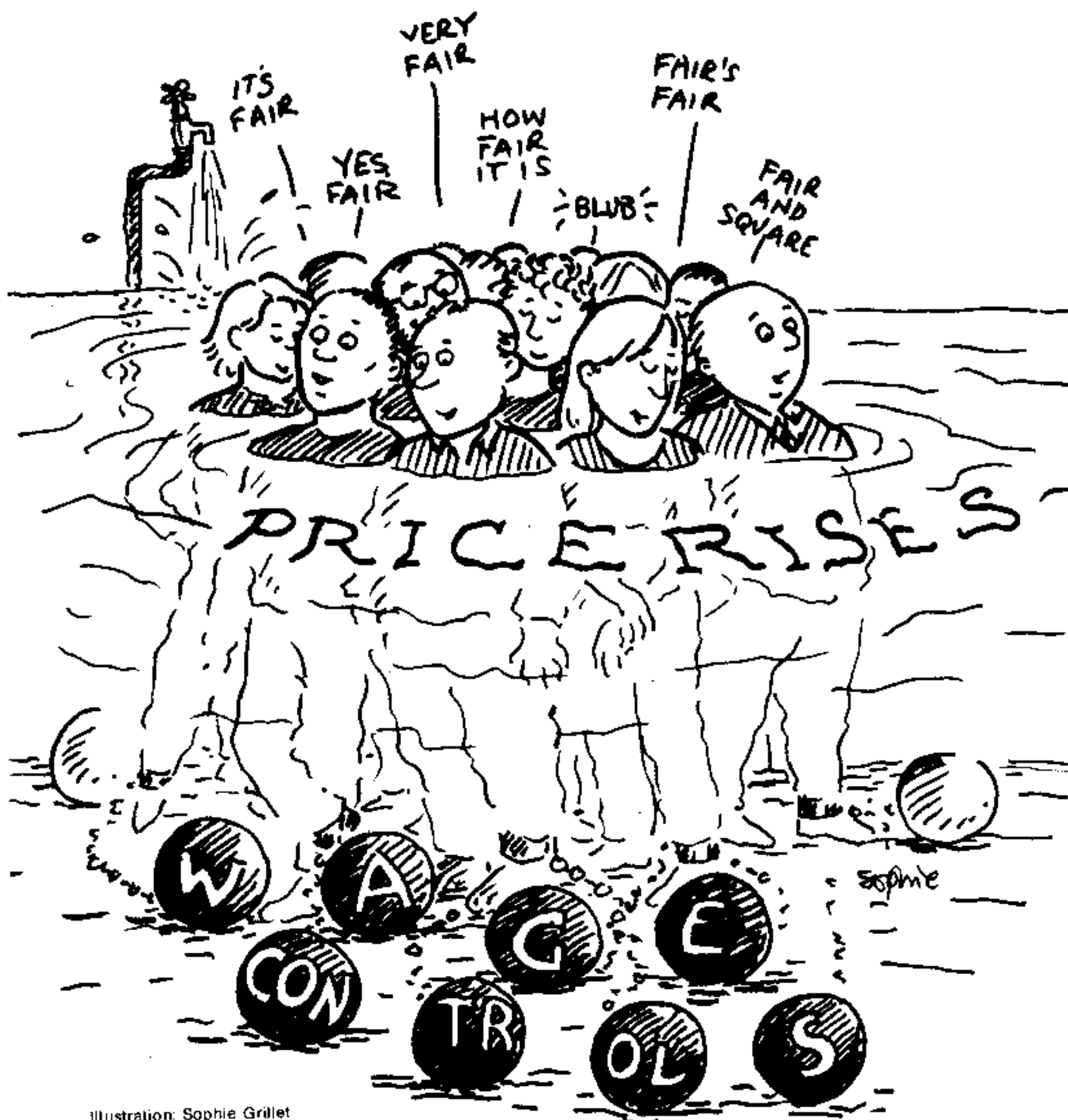


Illustration: Sophie Grillet

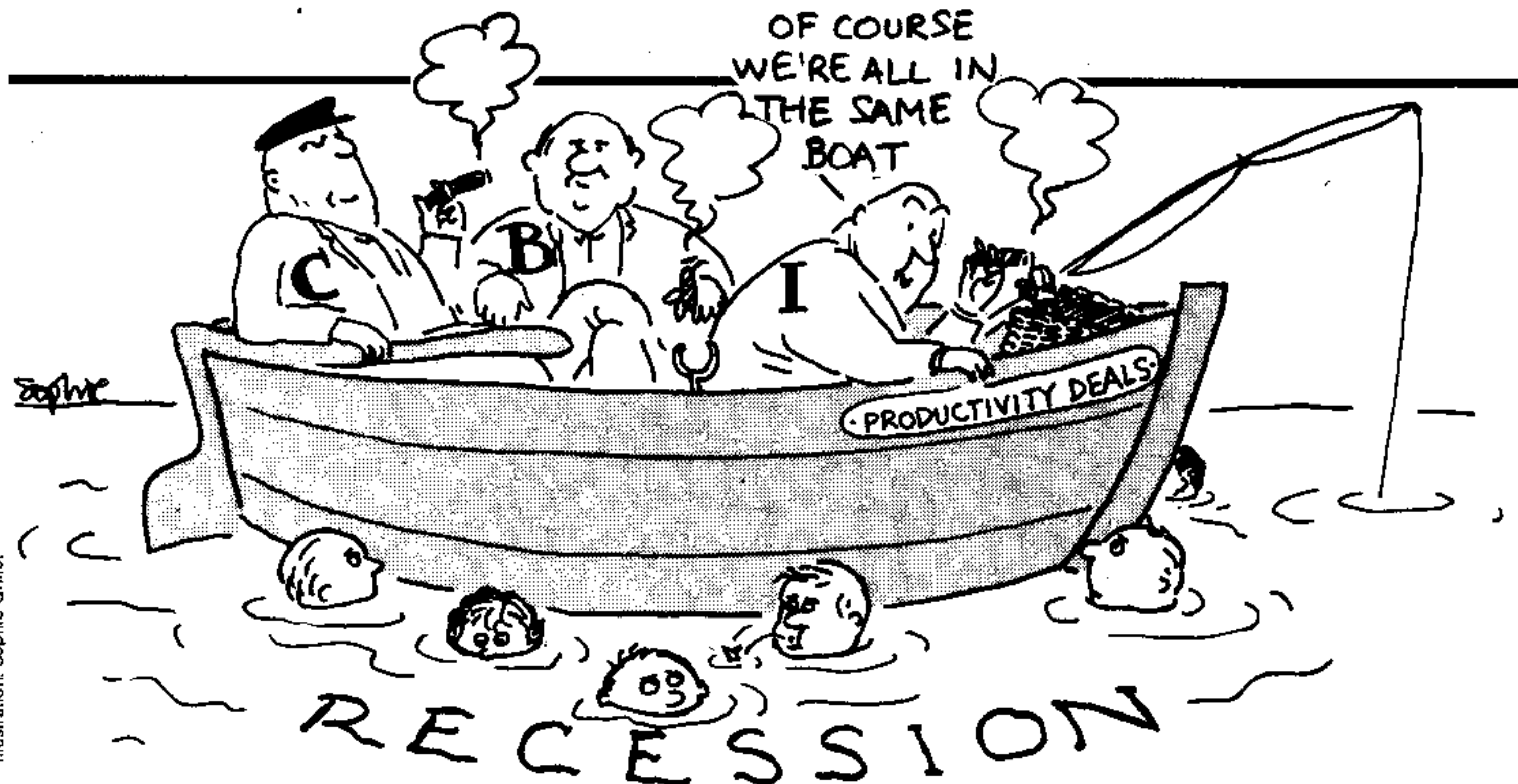


Illustration: Sophie Grillet

of the 'reinforced NEB' – they will all tend to come from the same group, who for brevity's sake we could describe as 'The Planners'.

Some of these people will have been there before. The assorted merchant bankers who were scattered round the 1974 Labour government bureaucracy may have had their day, but those like John Hughes, who headed the Price Commission, assuredly have not. Looking at the editorial panel of the new Labour theoretical journal *New Socialist*, it is striking how many were key figures in wage restraint policies last time round, or who provided the theoretical back-up, or who were involved in the processes of conciliation which enmeshed the trade union movement between 1974 and 1979.

John Hughes we have already mentioned: involved with the Price Commission, the November 1978 attempt to save Callaghan's 5 per cent wage limit and the 'Concordat' in February 1979. Geoffrey Goodman, the *Mirror* industrial editor, was called in to organise the propaganda for the £6 wage limit in 1975. The coyly named 'Bill McCarthy' (Lord McCarthy, no relation) is the resident industrial relations 'expert' for the Institute of Personnel Management, as well as being chairman of the British Rail arbitration panel and a major promoter, with Hugh Clegg, of the incorporation of the unions into running the system. Jack Jones is also on the editorial panel. Jim Mortimer, formerly chairman of ACAS, is a member, and so on.

Alongside this type of Labour figures sits the new generation of leftists who have come into prominence. These include Stuart Holland MP, Dianne Hayter, Mary Kaldor, Chris Mullin etc., representing the new 'Bennite' left, in one sense, but more importantly part of a new generation of policymakers and planners.

The unique combination of the tired old hacks of the last round of failures and the bright new hopes of the next

round actually typifies a whole world. The economic field is, for obvious reasons, where most of the aspirant planners are to be found. The old guard, symbolised by the Cambridge Economic Policy Group, contains old-time gurus of planning from the 1950s and 1960s: Joan Robinson, Robert Nield, Wynne Godley. All highly respectable establishment economists in the Keynesian mould. The economists have not moved to the left – their political colleagues have moved to the right.

The Planners

At the same time, there is a complex new group, largely supporters of the Conference of Socialist Economists, which contains all sorts of different elements, from right-wing Eurocommunists who believe in incomes policy over to virtual anarchists. The most prominent force within this 'new' generation is a tendency which sees the way forward as economic planning, strategic nationalisation, a 'sensible' public sector, voluntary incomes policy and a national economic forum. Earlier this year, this grouping published *Socialist Economic Review 1981*, a collection of papers given at a September 1980 conference. The most striking thing about this grouping is that it takes in CP members like Sam Aaronovitch and Tribunites like Paul Ormerod of the National Institute (another very establishment body) and is broadly in line with the mainstream 'realistic' thinking in the Labour Party/TUC leadership. So in practice its line is quite right-wing, even to the right of the Lothian councillors on what to do about Tory cuts.

This is not the place for an examination of the planners' view of the economy. Their overall perspective is very much for import controls, strategic intervention by the state, withdrawal from the EEC etc, though they tend to take a slightly less chauvinistic view of Britain than does, say, the CP.

In terms of the debate on incomes

policy, the role of the unions and the workers, however, there is a common position. It links very closely with the views of the official leadership. It is that in the aftermath of a Labour election victory, workers would have very high hopes which would have to be contained. The planners do not believe they can do much about unemployment in the short-term, nor about the welfare state, the cuts, pay or whatever. Their perspective is a more radical version of the 1974 perspective – a political trade-off with the TUC. After 1974, as the TUC lost no time in pointing out to members, Labour abolished the Industrial Relations Act, legislated for planning agreements and the NEB, brought forward the Employment Protection Bill, moved towards nationalisation of shipbuilding and aerospace, abolished legal pay controls, set up Scottish and Welsh Development Agencies, the British National Oil Corporation etc.

The proposed trade-off for the future is similar. The NEB, National Plan, national planning college, National Investment Bank, planning agreements are all in the new Labour/TUC economic policy document. These and similar measures are what the planners and the new social contract will be all about. It will certainly *not* be about improving living standards, restoring cuts, saving the NHS, work or full pay, or anything else likely to affect the working class materially, even to the extent which has occurred in France since Mitterrand's election.

And in return for political changes, perhaps even including EEC withdrawal and elements of industrial democracy such as planning agreements, workers will be expected to restrain their economic demands, just as they were in 1974. It is odds on that the events in 1974/75 will repeat themselves, that the screws will be turned and that today's broad left will be the policemen for a government which will tell everyone how sorry it is, but there is no choice.

Dave Beecham

THE REVOLUTION THAT WENT WRONG

Iran under the Shah was a bleak and terrible place. The torture and killing, the secret police SAVAK, the corruption of the ruling families—all these made even the Western press almost enthusiastic about the revolution in Iran.

The mass movement of the streets and factories expressed such enormous opposition to the Shah and his class that some editorials even cheered when he was flown out—broken and disgraced—in January 1979.

Now, only halfway through year three of the revolution, the same newspapers feel that it is possible to write almost wistfully of the time when there was order and firm government in Iran. There is open talk of the re-establishment of the Shah's dynasty, and a good deal of speculation about how the CIA might engineer the same sort of coup which took Shah Reza back to power some thirty years ago.

With each week's events in Iran, the newspapers' enthusiasm for the good old times is renewed. Mass executions, bombings, denunciations and recriminations—all in the name of 'the revolution'—seem to be a bitter conclusion to the courageous struggles which toppled the Shah.

Unhappily, a great deal of this will not surprise socialists who have followed events in Iran since the revolution began.

The issues at stake

Even during the mass strikes and demonstrations of 1978 and 1979—the highest point of the revolution—it was clear that there were great problems in store. For there was no section of society sufficiently well-organised to bring the revolution under its own control. No self-confident bloc of the old ruling group of capitalists and landlords was capable re-enforcing its domination under the new conditions. More seriously, no socialist party had the political traditions or the working class support to lead the workers and the poor towards the construction of a new order.

Throughout the early period of the revolution the lack of socialist organisation had been a brake on the workers' movement. In the absence of the call to spread and strengthen the workers' factory councils, to fight for freedom for Iran's national minorities, to distribute the land to the peasants, to fight for *workers power*, the energies of the revolution were expressed in a different language—that of Islam.

Although Ayatollah Khomeini has been the 'face' of the revolution, in the beginning much influence lay with the leading figures

of what was essentially a government of small businessmen. Men like prime minister Bazargan were small factory owners who had never had the chance to develop their ambitions under the Shah's multinational-dominated economy.

These men, and the many bazaaris and technocrats drafted into office with them, had found life under the Shah restrictive. Now they saw the opportunity to pursue their own ambitions—to reconstruct capitalism in Iran, albeit in the guise of 'Islamic Republicanism', with themselves playing the leading roles.

Throughout the history of capitalism, with its repeated breakdowns and revolutionary crises, the petty bourgeoisie has played a vacillating and eventually reactionary role. There is no more illustrative example than that of Iran. The 'anti-imperialist' rhetoric of Khomeini's regime could not conceal the speed with which it moved to destroy the strike committees and workers' councils which had provided the muscle-power for the overthrow of the Shah. These workplace committees were replaced with 'revolutionary workers' committees' often composed largely of mullahs, technicians and managers.

The regime attacked the national minorities who only weeks earlier had played a leading role against the old regime. The Kurds were described as 'enemies of God'. Revolutionary 'komitehs' were established, which in the absence of any functioning state apparatus (this had been paralysed by mass desertions in the army, the collapse of the courts and the opening of the prisons) arbitrarily dispensed 'Islamic justice'. 'Revolutionary guards' enforced 'order' as they saw fit.

But the loose ruling group of small capitalists and mullahs was, as always, too weak to maintain any real control. Internal divisions and jealousies made an overall strategy impossible. The composition of the government changed from month to month, as first one and then another faction carved out a bigger share of ministerial power. Power blocs were built in the army, among the revolutionary guards, in the civil service, in the religious establishment.

Until recently it seemed that a general fear of the left and of the national minorities, together with the continuing influence of Khomeini, would keep the ruling factions in a shaky alliance although there were frequent eruptions which revealed petty jealousies in the ruling group, but sometimes also the aspirations of the workers and poor.

Early in the second year of the revolution Iran elected the first president of the revolu-

tionary regime. Bani-Sadr obtained a massive majority—providing a profound shock for the ruling clerics, with their Islamic Republican Party (IRP) candidate Habibi, gaining less than 5% of the vote. The people of Iran made it clear that whilst they wanted Islam—for Bani-Sadr was presented as a pious Muslim, though a 'modernist'—they did not want clerical rule.

Bani-Sadr had already established his strategy for change in Iran. The country should restart its economy and to move towards self reliance. New industries should be built, and large areas of economic life should come under state control. There should be more legal freedoms, including a wide freedom of the press, and the right to organise. Bani-Sadr even defended the rights of certain of the leftist organisations.

But in the Maulis elections which followed Bani-Sadr and the 'secularists' were unable to consolidate their position. Lacking the links between the bazaar and the mosque, which had been the basis of Khomeini's success, Bani-Sadr was forced to cast about for an electoral alliance to provide some basis of support.

He was unable to build a political organisation and his list of candidates did poorly.

The IRP, standing as the party for the rule of the clergy, consolidated strongly. During this period, covering the capture of the American hostages at the embassy in Tehran and the failed American attempt to release them, the clerics captured most of the ground lost during the presidential election.

Major divisions

There were many conflicts over appointments to ministerial positions and over control of government departments and the armed forces. Many were expressed in theological terms. But these reflected the major division which had been built into the regime since the beginning.

While large areas of Iran's economy had been westernised and 'modernised' in recent years, important sections had not. Most significant was the bazaar. For centuries the bazaar merchants had not merely controlled the largest section of trade in Iran, but had also dominated Iranian finance. They were the informal bankers, money-lenders, import and export agencies.

Under the Shah the bazaar, and the small merchant class in general, suffered badly. The families associated with his small ruling group developed a tighter and tighter hold on the import trade, and enjoyed a close relationship with the multinational compa-

IRAN

nies who dominated the economy. The predictable result was the increasingly bitter opposition of the bazaar to the Shah's regime.

Throughout the post-Shah period the bazaar has continued to play a key role in providing the network of support for the mullahs and in particular for the IRP. Many *komitehs*, for example, are led by small traders and shop owners who have exploited their positions to considerable gain. The bazaar has regained a little of the status it formerly enjoyed, and a thriving black market has grown up, especially with the war with Iraq.

It has been estimated that today some \$8bn of foreign trade passes through the bazaar. This has created an enormous problem for Iran's planners, and under Bani-Sadr resulted in a plan to nationalise foreign trade. The plan was bitterly opposed by the bazaar, who drew closer to the most fundamentalist of the mullahs. They became virulent opponents of Bani-Sadr, helping to give the factional campaign against him a basis throughout Iran.

The fundamentalists possessed an apparatus to support their faction. Besides the support of the bazaar and the mosque, they could call on the most vocal of the mullahs who were the core of the IRP, the *komitehs*, and the street gangs of the *hezbollahis*. Bani-Sadr, on the other hand, seemed unable to consolidate a real base. He owed his precarious position largely to his ability to manoeuvre between fundamentalist groups, and to draw upon liberal and increasingly upon leftist support.

With the war with Iraq Bani-Sadr took his chance to try and build a more solid base. He acted as commander-in-chief, and made repeated visits to the front, attempting, with some success, to present himself as a 'soldiers' man'. But he was still unable to consolidate the independent power base necessary to resist the fundamentalists, who were determined to bring the conflict to a head.

Prime minister Rejai took effective control of financial affairs—by-passing Bani-Sadr's supporter Nobari, governor of the

central bank. Then in June Khomeini dismissed Bani-Sadr as commander of the armed forces, effectively stripping him of all but the ceremonial powers of the presidency.

Bani-Sadr's newspaper '*Islamic Republic*' was closed, and many of his supporters attacked and arrested. Now the national support he had been seeking belatedly appeared—though, as usual, in an unorganised form. In most major cities there were demonstrations in favour of the president. Many were attacked by *hezbollahis*—150 were killed. Bani-Sadr went into hiding, and a manhunt began against this new 'enemy of God'.

Towards Civil War?

Events now took a bloody turn. After explosions in Qom and Tehran, 74 supporters of the IRP were killed in a massive blast which destroyed the party's headquarters and removed Beheshti and more than forty other top government members.

The regime hit back ferociously. Blaming the *mujahidin*, they seized and executed some 600 'traitors', 'saboteurs', and 'collaborators'. Most were said to be *mujahidin* supporters, many were unlucky enough simply to have been on the streets when the *hezbollahis* passed by.

After three months Bani-Sadr reappeared in France with *mujahidin* leader Rajavi, announcing the formation of a National Resistance Council for those seeking 'independence, freedom and Islam'. In Iran more religious leaders and revolutionary guards were killed, and in response still more roundups of leftists were organised. On August 31st president Rejai and the new prime minister, Bahonar, were killed in a further explosion at the prime minister's office. The fundamentalists demanded a new campaign of revenge against the leftists.

The scene seems to be set for the long-predicted civil war in Iran. Ranged on one side are the fundamentalist mullahs, backed

by most of the bazaar, and with a good deal of support from the lumpen poor among whom the *hezbollahis* find a steady stream of recruits. In addition, though he has vacillated between more 'liberal' and the toughest fundamentalist positions, the government supporters have the endorsement of Khomeini, still the most potent single individual influence in Iran.

In opposition are the *mujahidin* in cooperation with leftist *fedayin* minority and semi-Maoist *Paykar*. Together with other fragments of the revolutionary left, these organisations are the core of the anti-government forces. If civil war erupts the Kurdish organisations, who have secured near-autonomy in the west of Iran, may join them—as indicated by the fact that they sheltered Bani-Sadr when he went underground in June. Some elements of the army may support Bani-Sadr, through Khomeini was backed by the leading generals when he removed the president's military responsibilities. It is believed that Bani-Sadr has wider support within the lower ranks.

The left

The tragedy of events in Iran is that the majority of the population have been, until today, scarcely involved in the major struggles. Most importantly, Iran's workers have been mere onlookers. The Iranian left, without exception, did not take its opportunity—immediately after the fall of the Shah—to intervene directly in the workers' movement, preferring sterile debate on the campus, which often degenerated into pathetic sectarian wrangling.

As the political climate became more hostile some of the organisations seemed to approach the question of organising in the workplace—trying to play a role, for example, in the workers' committees. But without the necessary conviction that it is essential to direct their efforts towards the question of workers' power, this was never a priority.

The *fedayeen*, who started the post-Shah



period with massive growth, have split, with a majority faction moving well to the right, effectively collapsing into the Tudeh Party—the pro-Moscow Communist Party which insists that the regime is ‘anti-imperialist.’ It is believed on the left that they have co-operated with the *hezbollahis* and even informed on members of the *mujahidin* who have subsequently been arrested and executed.

The *mujahidin* have been variously described as ‘Islamic Marxists’, ‘Muslim Socialists’ and ‘radical Muslims’. They now appear to favour the latter description. They seem to have sustained their support by emphasising the Islamic content of their ideas, but also gained considerable credibility by fighting effectively against Iraq during the invasion and even providing a number of recruits for the revolutionary guards (hence the regime’s recent fears that the bomb attacks have been organised from the inside).

For a long period after the fall of the Shah the *mujahidin* avoided criticising Khomeini by name, but attacked the regime sharply for being ‘conservative’, ‘clerical’, ‘dictatorial’, and ‘fascist’. Now there are no scruples over even Khomeini, symbol of the revolution. *Mujahidin* leader Rajavi announced from Paris that ‘Mr Khomeini is worse than Hitler’.

Guerilla struggle

But still the alliance of *Mujahidin*, *fedayeen* minority and *Peykar* has the enormous shortcoming of being primarily militaristic. These organisations developed during the long period of struggle under the Shah, when guerrilla struggle was their central strategy. They have not thrown off that tradition, despite the experience of the extraordinary demonstration of workers’ power which toppled the Shah while they stood looking on. It is almost certainly true that some sections of the Iranian left feel more confident now that they are back

underground, once more involved in planning ‘military operations’.

Despite the difficulties it has *not* been impossible to build a base among Iran’s workers. The working class has suffered badly over the past two years. After the euphoria of the period of the mass strikes, life has settled down to a struggle over severe shortages, a booming black market, rising inflation and unemployment.

War Zone

Large numbers have emigrated from the countryside to the major cities, bringing pressure on homes as well as jobs. Hundreds of thousands have left the war zone in the south. The basis of the workers’ committees has remained in some areas, however much overlaid by the Islamic influence, and the workers are by no means crushed. It seems too, that most workers at least passively support a partly secular leadership in government—Bani-Sadr received 75% of the presidential vote only eighteen months ago—and resent the obsessions of the fundamentalists.

But there remains *no* workers’ leadership and thus no firmly-based pole of opposition to the fundamentalists. From the mid-sixties, when today’s leftist organisations had their beginnings, to the present day when they are at least a force on the Iranian political scene, the limiting factor has been a lack of that political tradition which takes socialists towards the workplaces and into the workers’ movement. That part of the Iranian left which has not surrendered to Khomeini or to Moscow is now embracing Bani-Sadr because it has failed to find a base of its own. The leftist alliance with the former president expresses the weakness of both.

Iran is still without any sort of effective class leadership. In the vacuum which remains, the influence of the petty bourgeoisie is still dominant. The class which

removed the Shah through months of political strikes, which organised a collective leadership through the workers’ committees of the oilfields, the textile and engineering factories, has not been crushed. But the awful possibility remains that while the left and others continue their bitter struggle with the fundamentalists, the workers will merely duck their heads and wait.

If it is to be civil war the regime will surely find the greatest difficulty in securing control throughout the country. It took nearly two years to get rid of Bani-Sadr, and it is clear that the *mujahidin* at least have several thousands organised in underground cells, armed with weapons taken when the Shah was toppled. In addition Kurdistan is already well beyond the regime’s control.

The regular army

Equally, the loyal sections of revolutionary guards and the *hezbollahis*—also well armed—together comprise a small army. The unknown element is that of the regular army. Substantially rebuilt over the last year, it is quite unclear as to how it will move if major fighting breaks out. There are a number of possibilities: officers might move to take power in their own name—a classic pattern in the Middle East, recently well-illustrated in Turkey; they may take power in the name of the ‘true’ Islamic revolution, with Khomeini remaining as symbolic leader; a thoroughly secular government might be projected into power with Bazargan and the ‘natural’ leaders of Iran given the job of reconstructing the economy; least likely, the army might return Bani-Sadr to power.

If the military do not intervene and Khomeini’s street gangs win through, a religious dictatorship seems likely.

But there are too many permutations and uncertainties. Meanwhile, offstage in Cairo, in Baghdad and London the monarchist factions grow in confidence. In Washington the CIA consider how to repeat their coup of 1952.

In the short term it is very hard to be optimistic.

Phil Marfleet



The loser who loved his chains

'I wanted to tell the story of a loser' was how the American writer James T. Farrell — who died a couple of years back — described his major novel, *Studs Lonigan*.

It is the story of an Irish-American born in Chicago around the turn of the century who dies of pneumonia in 1931. William 'Studs' Lonigan does nothing remarkable throughout his short life. We join him in the first book of the trilogy, *Young Lonigan* as he graduates from his Catholic 'grammar' (elementary) school at 14, smoking in the toilets, obsessed with sex, making jokes about the nuns. He drops out of high school, works for his father's nouse-painting firm, drinks too much, gets in fights. So he drifts from adolescence to adulthood.

He has no regular girl friend until his late 20s, having unsatisfactory sex with what he variously describes as 'bums', 'whores' or 'dirty low bitches'. He finally persuades his fiancée to have sex. She gets pregnant, they plan to marry, he dies, she is left disgraced.

It hardly seems the sort of thing to fill over 800 pages. Yet Farrell provides a detailed, accurate and fascinating view of American working class life from the First World War to the depression. He does so by writing the overwhelming bulk of the book through the eyes of Studs Lonigan.

Studs lives in the past and the future, never in the present. He looks forward to a great future, when he'd be a boxer, a footballer, have a nice flat and car, an office with his own name on the door. Yet as he gets older these dreams become increasingly unreal, and he is forced to hark back to when he beat another of his gang in a fight, or when he left a speakeasy with his trousers down as it was raided.

Studs' ideas are those of the ruling class as conveyed through the local pulpit. He hates Reds. After meeting one in a park he thinks:

'A Bolshevik. He supposed the guy was a nigger lover too. Well, let the Bolsheviks get tough. They'd be taken care of, just the same as the shines were during the race riots of '19.'

Foreigners are the cause of all evils. Studs, his family and friends never think of themselves as immigrants or foreigners, but as Americans, unlike the kikes, hebes, hunkies, Polacks, and, worst of all, niggers, all of whom are moving into the neighbourhood, forcing the Lonigans to move further out.

But time and again it is sex, and attitudes towards it, that dominates Studs' life. The approach of him and his gang to women is simple. There are two kinds: those who will and those who won't. Those who will are abused. Studs' first experience of sex is when he takes part in a gang bang with a local girl, Iris. They discuss her later the same day:

'You know, Lucy's nice looking and she's got pretty good legs, said Weary.'

'You know guys like us are too rotten to go around with girls like her or your sister, Studs,' said Paulie. 'They're goodam different from Iris, the dirty...,' said Weary.

They talked about the thing that made some girls, generally Catholic ones, different. Weary and Studs bragged what they'd do if they ever caught guys monkeying around with their sisters.

Studs never loses these ideas. His sex life is never satisfactory. He is always fantasising about women, whether they are his childhood sweetheart Lucy, with whom he cannot establish a mature relationship, or girls he passes on the street. He sees sex as the height of achievement, but at the same time a sin.

Farrell shows how sexuality for men and women is distorted at a young age, making free relationships between the sexes a virtual impossibility. This distortion is exacerbated by the teachings and sermons of the local priests, which increase the gap between wishes and reality.

The sexual ideal for Studs — Lucy — is never reached. Instead, what starts as harmless 'boys talk' becomes an increasingly brutalised view of sex, as when one of Studs' friends rapes and cripples a girl at a New Year's party.

Studs last sexual experience is the most degrading. He goes to a shimmy contest in a strip joint.

Tough luck. Too quick in covering to let them see her boobs. Another blonde, shaking the same way. Oh Jesus Christ, he wanted a woman. One of these would be the trick if he could put a towel over their faces.

Studs is taken ill, and dies to a background of worsening depression, unemployment and the financial ruin of his parents. As his death approaches, the narrative is no longer simply through his eyes, but through those of his parents and his fiancée, Catherine. We see that the people he always portrayed as oppressing him, as not understanding his problems, are just as oppressed. Their misery is only too apparent, and is heightened by Studs' death, Catherine's pregnancy and the depression.

One of the last scenes in the book offers hope, but not for the Lonigan family. Studs' father returns to the neighbourhood where he was brought up and encounters a demonstration:

The menacing roar gripped Lonigan with fear. These people were the mob, coming to wreck, and they would take all he had and live in his building without paying rent and maybe send him and his family to live in a hole in this neighbourhood. His shoulders dropped in relaxation. Before they would come to take his building, the banks would have it.

But old Lonigan is trapped. He cannot accept the hope of 'the Reds', of revolution. He clings to the ideas which allow him to believe he has a stake in the existing order, even though everything is being taken from him.

Why couldn't the Reds let well enough alone, put their shoulders to the wheel, try to help things along back to prosperity, instead of making conditions worse by parading to foment all this trouble and agitation... He had as much reason to kick as any man. But that was no reason to tear everything down and have anarchy like in Russia.

James T. Farrell was a Communist when he wrote this book and a couple of years later became a Trotskyist. It is the story of where reactionary ideas come from and of how strongly they persist. What he shows us is not how some people fight these ideas to become revolutionaries, but how many more keep those ideas, often in their basest form, and maintain the status quo.

Not all the oppressed move towards revolution. Some love their chains. And the divisions of race, colour and sex which exist allow some of the oppressed to believe they benefit, when in reality they are all victims of capital.

Studs Lonigan is a brilliant study of such people.

Lindsey German

The complete *Studs Lonigan* trilogy is available in a single paperback volume from Granada Publishing at £2.50.

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LOTHIAN: the collapse into cuts

On 13 August Lothian Regional Council's Labour group abandoned their previous 'No Cuts in Services, No Redundancies' stance by 18 votes to 7. They went on to vote £15 million worth of cuts and a moratorium on all future spending. Immediately 1100 workers, mainly part-time teachers on fixed term contracts, lost their jobs. Allan Armstrong reports on the way this spectacular U-turn took place and its implications for the new Labour left.

The immediate reason given by the Labour group for their spectacular collapse was the advice given by the region's Director of Administration, Alexander McNicoll. Apparently, they faced the danger of 'slipping into illegality'.

To the 30,000 trade unionists who had taken action in defence of jobs and services this was a breath-taking revelation. We all knew that Secretary of State George Younger's Miscellaneous Provisions (Local Government, Scotland) Act had been law since the beginning of June. It had taken the Labour group nearly two months to realise they were 'slipping into illegality'. Either they are the stupidest set of people ever elected or the whole exercise had been a vote winning stunt, in preparation for the regional elections next May.

After claiming sole leadership and now abdicating it, the Labour group has left tens of thousands of trade unionists and public sector clients in the lurch. The fight back continues, but is much more fragmented and is unlikely to attract national media attention.

As the rank and file desperately try to rebuild the campaign, it is time to take stock of the role of the Labour Party, not only the role it has played in 'leading' the Lothian struggle, but also its implications for future performance, whether from the GLC or from a Labour government.

The political background

Lothian region has been in existence since 1975. It includes the Tory district of Edinburgh and the three Labour districts of West Lothian, Midlothian and East Lothian. Since its inception it has been Labour controlled, although at present with a majority of only one.

The regional Labour Party includes a small group of far left entrists (with no councillors), a group of traditionalist right wingers (including some councillors, although fewer than in, say, Strathclyde), an old left (the majority of the councillors, including those with the closest links to the trade union officials) and the most dynamic group, the new Labour left (with seven councillors, mainly drawn from the new,

radical professionals).

Until the August breakdown the Lothian Regional Labour Party was able to build up a tentative system of accountability, outlining policies for Labour group councillors. It was through this method of operation that the regional party managed to get the regional group to implement the maintenance and expansion of regional services. Until 13 August, even the right rarely broke group discipline in council, and there has been only one defector to the social democrats—Peter Wilson.

Thus the potential balance of the Lothian Labour group has been far more favourable than could be expected in a 1983 or 1984 Labour government, whether led by Foot or Benn. Party accountability is far more advanced in Lothian than for MPs nationally. Despite this, Lothian Labour group has completely failed in its main policy objective.

Elimination of the far left

One early indication of the possible lack of will power of the Labour group was the issue of rates rises. The maintenance and expansion of the region's services was only achieved at the cost of rate rises of 42% and 49% in 1980 and 1981. The new Labour left surrendered their 'No Cuts, No Rate Rise' position under pressure from local trade union officials, from the old left and the right. They said they needed time to build up trade union support and that to take on the Tories at this stage would be premature.

The far left opposed this. They proposed deficit budgetting, refusal to pay interest charges and the nationalisation of the banks. However, without an independent base outside ward party meetings, this appeared as mere phrase mongering and a call for others to take the road of financial martyrdom. The far left were easily isolated, while the old left sought the cooperation of trade union officials to pack key party meetings with union delegates and proceeded to purge the far left from their various committee positions.

Old Labour left and new Labour left (and even right) now appeared increasingly inseparable, united around a 'No Cuts in

Services—No Redundancies' position. But considerable differences were hidden behind the rhetoric of unity.

The new left and the unions

The closest relations exist between the old left and the trade union officials. The cooperation has been based on maintaining a healthy respect for each other's cabbage patch. A firm division of labour exists between the political and industrial wings of the labour movement.

The new left insist that the two wings must be brought closer together. However, in as much as they seek trade union reform, they envisage it taking the form of officials who are more left wing coming to power, paralyzing their own rise in the Labour Party.

In the meantime, in their attempt to broaden support for the regional Labour group's position, they have confined most of their attention to the existing trade union officials. Yet the officials of NUPE, NALGO, EIS and TGWU have played a treacherous role in several local and national disputes in recent years. Indeed, the omens of dirty dealing were to be seen early within the campaign.

The regional Labour Party organised a wider based Lothian Action Group from an open meeting in early 1980. Many rank and file representatives were elected from the floor. They were subsequently 'replaced' by trade union officials. This body then went on to do virtually nothing, except call for an anti-Thatcher picket in Edinburgh in May. Nearly all the 1500 who were there were mobilised by unofficial contacting. There were few trade union officials present.

The second body to be set up was the Joint Trade Union Committee. This appeared in early June, without any pretence of a democratic launching. It consisted entirely of trade union officials.

Typically their first response was in June, after the 9 June strike organised by NALGO as a result of pressure from the rank and file grouping, NALGO Action. Official and unofficial delegates from NUPE, the FBU and the EIS joined the NALGO lobby of the regional council, and the idea of a one-day strike for all Lothian employees gained

ground. NAG and *Rank and File Teacher* campaigned for a 30 June stoppage.

The Joint Trade Union Committee stepped in and organised a 'shop stewards meeting' on 18 June. Six hundred delegates attended, but there wasn't a shop steward on the platform. Alastair Macrae, Regional Labour Party executive member and NUPE full timer fought off attempts by Maureen Watson, NALGO Action Group member, and Andrew McGeever *Rank and File Teacher* member, to widen the campaign committee and to specify further action beyond 30 June.

A tremendous feeling of solidarity was generated by the 30,000 protest strike and the 15,000 strong march along Edinburgh's Princes Street. But the platform party of trade union officials, Labour councillors and Tribune MP Robin Cook, confined themselves to empty rhetoric. There wasn't a single proposal for further action.

From then on the official campaigning among the ordinary members virtually ceased. And the officials were secretly ditching the 'No Cuts' position. On 23 July a second 'shop stewards meeting' was held, with 150 delegates. Again Alastair Macrae prevented discussion, this time on NALGO social work department's all-out motion. He deliberately let the meeting degenerate into a shambles but not before attacking the private sector delegates—this after tacitly accepting massive cuts which will result in the loss of many private sector jobs.

Since 13 August the trade union officials have been falling over themselves to be 'consulted' on further cuts. The only condition they make is the lifting of the moratorium, with its largely unpredictable effects. The impact of this betrayal would have been much more limited if the Labour new left hadn't wasted so much time and effort on the trade union officials in the first place, but had worked with the rank-and-file groups and the shop stewards committees, gearing themselves to a real fight back and not just rhetoric.

The new left and electoral politics

Electoral politics is the daily bread and butter of the right and the old left, with no room for 'unconstitutional' political strikes or illegal actions. The new Labour left, however, claims to see the limits of parliamentarianism (and presumably 'councilism') and the need for extra-parliamentary action.

The difference was hardly perceptible in this campaign. The old left and the trade union officials were continually trying to turn the campaign into a defence of the 25 councillors. NALGO official Tom Quinn warned us not to upset the voters too much, since the region elections were next May.

Yet the 30,000 trade unionists who struck and the 15,000 who marched on 30 June did so in order to safeguard their jobs and services. They wanted an immediate massive campaign to achieve this aim. With the Labour group's collapse, many of them are accusing the group of 'playing politics' with them, and demoralisation is widespread.

If the new Labour left had an alternative strategy, they had an audience on 30 June. Since they didn't distinguish themselves

clearly, the seven who voted against the surrender to the Tories are being tarred with the same brush in many people's eyes as the 18 who gave in.

Furthermore, there isn't even a realistic prospect of the new Labour left's (and the far left's) answer to the sell-out—reselect and better luck next time. The panels for the regional elections next May have been drawn up and new candidates cannot be included, while Alastair Macrae and other trade union officials are making sure that no existing candidates can be removed.

The new left and mass democracy

Party accountability is the key element in most new left thinking. This marks an undoubted advance on the traditional, almost unaccountable, Labour councillor. But the party's committee, ward and constituency meetings still represent a fairly narrow base for support. The weakness of this was highlighted earlier in the year. A right wing Ratepayers Action Group Executive (RAGE) was formed in response to the massive rate rises. It quickly grew into a formidable organisation, able to hold meetings several hundred strong throughout Lothian. The mass base of this campaign gave its members the confidence to speak out, even at union and shop stewards' meetings. A persistent element in its propaganda was the comparison between the mass of Lothian rate payers and '25 Marxist councillors controlled by shadowy unelected backroom committees.'

The 30 June action marginalised RAGE temporarily and it would have been possible to isolate them completely with mass campaigning, involving weekly meetings of shop stewards from every workplace, representatives from private sector workplaces and from public sector consumer groups. This could have ensured that every locality had an action committee based on the many regional council workplaces, with representatives as well from local community groups. RAGE propaganda could have been countered with public, canteen and factory gate meetings, the leafletting of housing estates and shopping centres, spelling out which services would disappear and the effects on unemployment if the government got its way. The fragility of the RAGE alliance would have been soon revealed.

However, a mass campaign of this sort would have taken control out of the hands of trade union officials and would also have removed the focus away from the Labour councillors. The new Labour left never proposed such a campaign.

Another indication of the attempt to keep control was the launching of the *Lothian Clarion* by the regional council. This newspaper was designed to counter the hostility of the local press. Yet it was nothing but a narrow Labour party propaganda sheet, and like all such publications it was uninspiring. How much better it would have been to have launched a paper open to trade unionists, tenants' associations, community groups and single issue campaigns. It would have been much livelier and would have been actively sold, rather than posted through the letter box. The *Lothian Clarion*

tended to buttress the Tory accusation of a 'one party Lothian state'.

Such sectarianism even extended to the 30 June action. New Labour left district councillors Alex Wood and Neil Lindsay tried to eject the Scottish National Party contingent from the march. The fact that an increasing number of SNP members are prepared to break with their ultra-constitutional leadership (and their local regional councillor) is to be welcomed. It was a big step forward for SNP members most of whom were also active trade unionists, to join what they see as a 'unionist' (ie pro-union with England) led demonstration.

The limits imposed by trade union officials, electoralism and narrowly based campaigning showed up most strongly in the type of action advocated. The Socialist Workers Party insisted from the start that only all-out action in Lothian, backed by widening national support, could force a real retreat by Younger and Thatcher. All-out action releases people for mass picketing and for sending delegates to travel the country gaining support. It is the only type of action that will receive any substantial outside financial support.

Selective action is designed to be self-financing and so forces the struggle into a local mould. It separates the active from the passive supporter. It allows divisions to be exploited by the government and the media.

Yet members of the new Labour left attacked the SWP as 'ultra-left'. Councillor John Malvey scorned the 9 June strike initiated by NALGO Action, as 'premature'. District councillor Val Woodward has been vitriolic in her attacks on NALGO's social work department and on those EIS members who supported all-out action.

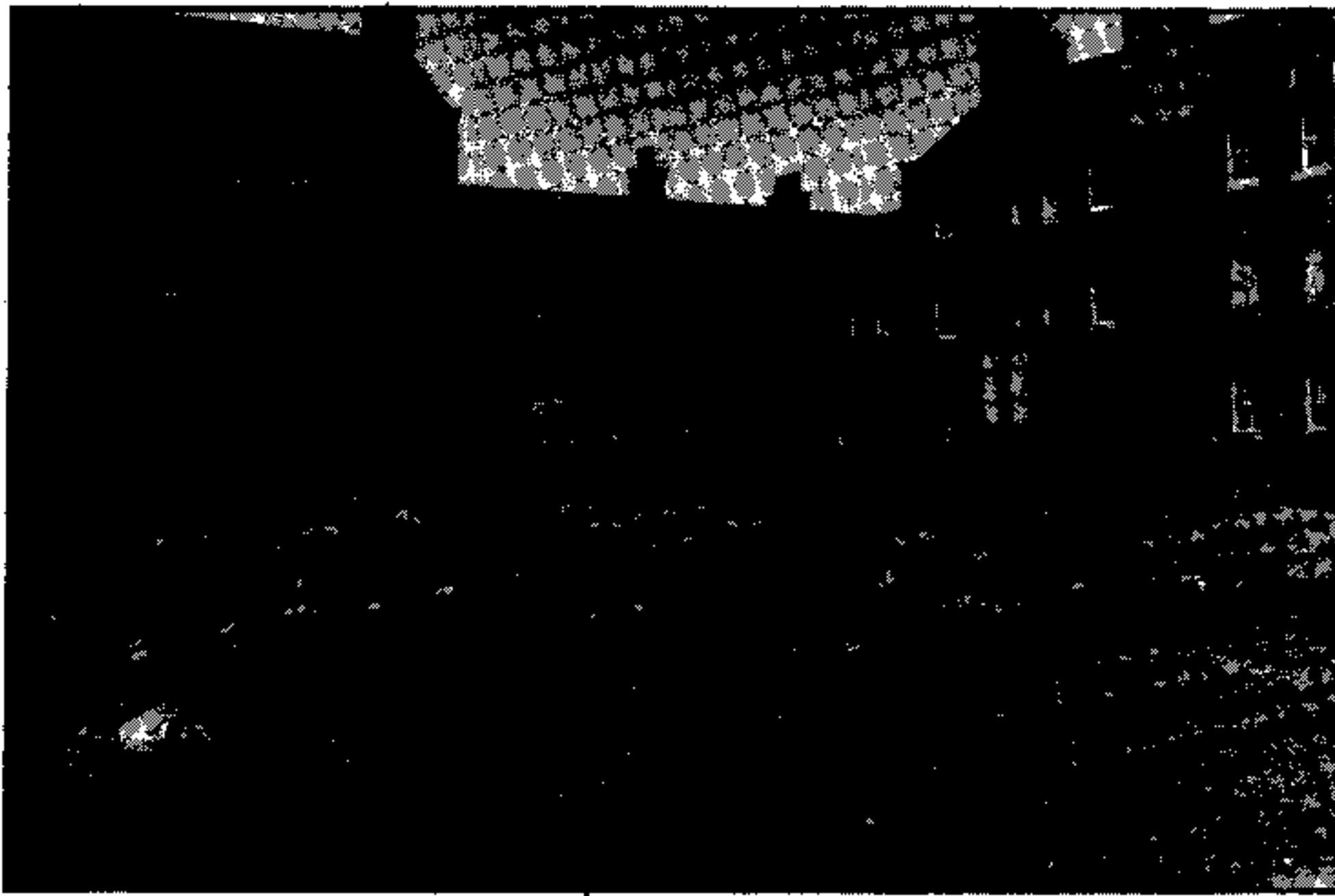
Instead, we heard new Labour left councillor Jimmy Burnett arguing for 'clever' schemes, such as approaching the water workers to cut off supplies to private industry. Others argued for closing schools in middle class areas. Both these schemes would have been divisive, leading nowhere.

It is somewhat ironic that those who criticise the SWP for being 'syndicalist' are the very people who oppose the only action—mass all-out action—that raised the struggle to the political terrain instead of confining it to limited industrial action.

The new left and the state

Nearly all these failings of the new Labour left stem from their conception of socialism. It is the fundamental difference between the SWP and the new Labour left. To them, the core of socialist politics at the local level is the provision of more services by the local state. With a higher per capita spending than any other region, the new Labour left proudly sell their 'People's Republic of Lothian' badge.

Yet ask any Lothian region employee whether as he or she enters their school, office or depot they feel they are in some way entering an island of socialism. Every regional workplace is merely another dictatorship, just like any private factory or office. Ask any public service client or dependant whether they enjoy free access to, or feel they have any real control over, local services. No—they face the same hierarchy of



The reality behind the cuts, the Pilton Estate, Edinburgh.

officials as they would anywhere else.

Socialism is about workers' control. This isn't an abstract argument. Every well-intentioned measure put forward by Lothian Labour group is implemented through a largely hostile layer of management officials.

Take David Semple, regional director of education. Last year he gave out 900 disciplinary warnings to striking teachers. This year he tried to sack 67 fixed term contract teachers in June. The schools are managed by senior officials and headteachers, who often show their commitment to comprehensive education by sending their own children to fee-paying schools.

These same officials have done everything possible to sabotage the fightback. Under the guise of providing detailed figures to show the effects of the cutbacks proposed by Younger, they have in reality drawn up hit lists of cuts to be made. It was the same officials—director of finance Robert Peggie and director of administration Alexander McNicoll, who so confidently panicked the Labour group into the disastrous moratorium—something the councillors now see as a mistake because it will spoil their electoral chances next May.

For a long time, revolutionary socialists have realised that when workers achieve state power, the first thing they will need to do is dismantle the existing armed services, judiciary, and civil service hierarchy. Exactly the same holds true when socialist find themselves in control of the local state. Only here it is the police and local government hierarchy that needs to be dealt with. The local state machinery is not neutral, and continually it tries to undermine all attempts at real reform.

The new Labour left's equation of growing state control with growing socialism leaves them blind to this. They are continually caught unawares, for they have no strategy for dealing with the problem.

Worse still, in as far as they realise a problem exists, their attempt at a solution weakens workers' control even more. They actively defend senior management officials

as fellow trade unionists, since they are in NALGO and the EIS. They use the spurious argument that management can be controlled through the union. Management are management, whether in the public or private sector. The beginnings of control can only begin when they are thrown out of our organisations, which are then free to act effectively without a permanent fifth column within.

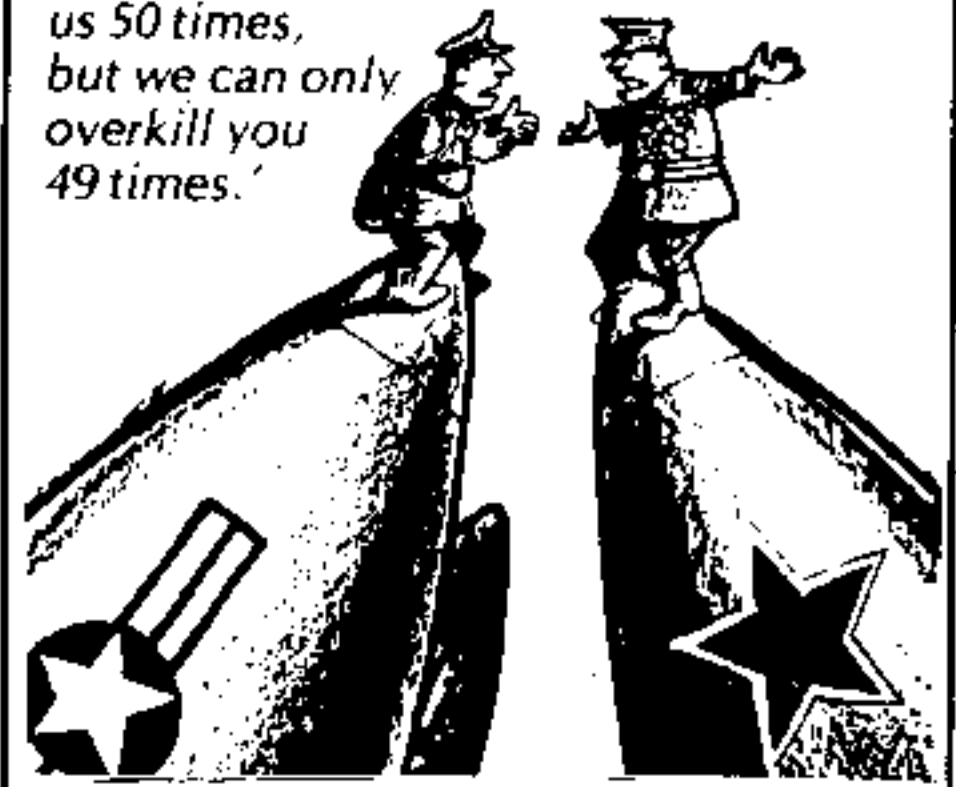
The extent to which the Labour group are prepared to go was highlighted on 14 August. There they voted to give £2000 pay increases to the regional directors. On the previous day, as part of the moratorium, the majority had voted to suspend regrading of lower paid staff and gratuities to retired employees.

Conclusion

Demoralisation is widespread among ordinary trade unionists in Lothian, although a patchy fight back is likely to re-emerge. It is unlikely that Labour's chances have been increased for next May's elections. However, since the only serious opposition, the Tories, are so unpopular in Scotland, the drift in that direction is likely to be limited. The SNP, Liberal and Social Democrats, each with one councillor at present, will slog it out to appear as viable alternatives to both major parties, but their likelihood of success is limited too. Possibly, the level of voting will decline as a result of disillusionment and the lack of real choice—

The political costs of raising people's expectations only to dash them to the ground are not so high at the local level as in the national arena. Younger and RAGE are unlikely to combine to destabilise the region's Labour administration; group leader Eric Milligan won't be shot in the regional HQ; power won't end up in the hands of the Lothian chief of police; and there won't be a bloodbath in Meadowbank Stadium. But thousands will lose their jobs and our services will be slashed. There are many lessons to be learnt from Bennism in One Region.

'You can overkill us 50 times, but we can only overkill you 49 times.'



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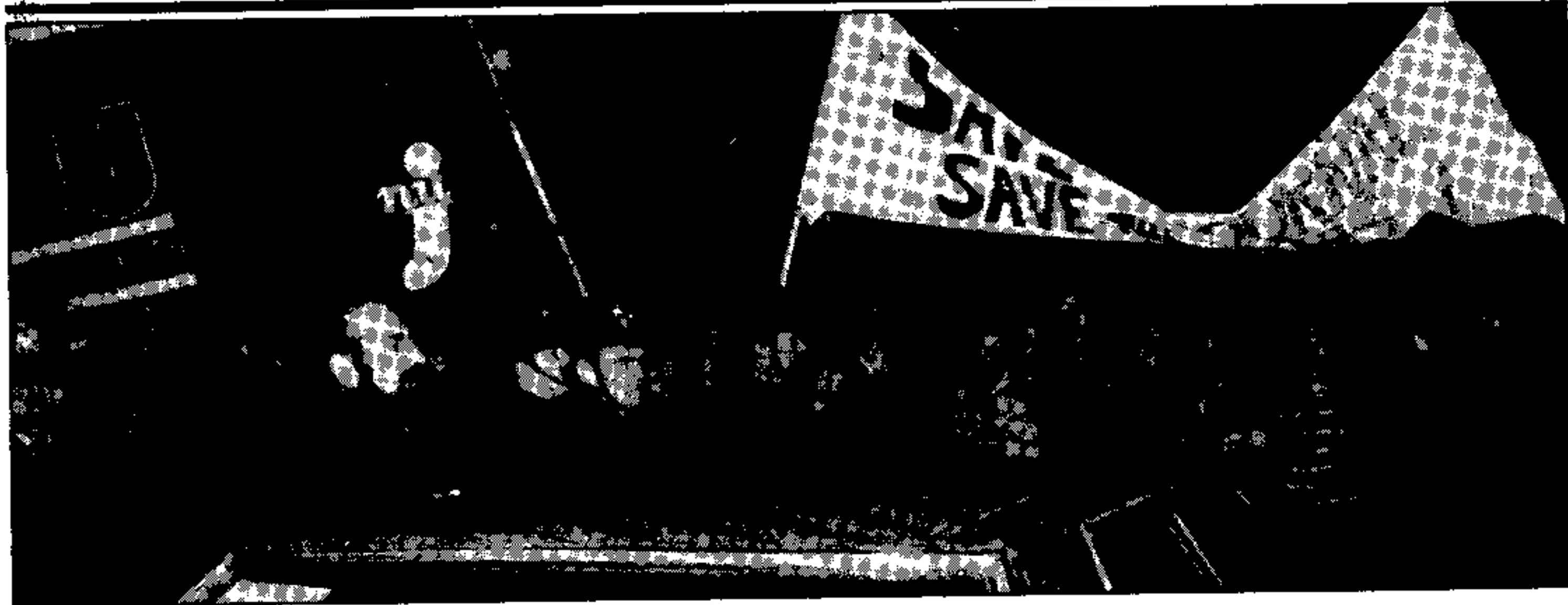


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Journal of the Camden strike

Six days before Christmas the management of a London weekly newspaper group celebrated the season of goodwill by sacking nine journalists and closing their paper, the *Camden Journal*.

We saw this as a vicious attack on one of the strongest chapels in the local sector. Like everyone else we had been keeping our heads down a bit. It was a cold winter, no one was fighting and there were the latest disastrous job figures on News at Ten to make you feel grateful for just having work.

But fortunately for those of us among the ditched nine, the gloom hadn't completely neutralised the chapel. We were still able to find the will to fight back because of the strength of our organisation.

Why? Because this was about people's livelihoods — the reality of what unemployment means to individuals. And we knew that among those being sacked were militants victimised for trade union activities.

An official strike was called on Christmas Eve, and was coming to an end as the *Review* went to press.

In many ways the Camden dispute has been a textbook case, and has shown some of the problems workers will face in the coming battles for jobs. But it has also shown the strengths they can muster when management attack.

Solidarity from fellow journalists, and local supporters, was the main thing that enabled us to mount such a massive campaign. But *lack* of solidarity from print union leaders when the crunch came in May led the dispute to the unsatisfactory conclusion of binding arbitration.

NUJ members working on the *Journal's* sister papers — the *Islington Gazette* and *Hornsey Journal* — also joined the strike at the beginning on Christmas Eve.

Journalists alone on provincial newspapers don't have the industrial power to stop papers and hit managements financially. To win we had to get solidarity from all journalists working for the parent company, Courier Press,

from our colleagues on London weekly papers and from the print unions: the National Graphical Association and the Society of Graphical and Allied Trades.

London SOGAT, whose members distribute newspapers, gave us their support immediately. We picketed wholesalers late at night and in the early hours to stop the scab North London Newspapers. In most cases SOGAT members refused to cross.

The Camden closure was announced just two months after a successful London weighting strike. We believe that management had carefully chosen their time to swoop on the chapel in retaliation. Eric Gordon, the editor of the *Camden Journal*, also chaired the union's London suburban area council and was one of the negotiators during the London weighting dispute.

At a mass meeting of London members early in our dispute we won the vote for weekly one day strikes. We were able to use the tradition of solidarity which had been built because of the concentration of members included in the growing militancy of the seventies, culminating in the national pay dispute of 1978/9.

When it came to getting support from our colleagues in the rest of the company it was more difficult. We had failed to maintain our links with them — in Leamington Spa, Nuneaton, Rugby and in Wales at Haverford West and Ammanford.

They were bombarded with stories about us which rivalled Dracula for sending shivers up the spine. It took us months to win the propaganda battle in those centres which were vital if we were ever to get support from the NGA.

It finally took the sacking of the sympathy strikers on the *Journal's* sister papers to get the other journalists in our company to join the picket lines. Strangely enough, once we had got them out it was even more difficult to get them to go back when their support had achieved its purpose!

But we still had to win one major battle to really put the pressure on management. We had to get the printers

out. It's the vital factor in every NUJ dispute.

Right from the beginning early morning pickets at our print centre at Nuneaton brought limited success, with a hard core of NGA members respecting our lines. But the majority of print members refused to support us until they received an instruction from their leaders.

And once again, it was here that we came up against the traditional hurdle facing all journalists on strike. The NGA leadership, hiding behind a jungle of red tape, tried to just ignore us. Letters to Joe Wade went unanswered, a national demonstration against Prior's 'law' was ignored, and the NGA leaders consistently failed to support us.

The failure to issue an instruction led to a worsening relationship between rank and file printers and journalists as the weeks went by.

It was finally the solidarity of the NGA members who consistently supported us at Nuneaton, and a one day stoppage at Leamington, which finally embarrassed the NGA leadership into making positive moves to support us. But their two week strike notice was too little too late. It was nearly five months after the beginning of the dispute — three months after the supporting strikers joined us from the rest of the company.

Courier Press boss, Stanley Clarke, had firmly dug in his heels refusing to re-instate the Camden nine anywhere in his empire, re-open the title or even go to arbitration. He conceded nothing. And yet the NGA's response, even at this late stage, was to stall for two weeks.

With all their usual style, once 'involved' — although so far they hadn't given an iota of support — the NGA began to call the shots and so the dispute ended in binding arbitration at ACAS.

Yet all this time the NGA leaders, anxious to extend their control in the industry, are desperately seeking a merger with the NUJ. But if any merger is to take place, the first stage must be a picketing pact — which could have won the *Camden Journal* dispute in the early stages.

Management tried to defuse the strike right at the start by offering to sell the title to the sacked staff for £1. This was rejected as the obvious red herring it was.

Journalists who are fighting for their publications are very open to the option of just disappearing to set up alternatives. It's a cop out that plays into the management hands.

As revolutionary socialists we should be making the present system pay us while we struggle to get rid of it.

Production of a strike paper can lead to the temptation of seeing an alternative paper as the conclusion to a dispute. The importance of a strike paper cannot be overestimated as a focus for the chapel — but it must not

be allowed to get out of hand.

Our strike sheet, *Save the Journal*, provided a rallying point for the chapel and support in the union and the local community, but it became too much of a burden as it began to divert the resources of the chapel.

We were producing eight pages costing a total of about £450 a week. The effort of producing this took five or six of an active 16 members out of the nuts and bolts of the dispute, picketing, meetings etc. Not to mention the drain on our funds.

It's always a nice idea when faced with a bungling management, to say we can do better on our own. Of course we can. But one essential resource is simply not available to a group of strikers. And

that is the capital.

Finally, the contracting nature of the industry, and the ruthless managements which abound, mean journalists will face many jobs battles during this recession. So far the list this year reads: *Camden Journal*, *Radio Times*, Pergamon Press, Radio Basildon, Doncaster, British Printing Corporation and *Time Out*.

We like to think we've proved it can be done. You can fight rather than just meekly join the dole queue.

Horrific though it was, most of us would probably mount such a fight again. But we wouldn't make the same mistakes. Other chapels should heed our battle and start preparing now.

NUJ/SWP members at North London News

Losing the longest struggle

The 1981 civil service pay dispute came to a bitter and unsatisfactory conclusion at the end of July. The Council of Civil Service Unions (CCSU) accepted the government's 'final offer' of 7% plus £30 a year consolidated onto basic rates, and a promise of arbitration in 1982.

Members of all nine unions had been consulted for the second time in the 21 week dispute (mainly by ballot at branch or area meetings) and were faced with the choice of either accepting the offer or taking all-out strike action from 3 August without strike pay. When the votes were counted, only the Inland Revenue Staff Federation, a traditionally 'moderate' union, had a majority in favour of all-out action; the large clerical union, the CPSA, which in an earlier ballot in June had a majority for all-out action, now had a two to one majority for accepting the offer.

The pay campaign came at a critical time for the civil service trade unions. The Tories made 'civil service bashing' an integral part of their election propaganda in 1979 and, as the unions have discovered, they meant it. By 1983 they are determined to cut 60,000-100,000 civil service jobs, to introduce new technology on a much wider scale than at present, to end national pay bargaining and to introduce regional pay bargaining and merit payments. To have beaten the Tories on pay would have breathed new life into the fight against job cuts, new technology and regional pay bargaining.

The strategy adopted by the union leaderships could not produce that victory. Their line was selective strikes in 'key' areas of government activity—revenue collection, defence, customs—involving small numbers of members. These would be paid 85% of their gross pay, funded by a levy of the majority of civil servants who stayed at work.

Such action, it was argued, would bring the government to the negotiating table, if not to its knees. No doubt this was based in part on the experience of the CPSA and SCPS in the 1979 pay campaign—selective strikes against the Labour government's attempt to impose a 5% settlement resulted in a final settlement of something around 15%.



Civil Service leaders deliver wreaths to No 10.

However, in 1979 the Labour government had already been given a bloody nose by the lorry drivers and other workers in the so-called 'winter of discontent', was at the end of its term of office, and was not in a good position to resist effectively even selective industrial action. The present Tory government is a different proposition altogether.

At best, the use of selective strikes could only be a *tactic*, to be used quickly to produce maximum disruption and prepare the ground for escalation to all-out action. That presumes an appreciation of the tactics of winning a dispute—something it soon became clear that was lacking in CCSU leadership. The selective strikes began very slowly and it was four or five weeks before they were seen to be having any effect by the majority of members. Worse still, the leadership were convinced that selective strikes, particularly those in the Inland Revenue, could of themselves achieve victory—what should have been a tactic became the only way of winning the campaign.

The need to keep strikes selective and under firm central control led leaders to be ultra-cautious. The problem of suspensions illustrates this.

With some members involved in strikes and some not involved, action can only be really effective if those still working refuse to

cover, insist on blacking the work not being done, and do not cooperate with contingency plans. The government realised this, and the threat of suspension became a major tactic for breaking solidarity between strikers and those still working.

For us the response should have been simple—members threatened with suspension should be brought out on indefinite strike and the action escalated. For the leadership, such a course would divert funds from the selective strikes, so they decided to allow blacking and sympathetic action to go to the point where suspensions were threatened, and then told members to back down.

Time and again during the dispute, members who were prepared to take action had to pull back because the leadership wouldn't bring them out on strike and provide strike pay. Not surprisingly this produced demoralisation among activists and rank-and-file members alike, and doubts began to be expressed about the willingness and ability of the national leadership to win the campaign.

The preparedness of rank-and-file members to take action came as a genuine surprise to many activists who had been battling away since the 1979 sell-out to maintain confidence and win the argument for a militant campaign in 1981.

But it was not until the 16th week that the CCSU leadership finally raised the possibility of an all-out strike. Individual unions consulted their members, mainly by branch/area ballots, but even then the all-out strike option was set against an option of continuing the selective strikes with an increased levy.

Continuing the selective strikes was, by then, not a serious option and activists recognised this. In the event, only the CPSA achieved a majority for all-out action. But instead of bringing its members out and putting pressure on the other unions to do likewise, it fell in behind the other unions 'for the sake of unity' and tried to raise the extra money.

About £1.4 million was collected, but members who had voted for all-out action were reluctant to pay the higher levy, since it only served to delay an all-out strike and gave credibility to a discredited tactic.

Escalation

Escalation of the dispute in June and July came about almost by accident. At the beginning of June, members at Department of Employment computer centres in Reading and Livingston, and at the DHSS child benefit computer centre at Washington, were called out on selective strike, stopping the production of unemployment benefit girocheques and child benefit order books.

However the CCSU leadership instructed staff in local offices to apply emergency procedures and write out by hand the giros that would have been produced by the computer centres. In some areas there was opposition to this instruction—members quite rightly saw it as strike breaking—and the CPSA Section Executive Committee in the Department of Employment called on its members to refuse to implement emergency procedures.

There was another swarm of suspension threats—on 11 June 900 Department of Employment staff in Scotland were threatened as eleven offices were closed and 41 others were unable to provide an adequate service. Five days later the threat was withdrawn, but the suspension threat was then applied to tax offices—collectors in charge at 280 tax offices refused to provide state of work reports to senior management.

At the beginning of July, picketing began at the Department of Employment stationery stores in Watford, preventing supplies of blank giros reaching local offices. In response to management attempts to transfer giro stock between offices and their breaking of the picket line at Watford, some local offices began to black supplies of new giros and at some, stocks began to run out.

Although only a few offices were involved, management started to suspend staff and the CCSU leadership was forced to bring them out on strike. Suspensions took place at four offices initially—Hackney, Washington, Kinning Park (Glasgow) and Keighley—but the action looked like spreading to other inner city offices.

On 13 July, Ken Thomas (CPSA general secretary) warned that, 'if, as a by-product of our industrial action, the unemployed are not paid, that might aggravate the present difficult situation'. He was referring to the riots that had taken place in the previous 10 days.

The prospect of unemployed kids with no giros clearly worried the government, and the press began to report a willingness on their part to shift slightly on the 'final offer'. The CCSU leadership were also worried, but for a different reason—paying Department of Employment members on strike was using up limited funds and, more importantly, things had all the signs of getting out of their control and increasing the pressure for an all-out strike.

The CCSU meeting on 14 July reportedly broke up in disarray with the union leaders not knowing what to do. Nonetheless, Bill Kendall (CCSU secretary-general) was given authority to sound out the government on exactly what was on offer! It looked as if an attempt was being made to settle the dispute quickly, and reports of secret meetings between CCSU officials and government ministers on 15/16 July persist. Whatever happened, the government

announced a £30 a year increase on top of the 7% already offered and access to arbitration in 1982.

The rest is history. The government insisted that the new offer be put to members without a recommendation and threatened to withdraw the whole package if it was rejected. The CCSU 'moderates' jumped at the offer, although three unions—SCPS, CSU and NIPSA—did recommend rejection. Only the IRSF won the vote for all-out action, although the vote in CSU and SCPS was close.

The government had won—it had not increased its cash limit at all, having accommodated the 'extra cash' within the existing limit, and had made a promise of arbitration which was not worth the paper it was written on.

Lessons

What can be learned from the dispute, the longest national dispute since the miners' strike of 1926?

While the various union leaderships made much of their 'unity' in CCSU, in practice it meant the unity of the lowest common denominator—taking action which was acceptable to the most moderate of the leaders and holding back members who wanted to win the campaign.

Despite clear decisions from the main union conferences in May, the CCSU leadership did not produce the escalation that was called for and the unions themselves did not campaign among their members for a change in tactics from selective to all-out action. Indeed, by the end of May CCSU were begging the government for negotiations, were prepared to drop the original claim and were suggesting that extra money could be found as a result of staff cuts and savings on staff costs!

The 40 local CCSU committees were a revelation. Initially they were composed of lay representatives from the area committees of the various unions, appointed by the unions, and serviced by a full time official from one of the unions.

Many of the committees soon developed unofficial activists committees made up of union representatives from the local offices who were in daily contact with rank and file members. Because the activists were much closer to the rank and file membership, tension developed in some CCSU areas between 'official' and 'unofficial' committees, with accusations of 'the tail wagging the dog' being thrown about.

What about the left? In the CPSA there is a numerically large Broad Left organisation which at present is dominated by the *Militant* tendency. The CPSA executive is dominated by the right wing and, in such circumstances, the existence of a large organisation of militants in the offices is worth a lot more than any number of BL supporters on the executive, particularly if you expect the executive to sell-out and want to take independent action.

At the beginning of the dispute the CPSA Broad Left had gone along with the strategy of selective strikes, arguing that members were inexperienced, still had illusions in the ability of selective strikes to win the campaign, and would not support all-out action from the start. Members had to learn the hard way that selective strikes would not

deliver the goods and, having learned that, would be more likely to support all-out action.

By the fifth or sixth week of the dispute it was becoming clear that selective action was not working and that more members than had been thought possible might support all-out action. The BL persisted in their support for selective action, calling for it to be intensified. At CPSA conference their motion calling for an all-out strike at ports, airports and passport offices coupled with a campaign for a five-day all-out national strike was carried as against a more militant motion from *Redder Tape* supporters for the CPSA to call an immediate all-out strike with or without the other unions. But it was a hollow victory because the action at ports and airports never materialised and the 5-day strike call was simply ignored.

Unofficial all-out strike action had been taken by CPSA members in Aberdeen and Dundee before the CPSA conference and had this been spread, the CCSU leadership would have been under considerable pressure to escalate the action. But elements of the BL were more concerned to get the strikers to go back to work rather than use their resources to spread the action.

When it came to the crunch, the BL were unwilling to lead action which would both build up the confidence of members and which would force the national leadership to call an all-out strike. Towards the end of the campaign, they were mainly concerned to point to the need to get rid of the right wing executive and replace it with a Broad Left executive.

Following on from the defeat, the need is to maintain the confidence of members in the union and in their own ability to fight on issues like cuts and new technology.

That task will probably fall to supporters of *Redder Tape*. While numerically smaller than the Broad Left, *Redder Tape* supporters in the CPSA, SCPS and IRSF produced regular bulletins during the dispute, which raised the arguments for an all-out strike and tried to link up those civil servants across the country who were taking action.

The ideas which *Redder Tape* supporters have been raising in the civil service unions in the last 10 years—the need to elect all full time officials, the need for open negotiations under membership control, the need for all-out strike action on national issues like pay, the need to have elected and accountable local and national strike committees—were never more relevant than in the 1981 pay campaign. Despite the demoralisation after the defeat, there are many civil servants who now agree with them and many more who can be won to them.

The need for a rank and file organisation across the civil service unions which is not simply an election machine is clear and it can be built. It must be built if the claims of the CCSU bureaucrats that 'industrial relations in the civil service will never be the same again' are not to be empty rhetoric and a cynical apology for their bankrupt strategy.

BRYAN REES
SOCIETY OF CIVIL & PUBLIC
SERVANTS
DOE/DTP Northern Branch
1 September 1981

Gareth Jenkins looks at the background to the sacking of Mike Cooley, TASS shop steward at Lucas Aerospace and best known proponent of the 'alternative plan' for the combine.

As with Derek Robinson at British Leyland, the mixture is very much as before: an aggressive management facing a defensive workforce decides that if it can get rid of key militants, the resulting weakness of shop-floor organisation will enable it to push through rationalisation vital for increased profitability.

This is not the first time Lucas have tried to get rid of Cooley. Three years ago it tried and failed. Nor is it the first time it has tried the same tactic of shunting militants into

different posts as a way of effectively separating them from their base. But this time Lucas has succeeded, aided on the inside by a softening up process on the workforce on matters of new technology and wages, and on the outside by the general political climate that has sapped the confidence of workers to fight back.

Lucas had their job made easier for them by the TASS leadership, who sabotaged any moves to resist the sacking. Their backstabbing is not an isolated example of the depths to which official leaderships are prepared to sink (witness what happened at Laurence Scott), although all but hardened politicians might have expected a progressive CP-dominated leadership to have behaved better than the absolutely predictable

right-wing duo, Duffy and Boyd.

In true bureaucratic fashion the TASS leadership have tried to put the blame on the membership. Against the advice of the National Negotiating Committee for Lucas Industries, who wanted to bring out key strong sections at Wolverhampton to spearhead the struggle, the TASS executive picked on the much less confident Willesden site (where Cooley worked). When Willesden voted against the executive line, TASS then argued there was no support for Cooley and so washed their hands of the affair. (For further details of this sordid manoeuvre, see Hilary Wainwright's article in *Socialist Worker*, 18th July 1981.)

All this is in marked contrast with the victimisation just over a year ago of another

THE CARVING-UP OF MIKE COOLEY

leading militant, Ken Tynan, who was accused by GEC of spending too much time on union affairs. Then the TASS leadership pulled out all the stops—and won. The difference between the two cases is to be explained by the internal politics of the union.

The politics of TASS

As a union dominated by the Communist Party, with a CP general secretary, Ken Gill, TASS prides itself as being 'progressive'. But its progressiveness is of a formal, top-heavy kind, with the leadership laying claim to the highest level of consciousness, which is then to be transmitted downwards to the base. It is deeply suspicious of rank and file activity—a fact that is reflected by the refusal of the leadership to submit its officials to regular election.

CP domination dates from the time in the late 60s and 70s when the party took the decision to impose a more rigid control on the Broad Left (which at that time included other left wing currents, such as the group around Cooley and the IS). All left wing tendencies with different perspectives from the CP were dropped from election slates. With the election of Ken Gill and the prospect of amalgamation with the AUEW, the CP strategy was transparent: Gill would eventually lead the amalgamated union. But 'stability' was needed.

So other changes followed. The size of conference was reduced, elections were from divisions, not from branches, motions to conference came from divisions. Along with this tightening up of the structure went an expansion of the apparatus. TASS has always been opposed to the election of full-time officials. The CP didn't challenge that, but used its powers of patronage to increase the number of young recruits to these positions.

TASS's claim to be progressive lies in its adoption of supposedly progressive policies—like the Alternative Economic Strategy. But just as the union places its faith in the right kind of people (officials chosen rather than elected), so it puts its faith in the right kind of people in the state machine to implement policy. TASS has more interest in 'progressive' national capi-



INDUSTRIAL DISCUSSION SECTION

talism than in working class strength, as its current campaign to save jobs by urging investment in British technology shows.

These developments have not gone unchallenged, and one source of opposition is associated with the name of Mike Cooley. When president a decade ago, he stood for more democratisation and for regular election of officials.

Convinced that the building of a strong union is from the bottom up, not the top down, he was instrumental in setting up a strong combine committee at Lucas in 1969. Cooley saw this as the best way of organising a rank and file challenge to a multi-site company, and pushed hard for strong international links as the most effective means of fighting a multinational. This internationalism also set him against the nationalism of the TASS leadership and led him to oppose the union's naive faith in technology that sprang (alongside the nationalism) from an acceptance of capitalist priorities.

Not surprisingly this made him a thorn in the side of the TASS leadership.

TASS is not keen on the combine committee. With its representatives from other unions with members at Lucas it tends to too much independence. Consequently the combine has been forced to operate within the shadow of the Confederation of Engineering and Shipbuilding Unions (even more bureaucratic than TASS), as in the case of the tripartite negotiations between the unions, Lucas and the last Labour government. These negotiations featured the product of the combine thinking, an alternative plan to Lucas's announced redundancies, based on the earlier Corporate Plan which crystallised many of the ideas with which Cooley is associated—ideas about alternative technology and rank-and-file control over production.

So it is not altogether surprising that TASS were quite happy to see Cooley go down the road. Cooley represented a rank-and-file alternative they are not prepared to tolerate. It also explains the marked difference in their attitude to Cooley's sacking

and that of Ken Tynan (mentioned earlier): Tynan is part of the union machine, Cooley is not. In Tynan's case the machine was thrown into action; in Cooley's it was not. Indeed, it was quite actively deployed against him.

For example, one TASS official, Bob Parsons, was ordered down to the Wolverhampton site by Ken Gill to talk to the members about the dispute, even though the joint office committee (TASS's equivalent to the shop stewards committee) had told him not to come onto the site. The attitude of the Wolverhampton members there was going to be crucial. The national negotiating committees had recommended bringing them out as a key section spearheading the struggle against Cooley's victimisation—a recommendation rejected by the executive.

Parsons, obviously with executive backing, set about undermining morale. Instead of promoting inter-site solidarity, he employed sectionalist arguments, saying there was no reason for members there to be sacrificial victims.

This undermining was a repeat performance from the last time Lucas had attempted to victimise Cooley. Then, TASS officials toured the sites speaking to members, armed with a pack of speaker's notes which insinuated that Cooley had misrepresented the true facts of his position. Clearly, the aim was to discredit him in the eyes of the membership.

During the current dispute TASS also undermined attempts to build international solidarity—not surprising, perhaps, given the nationalistic perspectives of the Alternative Economic Strategy so beloved of the leadership. In a report they wrote that: 'The offer of Ford workers in Cologne to boycott Lucas products would simply have meant redundancies in UK factories and more work for the German manufacturers Bosch.' The overall strategy was clear: set workers from one site against workers from another; set workers of one country against those of another.

There is one additional factor to be added

to this explanation of TASS's inactivity (or rather activity to defeat activity), and one that is related to sectionalism. TASS faces a severe problem as a union. Its numbers are slowly declining (down from about 200,000 to about 185,000), this loss being due mainly to wastage within the industry.

In its desire to have one union for the engineering industry as a whole, TASS found it would have to recruit outside its natural base (technical, test, planning and production engineers), on the one hand among clerical staff, on the other the highest skilled, professional engineers. With clerical staff it lost out to APEX (though APEX have now been hammered by wastage and redundancy). With the higher grades, it has made concessions in order to attract members. It has set up separate branches for professional engineers, a move that panders to their elitism.

This caution and respectability is one more reason why TASS would be reluctant to embark on a campaign that might have involved a considerable drain on its resources (already under pressure as a result of declining membership and an unwillingness to reduce its over-extended apparatus), as well as raising crucial political issues, such as rank and file control.

Alternative plans

There is one final aspect that needs comment, and that is Alternative Plans.

TASS leaders have always had an equivocal attitude towards the Lucas Combine Plan. They have endorsed the concept in general terms but have also stated that the Plan is not official union policy, an ambiguity Lucas Aerospace management have been quick to exploit.

For Cooley and other militants, the Plan has been a vital ingredient in their strategy to resist redundancies. They have insisted that it increased the consciousness of workers by showing that there were real, concrete alternatives to what the company proposed and that these alternatives were not just technical but could answer human need. For them, the Plan raised and widened the struggle.

There is a difficulty in criticising the Plan—quite obviously it was a source of irritation to both management and union. With the former it challenged their monopoly of planning; with the latter it ran counter to their implicit acceptance of capitalist goals (as represented by the AES).

The supporters of the Plan did lead major struggles against a management determined to achieve large scale redundancies, and despite pressure from the Labour government and the union bureaucracy they stayed off the worst. (In a confidential report, Gerald Kaufman, the minister in charge, stated: 'We know how to use the Confed against the mavericks.')

However, was the Plan crucial or was it secondary (its success to be explained by the particular circumstances)? Should we take a favourable view of alternative plans in general as a result of the Lucas experience?

If we look at the history of the Corporate Plan, one thing is very striking: it was devised at a time when signs of economic crisis were already very marked, but when trade union organisation was still intact—and capable of such major victories as the



miners' stinging defeat of the Heath government. It was in 1974 that the combine committee first went to see Tony Benn, then newly appointed industry minister, because of possible redundancies in the Aerospace industry. The combine were in favour of reducing defence expenditure, but wanted no redundancies. This required something more than a simple trade union approach: alternative production seemed the answer, but that in turn required state intervention of a radical, 'socialist' character.

Benn told the combine committee to develop a plan and said that he would arrange a meeting between management, government and unions. It seemed that with Labour in power you only had to push hard enough and you'd get what you want (although, Cooley and others say that one reason for drawing up a plan was to expose the limits of what Labour could, and would, do, and that they had no illusions in reformism).

Over the next few years, the combine committee went ahead drawing up the Corporate Plan, which they referred at each stage to the rank and file for comment and amendment. And in 1978, they produced a counter strategy, based on the Plan, in response to Lucas's general announcement of redundancies.

Throughout this period there was a history of successful resistance to local (as well as more general) redundancies. Overtime bans, blacking of sub-contract work and refusal to move work were all used in the campaign. But what was responsible for this? Was it the development and articulation of the Plan in the post-1974 period? Or (much more likely) was it the *continuing* strength in this period of rank and file organisation that the Combine had built up since 1969?

Cooley and others would argue that there was a dialectical interaction between the two. But the question that must now be asked is what part did the Plan play in recent events? The sad truth is that shop-floor organisation has declined everywhere over the past two years and Lucas is no exception.

Even allowing for the treachery of the TASS leadership, there were only limited examples of shop-floor resistance to Cooley's victimisation. The combine committee did not act independently. As one leading Lucas TASS militant has admitted, it was disastrous to leave things in the hands of the officials. The combine committee stood by waiting, then there were the holidays. It had been a tactical error to go through procedural agreements.

This set-back for rank and file organisation continues. One TASS division in the Midlands has now condemned a leading militant at the Wolverhampton site as 'an anti-union element'. This is to give the company a green light for further victimisation. One can only hope that the decision by the Burnley combine committee, with 72 shop stewards from all the unions represented, to take *direct* action if the militant is touched is an indication of a rank and file fightback.

So the conclusion must be that the Plan is a *reflection* of confidence, not a *creator* of it. If shop-floor organisation is strong then resistance to company plans for rationalisa-

tion and redundancy is effective (as has been the case at Lucas); if it falters, then the best Plan in the world is an irrelevance. No section of the class has been immune to the corrosive effects of the industrial downturn and alternative schemes for production, however much they stress desirable social needs, are not an answer.

Indeed, there is a sense in which they may be harmful. For, if you devise a plan, even for tactical reasons, you have to try to implement it. That is the *logic* of the situation. It also assumes that existing power relations remain intact. From being a strategy the plan becomes an end in itself.

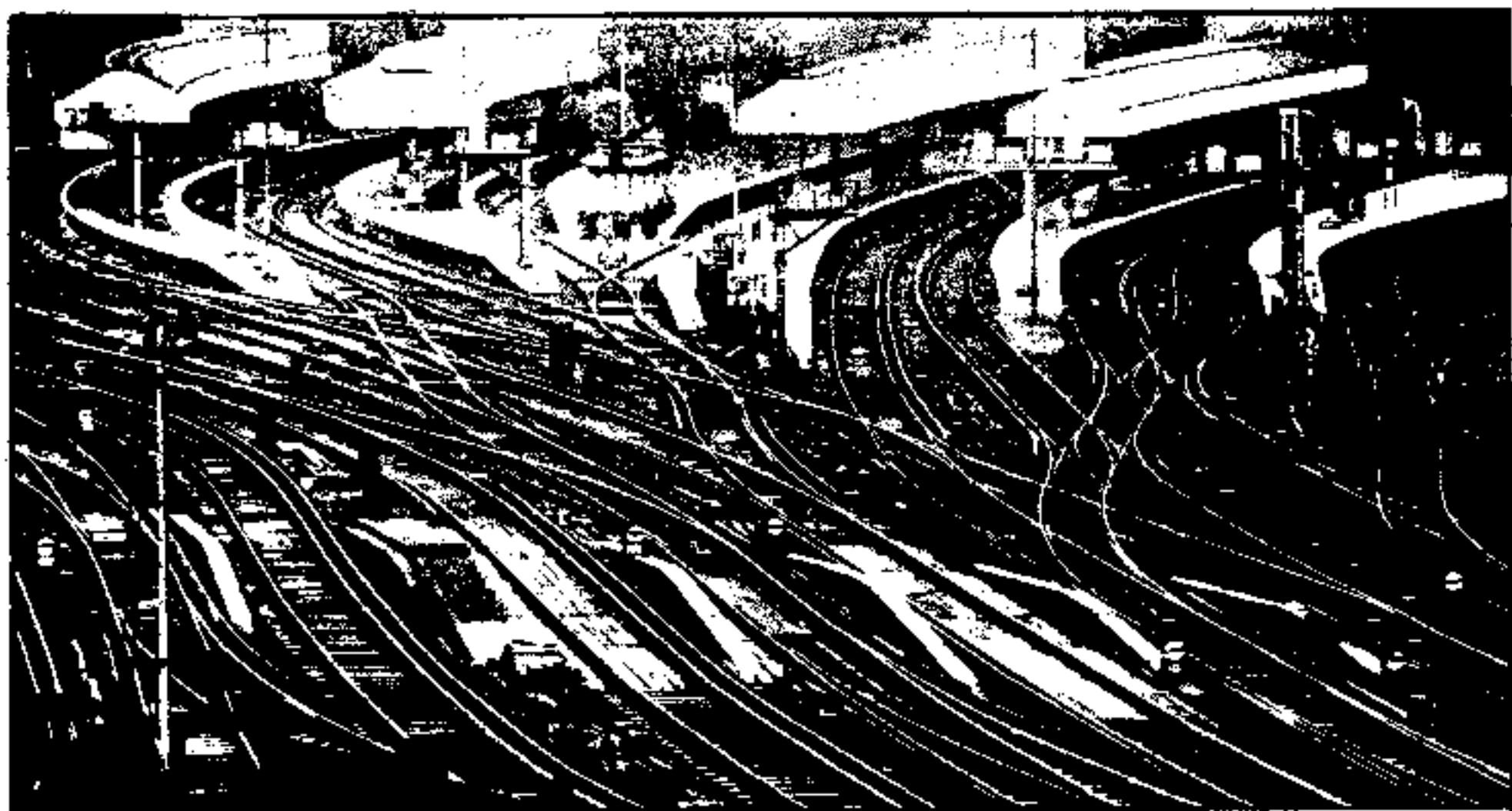
The history of the Lucas plan, whatever its origins, shows signs of this. In order to get the plan discussed at all after the announcement of redundancies in '78, the combine had to agree to go through the Confed in order to negotiate with the company and the government. In effect that meant subordinating rank and file organisa-

tion to the union bureaucracy; it was only under those conditions that the company and the government were prepared to talk. Consequently, when Lucas threatened to withdraw if the campaign continued (with Labour's Kaufman 'leering' in agreement with this suggestion) there had to be some backing down.

The social perspectives of the plan turned in the end into the much more mundane question of government cash injections. That is not to blame the combine committee but to argue that prioritising the plan meant having to put rank and file independence into abeyance and consequently undercutting the one means that might implement the plan. It is interesting to note that the leading Lucas TASS militant referred to earlier admits that it was wrong to submerge the identity of combine committee in the Confed. But again, the logic of the strategy implied that subordination.

Gareth Jenkins

Weighell's deal



They almost fooled us. For a little while it looked as though the worms on the ASLEF and NUR executives would turn on the government. Instead they have, as usual, turned on their members.

In the May *Socialist Review* we argued that they would huff and puff and finally accept the board's offer. We were right, even if for a minute there it did look that there existed the possibility of the first national rail strike since 1926.

There is no way now that the 38,000 jobs to be cut will be saved through the machinery of negotiation. Only strike action could save them, and the possibility of that is extremely remote.

There exists no effective rank-and-file opposition within the rail unions. The Broad-Left in the NUR is extremely weak and dominated by *Militant*; the CP has some organisation, but it is compromised by its officials and executive members. No attempt was made during the run-up to the strike to build any rank and file opposition capable of resisting a sellout.

The agreement means the end of ASLEF as an independent union, and a federation is already being formed with the NUR (Buckton, of course, won't be going back on the footplate—full time bureaucrats may be incapable of defending their members' jobs,

but they're extremely adept at keeping themselves off the dole queue). The disappearance of ASLEF with its extremely negative craft attitudes and narrow sectarianism will not in itself be a bad thing. What is important is the jobs which will disappear.

For those left on the railway the tasks ahead are relatively clear. It is now obvious that a Reform Group is needed in the NUR. The full time officers at Unity House must be brought under the control of the members. The efforts of the left must not be directed merely at capturing the NUR executive, but at a campaign to change the rules and structure of the union to try and ensure that similar sellouts don't occur in the future.

It's here that the moves to an amalgamation between the two unions can be utilised. There exists the danger that instead of a complete amalgamation, two separate structures will continue, with the one bureaucracy. Militants in ASLEF and NUR must support the amalgamation, but demand as a condition the election of all officials and a democratic rule book. We are not defeated. But a few more 'victories' like this summer could finish us off for good. So it's back to the drawing board for rail militants — and not to 'Save the Weighell'.

Jim Scott

Subversive criticisms...

'Take any parliamentary country, from America to Switzerland, from France to Britain, Norway and so forth—in these countries the real business of 'state' is performed behind the scenes and is carried on by the departments, chancelleries and general staffs. Parliament is given up to talk for the special purpose of fooling the 'common people'.

So wrote Lenin in 1917 in *State and Revolution*. Sixty four years later is Tony Benn moving into agreement with him? Much in his latest book, *Arguments for Democracy* (Cape, £6.95) might lead one to believe so. For one of the main themes of the book is that:

'The democracy of which we boast is becoming a decorous facade behind which those who have power exercise it to their own advantage and to the detriment of the public welfare.'

Benn dwells on a number of mechanisms by which this process takes place:

'The present centralisation of power in the hands of one person (the prime minister) has gone too far and amounts to a system of personal rule in the very heart of our parliamentary democracy.'

'... The power, role, influence and authority of the senior levels of the civil service in Britain have grown to such an extent as to create the embryo of a corporate state.'

'It is impossible to escape the conclusion that the British establishment and its permanent intelligence services see capital, both national and international, as a natural ally in its unending conflict with the organisations of working people which produce the wealth in this country.'

Benn backs up these general observations not only with examples, but with anecdotes taken from his own experience:

'Twice, as a minister, I was told categorically that candidates I had proposed for major public appointments were not acceptable on security grounds. The two men concerned were senior members of the general council of the TUC, active in the Labour Party...'

'Though I have been the minister responsible for the Atomic Research Centre at Aldermaston and have served in four cabinets and on occasions as a member of the key Overseas Policy and Defence Committee ... I was never told, and still do not know, the basis upon which US nuclear weapons sited in the UK can be fired.'

'In 1970, when I was the responsible minister, my civil servants authorised the British nuclear industry to obtain uranium from Rossing in Namibia, a country occupied by South Africa. The

United Nations had declared this occupation illegal and the Labour government insisted it be informed before any uranium contract was signed. The contracts were approved by the Ministry of Technology officials. The cabinet was not informed. I said in the House of Commons that I was misled.'

Alongside exposing some of the real workings of the state machine Benn adds another reason why democracy is a facade

'A mature democracy depends for its success upon being able to receive news and comment, selected and presented from a variety of social and political perspectives ... Yet in Britain we do not have a free press, nor an unbiased broadcasting system. Seven multinational companies or wealthy families own all the mass circulation newspapers in Britain. Generally speaking they use their papers to campaign single-mindedly in defence of their commercial interests and the political policies which will protect them.'

No wonder the ruling class are getting hysterical about Benn. The facade of democracy is extremely important to how they have traditionally maintained their rule. To have a prominent politician systematically blowing the whistle on it is genuinely subversive. Of course *Arguments for Democracy* is not *State and Revolution*. But for the hundreds of thousands of people who hear what Benn has to say about the way the British state works, the arguments of *State and Revolution* can become that much more plausible.

However *Arguments for Democracy* has another side which is equally important for assessing the role which Tony Benn is likely to play in British politics. It is not simply that Benn believes that the state can be reformed. That comes as no surprise. What is surprising is the feebleness of the reforms he suggests. Just look at some of them:

'The further development of the Commons select committee system. This should include the right to summon ministers and would open up the workings of government in a way that no other method could achieve. Effective select committees would probably do more to set up a countervailing power to the power of the executive than any other single reform.'

Well, they might just about provide the occasional embarrassing episode which the extremely powerful congressional select committees do in the United States. But wouldn't they still leave ruling class control of the executive as firm as it is in the United States?

'A Freedom of Information Act. Legislation enforcing the right of access to



government papers, save those in a clearly defined narrow category involving defence and security or commercial or personal files, would greatly reduce the powers of the prime minister to the advantage of public, parliament and the party.'

• Really? Doesn't the let out clause (defence, security, commercial, personal) make a nonsense of such a claim?

It is the same when you look at the reforms Benn proposes for the civil service, the security agencies and the press. Each set of reforms leaves each institution fundamentally intact.

In the civil service there is no question of stopping appointment from above or the hierarchy of pay. There is no question of disbanding the security agencies; instead they are to be monitored by 'a special House of Commons select committee, meeting, when necessary, in secret, composed exclusively of privy councillors...(!) And so far as those 'seven multinational companies or wealthy families' which control the newspapers are concerned there is no question of expropriation. Instead they will be subject to anti-monopoly legislation and face competition from new state aided publications.

The near *State and Revolution* elephant gives birth to a British Constitution textbook mouse.

...and a feeble remedy



This is true even when you look at Benn's two most famous proposals, abolition of the House of Lords and withdrawal from the Common Market. He exaggerates the importance of both institutions. Never mind, we would be well rid of both of them. But contrast the criticisms with the proposed reforms.

Benn criticises the absurd powers of a hereditary House of Lords and then immediately continues:

'The Crown still retains an equally unfettered legal authority to dismiss an elected government, dissolve an elected House of Commons and precipitate a general election at any time it chooses. To do so, it need only call upon its prerogative powers as used by the Governor-General of Australia in 1975 when the Labour government of Gough Whitlam was dismissed'

True. And Benn draws the logical conclusion that the House of Lords should be abolished. But as for the equally obvious conclusion that the monarchy should be abolished—total silence.

In his opening chapter, 'Britain as a Col-

ony' Benn pillories both what he claims is 'Britain's formal surrender to the Common Market' and 'Britain's subordinate role within the American global defence system'. Logically enough, he proposes withdrawal from the Common Market. But, quite illogically, he is explicitly in favour of continued membership of NATO.

This same yawning gap between criticism and recommendations for reform is also apparent when it comes to Benn's treatment of the economy.

He continually criticizes the fact that past Labour governments presented themselves as 'a more competent management team for an economic system which by its very nature cannot serve the interests which we came into being to advance.' He has a whole chapter on the 'transition to democratic socialism'. But when you look at the proposed transition you find that it envisages an indefinite continuation of the 'mixed economy' (in other words the same capitalist economy 'which by its very nature cannot serve the interests we came into being to advance'.)

This gap between ringing, subversive criticisms and downright feeble recommendations as to what to do to remedy them is not simply the product of a failure of courage on Benn's part. Far more it is his failure of vision. *Arguments for Democracy* is also revealing on this.

Not that it is immediately clear from the book what Benn's political vision is. There are too many inconsistencies of analysis for that. For example, the dark forces that rule our lives are at one point 'capital both national and multinational', elsewhere 'multinationals', and at another 'the surviving remnants of British feudalism'.

But once you have sifted through the inconsistencies then a clear vision does emerge. To many of Tony Benn's newer and more radical supporters it may come as a surprising one. To anyone who takes seriously Benn's political biography it is less so.

Take this one passage as a starting point:

'The bold challenge of the 1964 Labour government's 'new Britain' manifesto was gradually absorbed and defused by 20th July 1966, when the Treasury persuaded the then Chancellor to insist upon a package of economic measures that killed the national plan and instituted a statutory pay policy.'

This neatly illustrates just how far Benn has moved over the past twenty years—and just how far he has stayed still. Unlike the bulk of the Labour leadership he now recognizes just how much the 'absorption and defusion' took place and must continue to take place if things remain as they are. He is quite clear about the miserable failure of the Labour governments he has served in and

quite clear that it is no good just saying 'try harder next time'. He has learned all that, but the nationalist and technocratic banalities of Harold Wilson's 'new Britain' still remain for him 'a bold challenge.'

Benn's political vision remains at heart a version of the 'decline of Britain' thesis peddled by many distinctly unsocialist commentators from the early sixties onwards. It shows through again and again in his obsessive focus on Britain and its peculiarities. It shows through in that the features of the state that Lenin recognised as firmly established in all parliamentary democracies more than sixty years ago. Benn sees as having grown up in Britain in far more recent times. It shows through in that underneath it all Benn accepts the concept of the 'national interest' that goes with it.

What Benn has added is his open recognition of past Labour failures to do anything about it, a spectacularly successful attempt to incorporate the new stirrings of revolt behind his project, and the bogey of the Common Market.

Seeking for reasons why Labour has failed in the past he elevates the Common Market to a position of quite grotesque importance. It looms everywhere as the ultimate cause of the decline and the ultimate imposition on our freedom:

'Britain is now, in law and in practice, a colony of this embryonic Western European federal state', 'British entry marked the most profound change in our system of government since 1066, or perhaps since the withdrawal of the Romans in AD 410.'

Now that is downright silly. And in the unlikely event that a Benn government did withdraw from the EEC, it would still find the same forces of capital ruling society behind the parliamentary facade.

But the claim is widely believed. The Common Market is Benn's electoral trump card. The first chapter of this book 'Britain as a Colony' may well prompt the cartoonists of the Tory press to mock Ho Chi Benn, complete with pipe, sun hat and Kalashnikov. But it could win Benn an election.

If it did then the hysteria that the ruling class quite reasonably feel about Benn at the moment would change to irritation at some of his pin pricks. But alongside the irritation would go a sober recognition that it was necessary and possible to use Benn, just as they used Wilson and his 'new Britain'. Use him and then thrust him aside.

This is not to accuse Benn of being likely to sell out. It is just to say that there is nothing in his political vision and programme outlined in this book that could have any other possible outcome.

Pete Goodwin

Fight for the right to carry guns?

The attempted assassination of Ronald Reagan last March unleashed howls of liberal protest about the fact that firearms are so easily available in the USA. Many people on the left, who do not think too much of Reagan, have joined in that protest.

The argument runs rather like this: it is shocking that guns are so easily available in the USA. Quite apart from the shooting of

the document, the Declaration of Independence, which reads in part:

'We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted amongst men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to



Liberal with a gun

Henry Brandler writes in the July issue of *SR*, 'the right to bear arms is, in fact, a fundamental democratic right, just like the right to join a trade union.'

It presumably follows that socialists should not only oppose gun control in the USA, but also fight for easier access to firearms in Britain. In spite of this, I for one will not be arguing for the adoption of a policy statement to this effect under 'Where We Stand' in *Socialist Worker*.

Brandler claims that the 'liberal' argument against the possession of weapons is, in Marxist terms, nonsense, pointing out that it is not the right to bear arms as such, but the rotten structure of US capitalism which is responsible for the killing and maiming of vast numbers of ordinary people. Quite so!

But this, as yet, is no justification for carrying arms. On the contrary, given the present structure of the USA, then the 'liberal' argument appears to have some force. If capitalism breeds violent crime (the main victim of which is the working class) then easy access to firearms does facilitate that violence.

We are treated to an historical overview in the form of quotations from the American Constitution (ironic from one who decries liberal arguments) and the Declaration of Independence. The aim is to show that the arming of the people was a necessary condition of the defeat of the armies of George III. Similarly, no doubt, a proletarian revolution inevitably involves the working class taking up arms against the capitalist state. Good!

But the fact that the right to carry guns has since been upheld, has *not* ensured the American citizen's right to 'Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.' It seems incredible that Brandler can believe otherwise but apparently he/she does. We are assured that!

'Every ruling class in history has tried to make sure that access to weapons is restricted to itself and its trusted servants, and to keep them out of the hands of the masses. For a number of almost accidental reasons, the US working class is fortunate (sic) in that its rulers are stuck with a sacred document which prevents them doing just that.'

I can just see Reagan lying awake at night, in a cold sweat, wondering how he can get round that damned piece of paper and smash the American masses into

submission with the introduction of gun control.

The real picture is, of course, somewhat different. Engels, in characterising the modern state, distinguished between a 'self-acting armed organisation of the population' and the state's armed bodies of men. The latter develops, he argues, as the former becomes an impossible means of enforcing societal norms because of class antagonisms within society.

Two points arise out of this distinction: first, the fact that individuals carry weapons in a society where there is no significant armed class struggle, is evidence that those individuals do not constitute a self-acting armed organisation; second, where guns are freely available, the state ensures that its special armed bodies of men are better equipped than the working class.

The fact that American workers (and for that matter American bosses) may carry guns does not imply that those workers are any more class conscious than their unarmed British counterparts. And the right to possess firearms does not necessarily make the overthrow of the state any easier. The American police are simply better trained and equipped to deal with armed workers than the British force.

One should not draw the conclusion that American socialists must campaign for access to CS gas, machine guns and the like, or for the right to ride around in tanks. (In a revolutionary situation, the workers will not need government permission to take up arms!)

The right to bear arms is not like the right to full employment, one which capitalism is unable to concede. And such a concession need not result in heightened class awareness or struggle. Finally (and at this point I am willing to run the risk of being written off as a liberal) it is ordinary workers who would suffer from the increased violence of an already irrational, violent system.

Tim Bateman

Too soft on subsidies?

It is unfortunate that my letter which appeared in the June issue of *Socialist Review* was edited, thus allowing Tim Potter to suggest that there is a weakness in the politics of the SWP on the question of subsidies.

In my article I had taken up

the warning by Bill Message in *SR* 1980:2

'...in 1925 a very vicious Tory government granted a subsidy in order to gain time. When the subsidy was withdrawn in 1926 the government had prepared, the TUC had done nothing, and the working class as a whole was defeated after the union leaders sold out the General Strike.'

So, to the union leadership, subsidies to industry are seen at best as being a means to pacify and disarm the militancy of the working class. It is for that reason I linked the demand for subsidies to action by miners (or any other section of workers) over jobs, hours, etc.

While it is true that workers are backing demands by employers for subsidies and grants to industry, the very nature of these being given is that the firms benefiting cut the number of workers employed. Examples range from BSC to British Leyland, both of which have sacked thousands of workers.

As revolutionaries we recognise that subsidies cannot cure the problems of capitalism and we recognise that the purpose of subsidies as far as the capitalists are concerned is to make their commodities cheaper. But that does not prevent us from raising

the demand *linked* to a militant strategy to defend jobs *and* at the same time as putting forward the argument for the socialist alternative.

Tim Potter's point about where the money is to come from under the present system I find a bit strange. He suggests that it will come from taxation or borrowing neither of which, he presumes, we are in favour of. The logic of that argument is that we don't support any demands to restore cuts in hospital or education expenditure. After all the money for that comes out of taxation and borrowing. Where does the money for higher wages come from within the present system? Capitalists concede to wage demands only if they expect that in doing so they can increase the rate of exploitation of the working class. But we support every strike for wages not because the working class end up better off, but because each time they are successful their organisation is strengthened, their capacity and confidence to go further is sharpened. Similarly we can raise the demand for subsidies, not isolated and as the complete answer, but as part of the wider struggle for jobs and socialism.

Roy Smith
High Wycombe

BOOKS

Broader and broader

Silver Linings: some strategies for the eighties

George Bridges and Rosalind Brunt (eds)

Lawrence and Wishart £3.50

Silver Linings is a collection of contributions to the Communist University of London 1980, covering a range of movements and issues from feminism and gay liberation to Northern Ireland and racism. The first five look in some detail at particular problems; the last three at more general questions of socialist strategy from a Communist Party point of view. It is not surprising then that the theme of them all is the development of the concept of the Broad Democratic Alliance (BDA). In addition, Dave Cook in his essay 'Rocky Road Blues' attempts a justification for the independent role of the Communist Party outside the Labour party. In some ways the two themes are contradictory.

The BDA is based on the idea that the old notions of class warfare are outdated and irrelevant in late capitalist Britain. Instead what is needed is an alliance of popular movements—the major ones being those of labour, women, black people and nations.

'The notion of 'the people' represents a more expansive cat-

egory than the proletariat. It rests on a sociological basis (the need for alliances with intermediate social sectors), but also has a political and ideological dimension, pointing to those forms of oppression not directly rooted in class forms of exploitation. This perspective has certainly not always been integral to Communist strategy: in the sectarian Third Period of the Communist International (1929-34), for instance, it was almost totally eclipsed by a severely reduced notion of class against class" (Bill Schwarz and Colin Mercer).

'Patriarchy is not just an 'issue' but a fundamental contradiction in society. The WLM, therefore, cannot simply be listed along with environmental, peace and solidarity movements.' (Tricia Davis)

In other words the working class struggle is only one aspect of the struggle for socialism. Workers' exploitation cannot be seen as more central than the oppression of women, blacks and nations. Socialism will only be built by an alliance of representatives of all those popular movements. To suggest that the fundamental divide in capitalist society is between two contending

classes is ultra-left and sectarian—something which, as the book points out at least twice, the Communist Party has not been guilty of since 1934.

Such theoretical positions explain the opposition of CP members to the 'class' slogan of 'Jobs not Bombs' in CND, and their desire to win progressive vicars to support the People's March. They are of course nothing new, and have long been contained in the party's programme, the *British Road to Socialism*.

But today they pose the CP with more problems. It is well known that the party has been declining for many years. The last two or three have seen an acceleration of that decline, which seems to be increasingly steep among young people and students. But the biggest threat to it since Thatcher was elected has come from the Labour Party and especially the growth of the left around Benn. Not because the CP doesn't welcome the left's growth, or because it disagrees much with Benn—it doesn't. For 30 years it has believed that a left parliamentary majority, backed up by 'extra parliamentary forces' can achieve socialism, and has rejected revolutionary analysis as 'insurrectionary'.

The problem it faces today is how to distinguish itself from the Labour left and so justify a role for an independent CP outside the Labour Party. It is here that the contradictions of the BDA are most apparent. The BDA plays down the role of the working class and its centrality as the gravedigger of capitalism. Yet it is in the industrial working class that the CP still retains some of its strength. It is the CP's strength in industry, not in consciousness-raising groups, that Dave Cook cites as justification for its continued existence.

'The Labour left is only beginning the process of establishing workplace branches to help build left wing politics in industry'

'So to those many socialists who are thrilled at the left's advances in the Labour Party, we need to ask how, without the Communists and the *Morning Star*, the all round politicisation



of the organised working class can take place, let alone support be built up so that a newly elected Labour government could carry the advanced programme the party has adopted.'

Of course Dave puts forward other examples of the CP's unique role: the Communist Universities, the party journals, their involvement in other activities. Yet none of these is unique—certainly the SWP could claim similar successes. What distinguishes the CP is its daily paper (however boring it might be) and its industrial members (dwindling and ageing though they are). But the *Morning Star* is finding it extremely difficult to maintain itself as a daily while its sales fall. If it disappears, there will be little justification for the CP outside the Labour Party.

The only hope for the CP then would be to build on its industrial members and to recruit new, young members. It won't make a serious attempt to do so because its analysis of the BDA leads it away from industry, away from its worker members towards the movements and the fragments. So the CP's role will continue to decline as it becomes increasingly irrelevant under the shadow of the Labour left. The demise of the *Morning Star* would be a body, maybe a death, blow. In which case the Communist Party would be looking for a bit more than silver linings. Pennies from heaven maybe?

Lindsey German

Boring on

People's History and Socialist Theory
History Workshop Series £6.95

This is a fascinating and frustrating book. It must be said, however, that it is not as frustrating as was attendance at the 1979 History Workshop at Ruskin College, Oxford, of which it is an account. Locked out of overcrowded meetings, faced with impossible choices between equally attractive and equally unpredictable speakers, and finally arse-numbed on a hard bench in a freezing cold church for what was billed as the debate of the decade—

it would have been reassuring to know we would one day have the Book of the Event.

So what was it about, History Workshop 13? In case you may think the title is a unifying theme, the editor, Raphael Samuel, gives us two separate introductions, one on 'People's History' and one on 'Socialist Theory'. In case you might think that means the book is divided into two parts, one colourful descriptive history and one lofty theory, it isn't that either. The fifty-two articles and papers included are, as you might expect, extremely varied, but the detailed reconstruc-

tion of working-class life for which History Workshop is justly famous (if often parodied) is not to be found here.

The reason for this becomes clear in Raphael Samuel's 'Afterword' on the basic aims and orientation of History Workshop. He describes the intention of encouraging worker-historians to research and write, providing an alternative to the system of lectures, tutorials and exams, and of making the annual Workshops 'a highly political occasion'—in short, 'democratising historical practice... against the dominant bourgeois mode of historiography'. But things have not worked out quite like that for History Workshop, not at all.

Since the foundation of *History Workshop Journal* in 1975 arguments about theory and matters of principle, some of them deep and bitter, have kept cropping up among the grassroots of 'people's history'. History Workshop 13 was evidently an attempt at stocktaking, a decision to give this tendency its head, to let it all hang out and see what happened.

What happened was, firstly, that the proceedings were dominated almost totally by university academics. (Look through the introductions to contributors—almost without exception, the only ones without university jobs are women; there isn't even a poly represented!) History Workshop has created an alternative academic environment rather than an alternative to academic history, and there is a big difference. This was extremely frustrating for the hundreds of non-academics present, and was criticised by the Ruskin students' collective before the end of the weekend.

Secondly and as a direct result,

the language and style of many of the contributions was directed towards what publishers call 'the specialist audience'. Contributors felt it necessary to refer to 'a high level of empirical depth', or to use 'acritical' (sometimes a-critical) as somehow more meaningful than 'uncritical'. The peak in the book is reached by Andrew Lincoln's appalling academic Franglais. Some articles are difficult for even an academic to follow if not acquainted with the history of these debates.

Marxism, as might be expected, is a central issue. But the range of attitudes to it is immense. 'I don't believe in socialist history. I believe that to use history as a weapon in the political struggle is counterproductive,' writes Peter Burke. Another contributor quotes with approval the opinion that, 'Whether a historian inspired by but developing Marx's thought remains properly Marxist... is a question of no serious intellectual importance whatsoever.' Well, the net of invitations was cast wide and there's no harm in that if the thing is meant to be a forum.

But what *Socialist Review* readers will presumably want to know is, *was there a hard core of committed Marxist history at the heart of it?* Where, in all this, is the politics? The answer to this is the most frustrating of all.

Many contributors clearly do regard themselves as committed Marxists, and explicitly discuss the relationship between Marxist history and political activity. But the conclusions they come to (with the exception of feminist 'fragmentism') are always negative. 'Given the political formlessness and difficulties of our times,' says Ken Worpole, it is better to concentrate on

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the 'long-revolution' which seems to be composed of working class autobiographies. Robert Colls regards the History Workshop forum as 'a surrogate politics for those depressed by the dismal political options of a country which no longer has a radical movement worthy of the name.' Bob Scribner, though he admires the 'People's History' work of the German Communist Party in the early 1920s, thinks that, 'In so far as... the historian is actively involved in politics, there is a problem of time and resources to carry out historical investigations with the necessary rigour.'

It was, of course, this hesitation with regard to political involvement that Edward Thompson set out to attack in his contribution to the debate on his book, *The Poverty of Theory*. Bitterly criticised at the time for 'causing pain' to other academics by his polemical style and frequent use of the term Stalinism (anyone even remotely connected with the Socialist Workers Party will be amazed by this low pain threshold), Thompson's tirade is passionate, witty, devastating and shallow. Intellectually, Stuart Hall's counter-critique carries far more weight: he lucidly rejects both Althusserian philosophy and the vagueness of Thompson's 'specificity of history as a discipline'.

But even more explicitly than in this book, Thompson called, on that cold November night in 1979, for academics to get out of their ivory towers and into political activity. At the time, Edward Thompson's last organised political activity was the *May Day Manifesto* of 1967-8; but within a year of this debate he was hitting the headlines with the Campaign for European Nuclear Disarmament and *Protest and Survive*.

And there's the problem—the clearest and loudest call for political commitment in this book results (however worthy the anti-nuclear cause) only in some vague kind of 'radical' politics ('popular but not populist' was Thompson's phrase on the night, not reproduced here) and an organisation designed to mobilise public opinion in general and academics in particular.

History Workshop is not, in all this, the innocent proletarian victim exploited yet again by academic history. From the start, its founders were hostile to revolutionary politics—and in terms frequently as nasty as anything Edward Thompson ever said to Richard Johnson. They thought they could provide a socialist history without politics by concentrating on the 'grass roots' and 'back to the sources'. Instead, they got an academic takeover and the worst kind of populist politics, leading to an obsession with the kinds of 'theoretical' questions they wished so earnestly to avoid.

Many of the papers in this book, however, are interesting and provocative. Women readers will be particularly interested in Barbara Taylor's defence of the Utopian

Socialists (compare it with Gareth Stedman-Jones's critique of them in another section) and Sheila Rowbotham's attack on the theory of patriarchy. There are articles on socialist history in other countries such as

France and Denmark, and some interesting discussion of 'grass roots' history in inner-city areas and among the North-East miners.

If there is little hope of converting History Workshop to revolutionary

socialism, the stocktaking of 1979 shows that there is, more than ever, a need for an independent organisation for revolutionary Marxist history.

Norah Carlin

Sex: Past and present

Havelock Ellis, a biography
by Phyllis Grosskurth
Quartet Books, £4.95

Massively researched, thorough and detailed. Here we have the life and times of Havelock Ellis, friend of Olive Schreiner, Eleanor Marx, Edward Carpenter, William Morris, Bernard Shaw; sexual campaigner and investigator, semi-recluse, writer, and much much more.

This is a very enjoyable and readable, if at times trivialising, biography. The complex (and Boy, were they complex!) relationships, loves and personal correspondence of the people of the early socialist movement are all there.

Yet somehow the essence of the period is missing. It's as if the biography of Trotsky concentrated on the problems with his two wives, fascinating though that subject would be. From a reading of this, if the BBC had any sense they'd serialise it and out-sell *Dallas*. The period teemed with characters — obsessive and nervous Olive Schreiner, idealist, kind, homosexual Edward Carpenter in his commune outside Sheffield, Ellis's frantic lesbian wife, and so on. It ends up like a cross between *Soap* and Chekhov. All fascinating reading, but I wish there was more discussion of Ellis's work or the effect of it on the socialist movement of the time.

Ellis was around the socialist clubs and groupings that gave birth to the Fabians, the Labour Party, Hyndman's SDF and William Morris's Socialist League. It was a confusing period and, judging by this book, full of confusing thinking.

In the introduction, Ms Grosskurth describes Ellis as 'a revolutionary, one of the seminal figures responsible for the creation of modern sensibility.' I disagree with the first assertion but would go along with the second. Ellis was a nice well-intentioned anti-Victorian Victorian. He wanted to talk, discuss and explain sexuality. He hated Victorian hypocrisy and he called himself a socialist and moved in socialist circles, though he never seemed to understand very clearly what he meant by socialism. In a vague and almost religious way he was committed to founding a new life, a new way of living where sex would be open, free and uncorrupted by repression. He was also involved with what was known as 'the woman question' (I've always wondered why it was referred to as 'the woman question' or even



Havelock Ellis sunbathing in the garden of 'Little Frieth', 1927

'the woman problem' when the problem is not with women but men, especially heterosexual men. The book details the trauma, contradictions and anguish involved in living the new way.

What most strikes me from this biography is what a terrible mess the socialist movement was in. A real quagmire of confusion that makes the present day Italian scene look simple, more autonomous and fragmented than any beyond the fragments could ever dream of. After reading this you can understand Lenin's *What is to be done*.

The left seemed to be all over the place, the Marxist groups both sexist and racist, the sexual reformers and revolutionary socialists squabbling and organising nothing more than picnics. Or so this book would have you believe. Class struggle never once makes an entrance, and this at the time of the building of the new unionism, and the rise of women's rights as a mass movement. In this book they are all excluded or referred to via squabbles between leading characters and replaced by an analysis of their personal relationships.

Ellis thought that to study sex you just had to collect 'facts' and let theory emerge from them, in the tradition of Darwin. He was as shocked by Freud's theories of infant sexuality and the central role of the family in creating sexual orientation as most Victorians. Yet in some ways he was more progressive and liberal than Freud.

He first came to public fame in 1887 with his publication on 'Inversion' (homosexuality) which he argued was only an abnormality in the 'sense that genius or criminals are abnormal'. He argued for tolerance and acceptance of it against Freudian attempts to cure it. But at the same time he thought it to be innate and inherited, while Freud saw it as socially conditioned. This was his first (of seven) works on sex, but came out just two years after the Wilde trial. England was in the midst of a homophobic wave, Ellis's book was prosecuted and found obscene. He always later regretted that he'd published this as his first work.

Perhaps the most important 'finding' of Ellis was that women had a sexuality not only equal to man's but greater, and he argued for women to have a full sexual life.

Until you read something like this book it's difficult to imagine the change in attitudes to sex that has occurred in the last 80 years. Victorians believed that masturbation actually made you ill (they prescribed anti-masturbatory suits for kids), that women had no sexuality, the only pleasure was the joy of giving joy to men, and that sex was solely for reproduction. We've come a long way from that and Ellis, however shallow and erratic his ideas, helped to create a more rational view of sex and to open up the field for discussion, study and action.

Noel Halifax

Deciphering imperialism

Translations
by Brian Friel
The Lyttleton Theatre

It's good to see a new Irish play getting critical accolades and a transfer from Hampstead Theatre Club to the National Theatre's Lyttleton; especially since its main theme is British imperialism. But when you see the comfortable upper-middle-class audience applauding politely, you begin to wonder...

The play is set in Donegal in 1833, in a hedge-school (cheap local private education) run by a drunken ex-rebel and his crippled scholar son. The British Army is 'surveying' the land for a new map — ie changing the Gaelic names into English — with the help of another son as interpreter. The pupils at the school speak Gaelic and some Greek and Latin but can't, or won't, speak English.

The device of the play — hence its title — is that both the Gaelic and English lines are spoken in English. So when a local girl and a young English soldier fall in love, they can have a conversation where neither understands the other, but the audience understands both; in another scene, the audience can observe the 'interpreter' twisting what one side says to the other to suit his own ends.

This is skilfully handled by the writer, and leads to much humour and some pathos; its symbolism, if double-edged, is obviously relevant to its subject. The picture of the deliberate destruction of a rich Gaelic culture by the English illustrates very powerfully the dehumanising effect of imperialism. The young soldier 'disappears'; the army order reprisals; the interpreter recognises his betrayal and

goes off to join the rebels.

The acting and production are of a consistently high standard. The writing style is very much in the O'Casey tradition. It is overlaid with symbolism, which in the end merely serves its usual bourgeois literary function of mystifying rather than clarifying; for example, the crippled son teaches a mute girl to talk during the play — this is obviously meant to be deeply significant, but what of it is far from clear!

The causes of imperialism, and the class whose interests it serves, are never examined. The rebels never appear on stage, but remain shadowy figures cut off from the community, rather than the integral part of it they were then and are still today. It's interesting to have a picture of Ireland 150 years ago, but I suspect that this subject was chosen rather because the author found the present-day situation too hot to handle. (A play supporting the hunger strikers would be unlikely to get into the National Theatre!)

The ultimate message of the play as it came over to me is that there is a breakdown in communication, and if only the two sides could learn to speak the same language (ancient Greek?) they could sort it all out amicably; but that will never happen. Which is only one step away from the argument that 'they can't sort it out for themselves so, unpleasant though it is, we have to let the British Army do it.'

The author's intention was clearly to make an anti-imperialist statement. But if, as I'm sure is the case, the Lyttleton audience sleep all the more soundly in their beds after watching it, I don't think he has succeeded.

Ian Milton

here that the problems start. While some of Shelley's poems are clear and powerful, others are long and hard and written in a language and style that is, for me at least, very remote and difficult. Paul does his best to grapple with that but I do not think he convinces.

It is quite surprising that he does not consider Shelley's own major statement, *A Defence of Poetry*. In this, Shelley argues that: 'Poetry ... makes immortal all that is best and most beautiful in the world.' He goes on to say that: 'Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.' This notion that it is the task of poetry to rescue from the dross of everyday life the moments of ideal beauty and thus to provide for people a picture of how the world might be is a noble and inspiring one, but it is also a very difficult one to carry out.

In the capitalist epoch, poetry has tended to be concerned with private and personal experience and has

developed forms and a language which have enabled it to do it very well. There have always been poets like Shelley who have tried to break out of that, but they have to cut against the grain. No writer of poetry, and no reader of poetry, can single-handedly, destroy all of that accumulated weight of expectations and techniques which go to make up what is understood as poetry. Consequently, such poetry has always been very difficult, and Shelley is no exception. I think, in the end, that Shelley was a very uneven writer of poetry. It was not his fault — the task he set himself simply presented insuperable difficulties.

There are many other things to say about this book. It contains a few factual errors and is rather sloppily produced. Perhaps it tells us rather more about Paul Foot than it should. But it exists. It is good. It should be read and enjoyed by the widest possible audience.

Colin Sparks

The People's Poet

Red Shelley
by Paul Foot
Sidgwick and Jackson £5.95.

Paul Foot has written an excellent book. He has recovered Shelley for the tradition of revolt and he has made him available to a wide audience. There are other books which cover much the same ground, but they tend to be a bit academic and bulky. Paul's book is clearly and simply written and rings with an enthusiasm and commitment which make it a pleasure to read. Hopefully, with this book, a new generation of militants will discover that Shelley and poetry have little to do with the rote-learning which was forced down their throats at school.

Shelley grew up in the shadow of the Great French Revolution. The storming of the Bastille, a redundant symbol of a monstrous tyranny, had unleashed a wave of hope across Europe. 1789 was one of those dates which, like 1917, marked the mind of a century. Depending upon your position, it stood for freedom and the future, or for the dark forces of chaos and destruction welling up against the established order. For the poor, for the ambitious, for the victims of injustice, and for the best minds of the intellectuals, 'The Rights of Man' were a rallying point.

Those rights were: 'liberty, property, security and resistance to oppression.' Even though property was one of the rights, the partisans of the French Revolution believed that this was a means by which equality and freedom from want would be established on this earth. The English poet Wordsworth, looking back on his youth, recorded how he and his friends had seen the goal of the revolution as the abolition of the misery of rural poverty which they saw all around them in France.

Two things shattered that mood

of confidence. First of all there was the rise of new despotisms. The revolutionary terror of Robespierre and the Jacobins frightened some of the weaker brethren, like Wordsworth. The counter-revolutionary despotism of Napoleon, with its new crown and new nobles, disillusioned others like Beethoven. And the defeat of Napoleon ushered in a new dark night of reaction across Europe. Shelley called that period 'an age of despair.'

The other factor which tested revolutionary faith was much stronger in Britain than elsewhere. The French Revolution was a bourgeois revolution, but in its drive for human freedom it stirred other passions. The mass of people in Britain who read Paine's great defence of the revolution, *The Rights of Man*, were miners, farm labourers, factory hands, wage workers. In their hands, the revolution constantly threatened to go beyond the limits of private property and to give birth to a new, socialist, revolution. That thought terrified many who found the existing order horrible but who were not prepared to abandon all of their privileges and power and wholeheartedly embrace the beginnings of modern socialism.

The importance of Shelley is that he recognised that new class logic and followed it through as far as he was able. Ever since his day, the mind of British intellectuals has been blocked by the terrible thought that any change means socialism, and most of them have cowered before reaction rather than accept that. Shelley is one of a very few great minds who have had the courage and clear-sightedness to see beyond their own personal niche and to dream of the hopes of humanity.

If that was all there was to Shelley, then we would read him as an excellent political propagandist, but of course he was also a poet. It is



SEPTEMBER 1973

By 10 September 1973, the Chilean navy, with some assistance from the American armed forces, had already taken over the port of Valparaiso and working class neighbourhoods were being terrorised. The roads between Santiago, Chile's capital, and Valparaiso, the principal port, were almost impassable. On one side of the road, in a field, literally hundreds of trucks and buses were parked.

The truck owners, mobilised by the extreme right, were on strike against the government and its policies—just as they had been precisely 12 months before. Farther down that same road, in the distance, something could be seen burning. It was a train which had been overturned by the 'strikers'.

Nerves were already stretched to breaking point. Just the previous week, three quarters of a million workers had flooded into Santiago to commemorate the third anniversary of the *Unidad Popular* government. Young and old, workers, peasants and many middle class people demonstrated together on the third anniversary of the election of Salvador Allende to the presidency.

There was no joy in this demonstration as there had been in the May Day demo when a million people took to the streets. Workers and militants of different political parties who had previously shouted 'The people united shall never be defeated' now shouted 'The people, armed, shall not be smashed'. The principal demand was for *People's Power*.

People were angry, felt deceived. The vanguard of the working class was expressing its frustration at having had the wool pulled over its eyes by its political leaders and by the government of the UP for three years.

They were ready for revolution, but the leaders were not. Luis Corvalán, general secretary of the Communist Party had even protested at accusations by the right that the government had a policy of replacing the professional army in the following terms:

'No Sir! We continue and will continue

to support keeping our Armed Institutions strictly professional'.

They had had a real scare back in June. Colonel Roberto Souper led his tank regiment in an uprising against the government, fully backed by the armed apparatus of *Patría y Libertad*, the fascist party. Indeed, Souper's brother was a top leader of *Patría y Libertad* from Concepción. 22 people were killed in the uprising but the coup was defeated—temporarily, because the rest of the armed forces were not ready. Workers responded immediately by taking over factories and offices, schools and hospitals. The illusion that the Chilean Armed Forces were 'constitutional' and 'non political' was being smashed.

That was the day when the Chilean working class might have had the will and the strength to take power. But they were restrained by their leaders on the grounds that militancy would 'provoke the forces of reaction'. After calling for the working class to arm itself to smash the coup, Allende then told them to 'have faith in the patriotic armed forces' and proclaimed a state of emergency. This gave the military the pretext for using the 'law of arms control' (passed by the UP the year before) to begin raiding factories to search for arms caches.

After the frustrated coup, workers, peasants and students immediately began to devote their energies just about full time to strengthening their organisations and to making contingency plans for the coup that they knew was coming. Every sector of society that was not in opposition to Allende had been organising, agitating, teaching—and learning—for nearly three years. Here was a real basis for revolution.

In the large industrial cities, industrial 'cordons'—committees of all factories in a given municipality—were being formed. The cordons worked with neighbourhood commands, with student fronts, peasant councils. Following the attempted coup, vigilance committees were set up to protect schools, hospitals, factories, mines, council

estates and shanty towns.

The account of the decisive action taken in June by people in greater Santiago, the biggest industrial city of the country, reads as follows: San Bernardo, 15 industries taken and coordinating committee set up to liaise with neighbourhood commands; San Miguel, 18 industries under workers' control; peasants occupy estates and take land in Buin forming defence committees; San Joaquín cordon—all industries are occupied; Florida, all shanty towns and council estates in permanent assembly, municipal vehicles requisitioned; Quinta Normal, all major industries occupied; Vicuña Mackenna cordon, all public and private sector works occupied, vehicles requisitioned, all industries under cordon command; Curicó, hospital under workers' control; Lampa, peasants council occupies 20 reformed farms and organises defence brigades; cordon Cerillos, the largest and best organiser in Santiago, responded immediately, issued communiqués to all factories, shanty towns, peasant organisations, students, requisitioned food, medicines, vehicles, was ready to march.

So the basis for an enormous struggle against the bourgeoisie existed. But the 'people's government' whose president had called for arms to the workers had also effectively allowed a ruthless army to break workers' organisations. The radical groups which existed in sections of the navy and the air force, in particular, were being systematically smashed (with individual militants being tortured) and disavowed by the government which still proclaimed, to the very day of the coup, its belief in the absolute loyalty of the armed forces.

The real tragedy of the coup in Chile in 1973 was not just that the workers were not given arms. There were armed groups, party militias. Given the right political direction, these could very rapidly have organised groups of armed workers. But to do so would have meant arming those very mass organisations which the government wanted to disappear—or at least to become incorporated in the trade union structures.

The real tragedy of Chile was that those who led were not prepared to allow a mass struggle for power. They had rewarded workers who had come out in virtually a popular uprising to defend the government in October 1972 by taking generals into the cabinet. They had let the paramilitary police and the army smash dozens of factory occupations and seizures of land. They had handed back factories to the previous owners. At all times, they had prevented or diverted moves which were leading to workers' growing self-confidence in their ability to take power for themselves. Everything had to be orderly, to proceed along a constitutional road—a road to nowhere.

As the Socialist paper *Imma* wrote about the government on 6 July 1973, a week after the dress rehearsal and 12 weeks before the army put its show on the road—'if they make the wrong judgement, and move too late to arm the people, if fascism imposes itself upon this country, they will be assuming a dreadful responsibility before the tribunal of history.' Fight years later, that verdict looks sounder than ever.

Jill Poole