

socialist
REVIEW

Monthly Magazine of the Socialist Workers Party

March 1993:2
Issue 52 50p
Unemployed 25p

CND

**Polls, percentages
& popular politics**

RACE

**Immigration,
deportation**

LABOUR

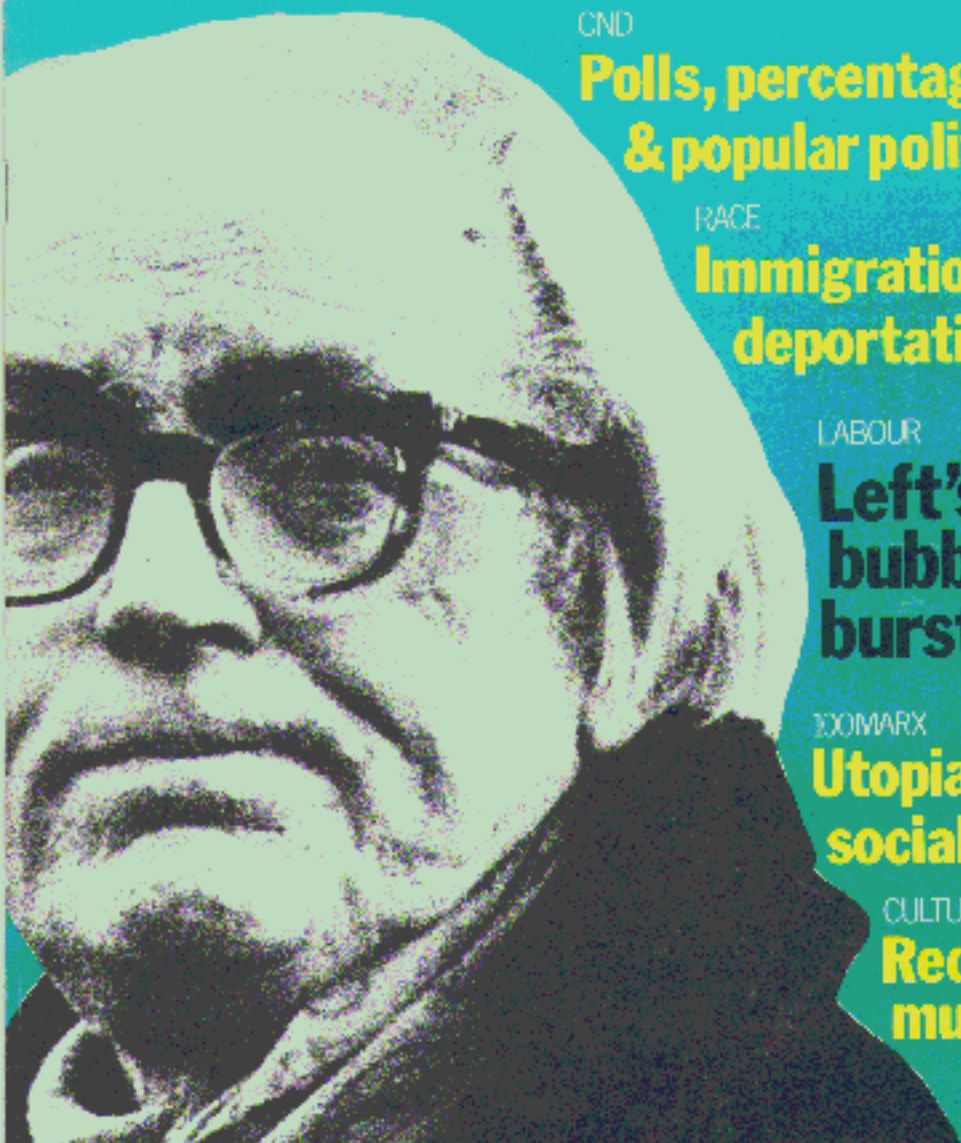
**Left's
bubble
burst**

UDOMARX

**Utopian
socialists**

CULTURE

**Red
music?**



Youth into the factories

The introduction of Youth Training Schemes is part of the Tory dream of establishing a disciplined, hard-working low-paid shopfloor workforce. **Dave Beecham** argues that it presents us with opportunities to create a new generation of young militants.

A fundamental change is about to occur for school leavers. Starting in April and continuing through the summer till next September, tens of thousands of young workers will be taken on in industry and elsewhere as trainees. The Government's Youth Training Scheme (YTS) envisages training places for around 450,000 people this autumn, the bulk of them will be employed though some trainees will just be in colleges. The change is going to create considerable problems for union organisation and an enormous opportunity for socialists in the workplace and outside it.

Consider: 450,000 trainees, mostly in work for the first time, paid a pittance — the allowance is currently fixed at £25 a week, with no expenses paid — without real employment rights. On top of this is a situation where at the end of year the employer will be able to select those he wants to keep on. In addition, trainees are required to have 13 weeks off-the-job training, which will generally take place in FE colleges, techs and the like, either on day-release or block-release. The potential in this is enormous.

Behind the Tory strategy is the idea of creating a docile, conformist generation of

young workers — grateful for a job, not interested in trade unionism, from whom employers can select the best and discard the rest. The scheme will also involve an enormous pressure on trainee wages — down.

But YTS is a potential timebomb in the workplace. It presents the unions with the opportunity of recruiting a new generation; it will mean thousands of young workers gathered together from time to time in colleges; it will mean an opportunity for workplace negotiation on apprentice pay ... and so on. In short the biggest opportunity for creating a new generation of militants since the great apprentice strikes of the late 1930s.

For the Tories and the large employers who will run the bulk of YTS, the scheme is a green light for selection. The young worker not only does not cost anything (unless a union starts pushing the allowance up ...) but the trainee has no real rights. It is like a more sophisticated version of YOP in this sense — though there are several crucial differences.

Pressure to conform

Most important for the employer there is a year when the whole trainee intake, including those who would normally have been taken on, can be knocked into shape without any obligation to employ them further. The pressure to conform will be enormous as will the tension, towards the end of the first year.

The other part of the strategy concerns pay. For years the CBI, engineering

employers, Institute of Directors and all the other rabble have been moaning about the high level of trainee wages. It is a cardinal principle of Thatcherism that youth unemployment is caused by 'young people being priced out of jobs by the unions' (the same notion goes for older people too, incidentally). Now, with YTS, the Tories have succeeded in involving the unions in a scheme which undercuts every single trainee rate in the book. The first fruit of this is the agreement signed by the EETPC in electrical contracting which reduces the 16-year-old rate from £41 to £27.88 a week. In fact the EETPC deal is not so bad — at least it offers security to those who get through the first year exams. A lot of other unions will sign (or accept) worse arrangements in the months to come. On the other hand, the NGA has managed to persuade (or con) the printing firms into an increase in first year training rates, by accepting the end of time-served apprenticeship.

The TUC, which is heavily involved in YTS — to the extent of selecting the union officials who will serve on the supervisory Area Manpower Boards — has produced a leaflet urging unions to negotiate better terms and conditions. The key problem with this pious intention is of course that it relies precisely on the 'strength' of workplace organisation, a fact of which the TUC seems blissfully unaware. The introduction of a number of unskilled young people into a workforce where short-time working, layoffs and redundancies are common will certainly cause resentment, and some possible disputes. Tactically, there is also a problem for stewards trying to negotiate a better deal on pay for trainees, namely tax. The £25 paid to trainees is an allowance, without tax or national insurance. As soon as the rate is pushed above the tax threshold there will be gross pay deductions.

Under YOP, there are almost no rights — in a recent case a black girl on YOP was shifted from one job in a supermarket to another. The tribunals said they couldn't consider the case because she 'was not an employee'. Under YTS the situation may be slightly different, but essentially trainees will be defenceless, with inferior conditions, unless they're in a union.

For us, there are undoubtedly important opportunities. By attempting to restructure the system of training in Britain, the government has created the chance of organisation — both in the workplace and in the colleges. As a minimum, SWP branches should be considering what they do round these colleges in the months to come. In the workplace, the potential disputes are numerous. Especially in engineering, where even right wing stewards may be resentful because of the undermining of the traditional apprenticeship schemes and the craft tradition.

On the whole, the largest employers are going to be most involved in running YTS — GEC, ICI, Lucas, Rolls Royce, British Rail, the big retailers etc. Young workers on YTS will tend not to be isolated in ones and twos, or in make-believe set-ups as under YOP. This time it's for real, and there are real gains to be made. □





TATCHELL

A spectacular decline

In the face of the humiliating defeat at Bermondsey, Labour lefts find themselves cut off from their life-line to the polling booth. **Pete Goodwin** looks at the background, untangles the web of new fantasies, and finds a thread of hope in facing up to the uncomfortable realities of today.

Pause for a few minutes before you consider the implications of the Bermondsey by-election. Cast your mind back to the years of 1979, 80 and 81, to the years of the apparently spectacular rise of the Bennite left. Remember what the Labour left was saying then.

Remember first of all the deep revulsion against the Wilson and Callaghan governments: '...the rich get richer and the poor get poorer, as they do under Tory governments'. That was Ian Mikardo's verdict in 1979 and

the whole of the Labour left agreed and vowed, never again.

The whole of the Labour left was also convinced that it was quite worthless to try and remedy this by passing left wing resolutions at conference. Again Ian Mikardo was speaking for them all when he wrote:

'our problem isn't that we don't have good policies, it is that our good policies don't get implemented... It is this sad history which has created the pressure to amend the party's constitution in order to

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CONTENTS

2	THE ECONOMY
	Youth Training Schemes
3	EDITORIAL
	The Labour left
8	LABOUR MOVEMENT
	The Broad Lefts
10	NEWS & ANALYSIS
	The class struggle today
12	
	Racism and the Nationality Act
15	
	FIGHTING THE BOMB
	Opinion polls
16	
	Sanity
18	
	The Suffragettes and World War I
21	
	Why we need a revolution
22	
	MARX CENTENARY
	Marx and the Utopians
26	
	WRITERS REVIEWED
	George Bernard Shaw
27	
	CULTURE
	Music and socialists
29	
	SEXUAL POLITICS
	Prostitution
32	
	BOOKS
	Reviews
35	
	TELEVISION
	Grangehill and Brookside
36	
	ARGUMENTS ABOUT SOCIALISM
	Leaders and led

Edited by Colin Sparks
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Subscription rates for one year (11 issues):
 Britain and Ireland £7, Overseas Surface £8,
 Europe Air £10, Elsewhere Air £13.50
 (institutions add £5) Cheques and postal
 orders payable to Socialist Review.
 Socialist Review is sent free to all prisoners
 on request
 ISSN 0141-2442
 Printed by East End (Offset) Ltd, (TU all
 depts) London E2.

ensure not only that we evolve good policies, but also that the Parliamentary Party feels a duty to implement these policies when it gets into office.'

That was why the constitutional changes, mandatory re-selection of MPs and the electoral college to choose the leader, were the centrepiece of Labour left strategy.

And remember the ecstasy with which the Labour left greeted them when they were finally passed at the 1980 conference and the special Wembley conference of January 1981. 'What a great day at Wembley... Wembley was a famous victory for the workers movement' enthused *Socialist Challenge* (29/1/81). While *Militant* (30/1/81) pronounced:

'Wembley was a great victory for Labour's ranks... With the transformation and re-transformation of the trade unions they will play an even bigger part within the Labour Party Conference, will become a vital transmission belt for the demands of an aroused and mobilised working class.'

If those statements seem somewhat wild today, then remember what followed them: Tony Benn's campaign for the deputy leadership in the spring and summer of 1981. For both old hands and new recruits to the Labour left this was conclusive proof. Benn had taken the fight 'into the unions'. He had overturned the likes of Clive Jenkins. He ended doing better than anyone had dared to hope at the start.

Unstoppable

On September 27 1981 he lost to Healey by only a hair's breadth, 49.6 per cent of the vote to 50.4. The Labour left seemed unstoppable. One more push and it would be home.

In those years thousands of socialists must have joined or become active in the Labour Party with exactly that belief. Just take the most famous of them, Tariq Ali. In December 1981 he wrote an article in this magazine explaining why he had decided to join the Labour Party. He claimed to be well aware of the 'bureaucratic dance' that has characterised previous 'left turns' by the Labour Party in opposition, but:

'The key problem Benn poses for the left bureaucracy is that he threatens to break up this dance. Bennism threatens to replace a left manoeuvre to restore the rightist leadership's authority with a left opposition to that leadership—an opposition going right through the next election and blasting away from Day One of a new Labour government or a new coalition which might attract the PLP right wing...'

'Benn has been radicalised through his experience in office. He has moved from the centre right to the left and the evolution is by no means complete. He has understood that Labour's only serious electoral chance lies in running the entire organisation into a gigantic lever of popular political mobilisations, championing the causes of all sectors of the oppressed and offering a governmental perspective of real change.'

It is worth contrasting this with what we were saying (and we were virtually alone in

saying it) in those same years. After Wembley, we pointed out the fragility of this 'famous victory':

'The balance of power is held by the trade union leaders and this power can increasingly be expected to be swung behind the moderate right.

'At the special conference a *majority* of union votes went behind the "right of centre" compromise which would have given half the seats in the electoral college to the right-wing dominated PLP. It was only confusion among the leaders of USDAW and an obstinate refusal of the leaders of the AUEW to vote for anything other than their own proposal to give four fifths of the votes to the PLP which enabled the left's version of the college to go through.

'...If the left has a majority on the executive it is because the shift to the right among the trade union leaderships in recent years (particularly in the AUEW) is not yet reflected, for instance in the women's seats elected from conference. But should the issues seem important enough to them, people like Allen and Basnett can be expected to line up with Chapple, Duffy and Jackson to impose their nominees.' (*Socialist Review* February 1981)

And that of course is exactly what happened at the 1981 conference, and with even more of a vengeance, at the 1982 conference.

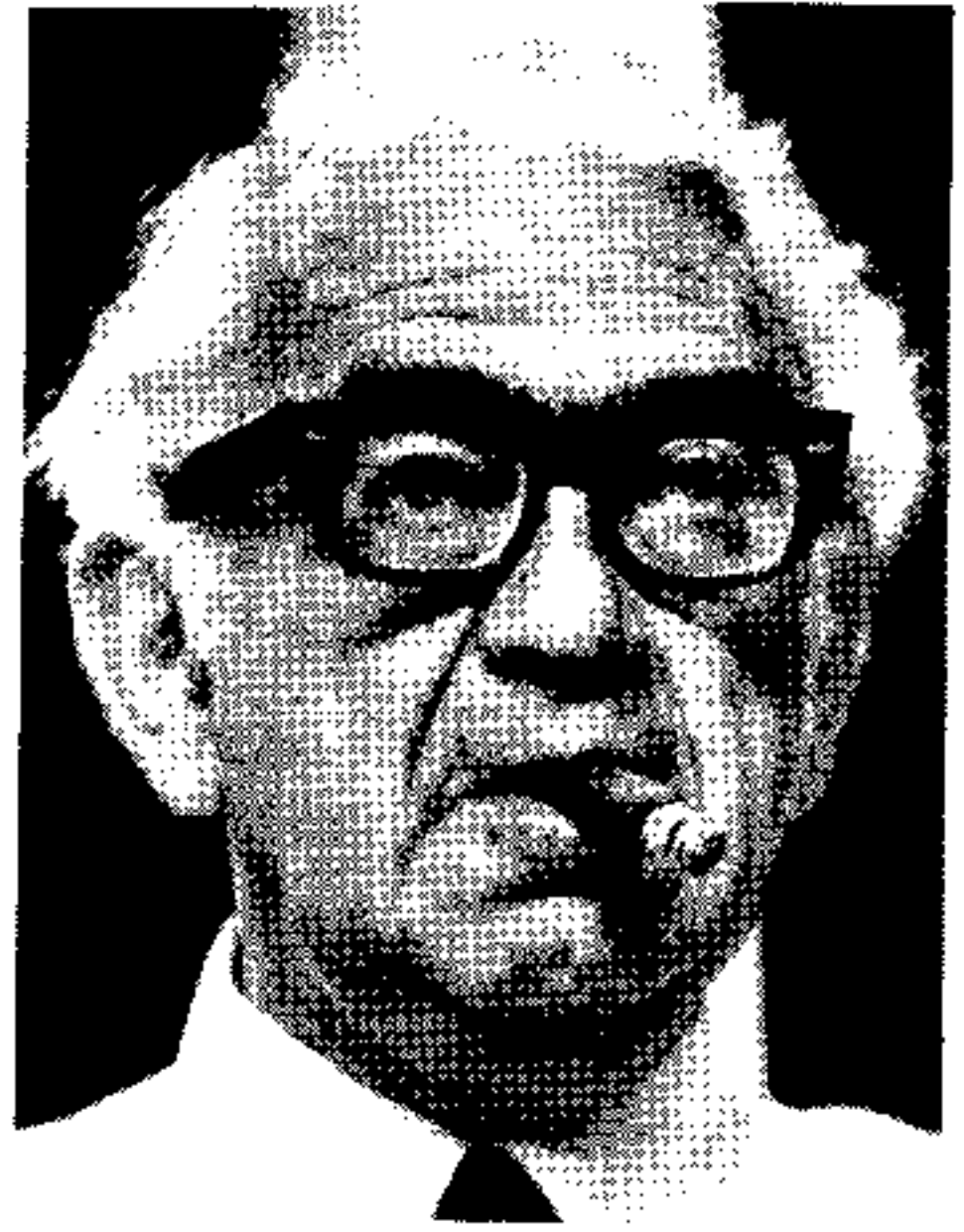
We underestimated, however, the degree to which activists in a number of unions could throw their full time leaderships off balance in the summer of 1981 and produce the bandwagon of the Benn deputy leadership campaign. In February 1981 we had predicted that the most optimistic estimate of Benn's vote against Healey would be 43 per cent, in fact it was over 49 per cent.

But our basic analysis still seemed sound and we were not afraid of repeating it immediately after the deputy leadership election when most of the rest of the left were entranced by Benn's performance:

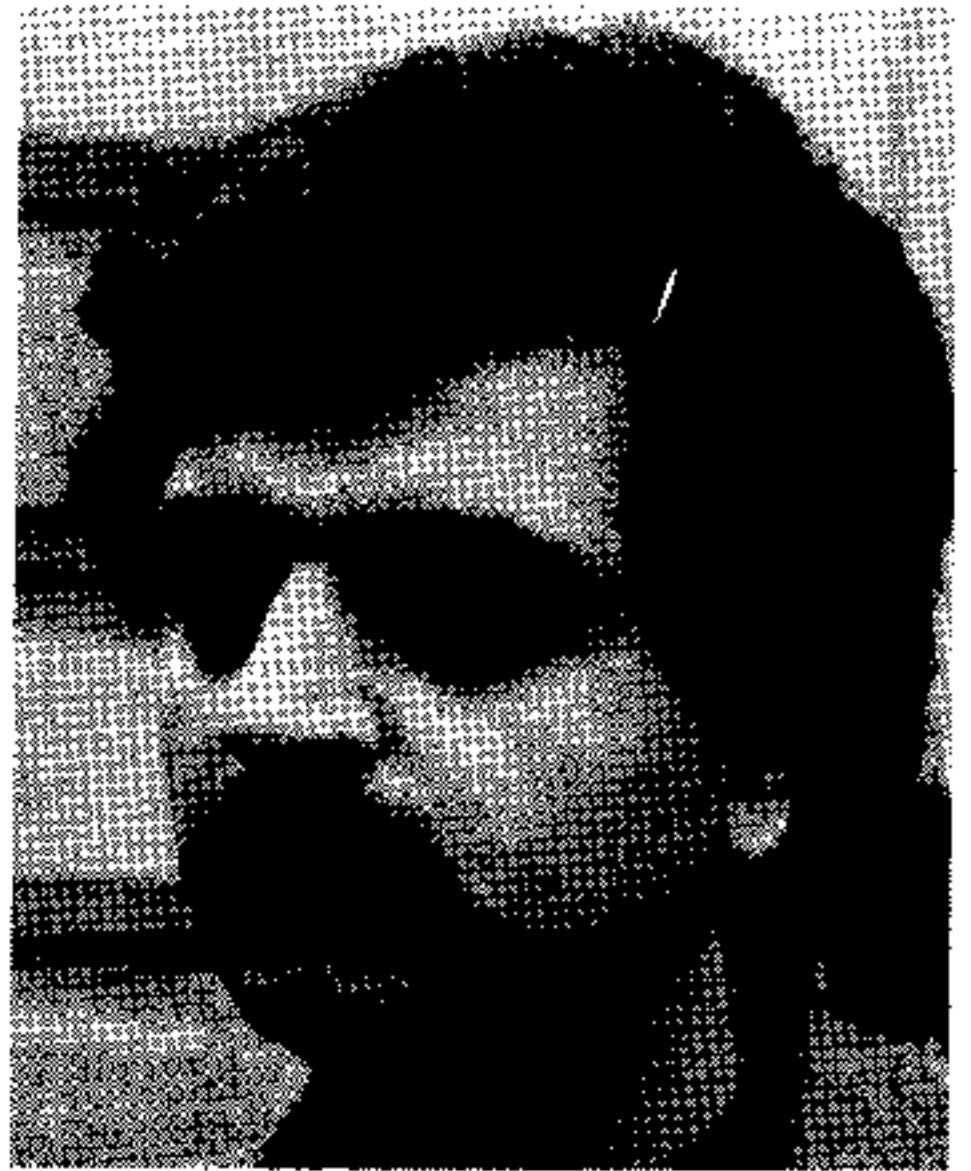
'We argued that the loss of confidence by workers in their ability to fight back over redundancies, cuts and wages had allowed the right to strengthen their hold over the trade union bureaucracies... So far the right leadership had been prepared to do trade-offs that gave left wingers seats on the Labour Party executive. But that would not survive any hotting up of the struggle between left and right in the party.

'The left would be helpless, we argued, against such manoeuvres. Although its forces in the constituencies and among union activists can be measured in terms of tens, or even hundreds of thousands, the *millions* who make up the trade union movement are retreating before an employers offensive, producing the lowest level of struggle for more than a generation. Under such circumstances, the media and the union bureaucracies could all too easily play on the real weaknesses of the Bennite left.

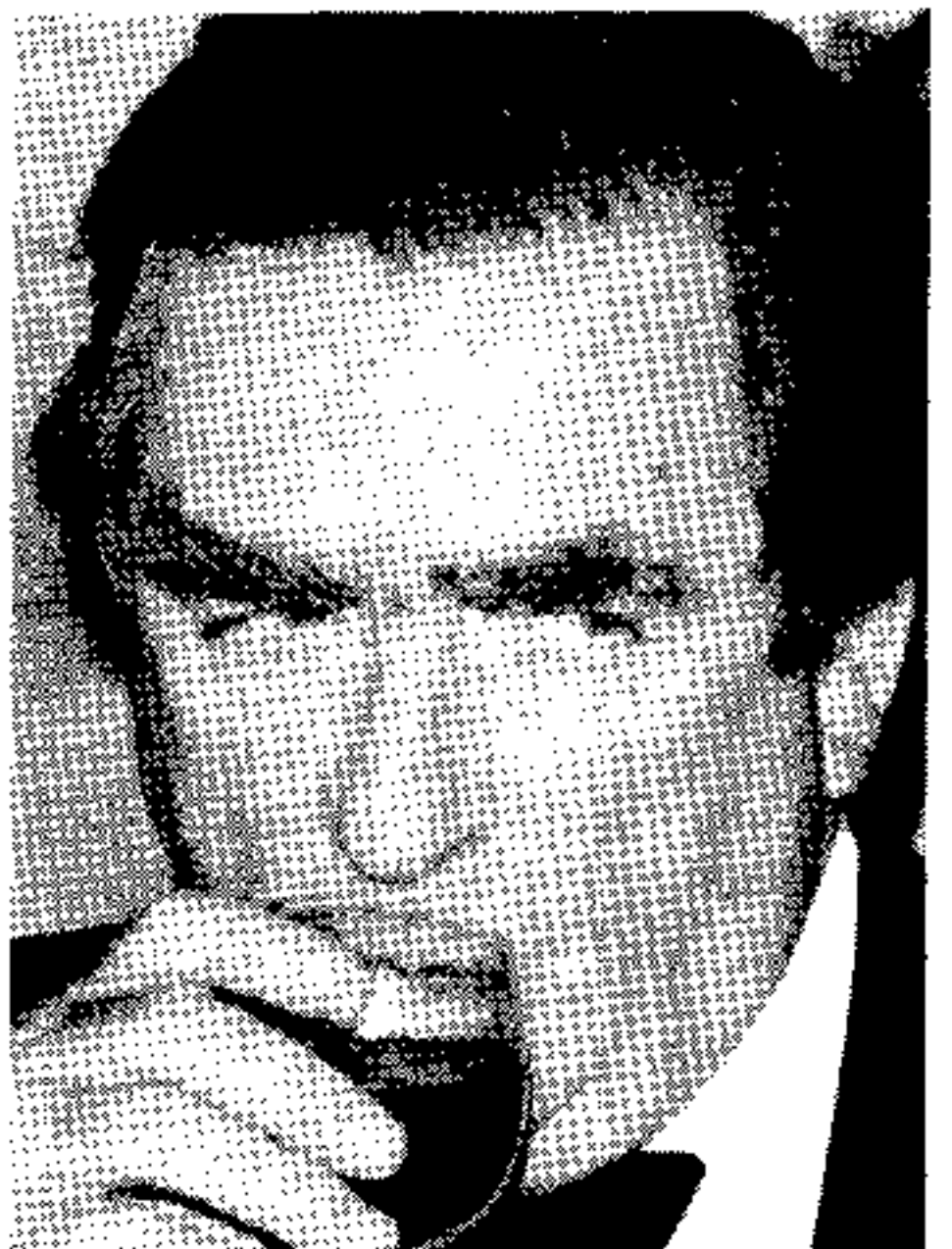
'...Bennite politics remains *electoral* politics. On that terrain, Healey has got control of the deputy leadership, Varley



Ian Mikardo



Tariq Ali



Denis Healey

has got control of the party treasurership, and the right wing has got control of the national executive with its power to determine who will run the party machine. The sudden display of strength of the Healeyite forces within the supposedly

'left' TGWU bureaucracy—so that Benn nearly didn't get the union delegation's vote—shows how powerful are those who would begin pushing the bandwagon backwards.

'And the success of the right in winning secret ballots and branch ballots for Healey in a number of unions shows that they have a weapon they can use with a degree of confidence of getting their way.

'All this leads us to believe that the forward march of the left within the Labour Party has been halted. Labour politics over the next year will be a different matter from Labour politics over the last year.' (Socialist Review October 1981)

We were, unfortunately, correct. Within weeks of the 1981 conference the new executive decided to refuse Peter Tatchell endorsement, to refuse Tariq Ali membership and to institute an inquiry into *Militant*.

Then in January 1982 there was the 'peace of Bishops Stortford' where Benn agreed not to stand for the deputy leadership again. There was no stirring campaign around the union conferences of 1982 to compare with the previous year. Instead there was the miserable spectacle of Michael Foot wrapping himself in the Union Jack over the Falklands.

The 1982 conference produced a massive majority for the witch-hunting register and a hard right majority on the national executive. And since then the left's campaign to refuse registration has largely crumbled, most notably in what should have been their patch, the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy.

Since the day of the deputy leadership vote, September 27 1981, it has been 18 months of downhill all the way for the Labour left.

The fact that we virtually alone predicted these uninterrupted reverses would be of little consequence if it was just a matter of us somehow miraculously understanding the workings of the Labour Party better than most of its own members. But there is a lot more to it than that. Our statement in October 1981 that the forward march of the Labour left had been halted was based on the fundamental premise of our revolutionary politics: that the emancipation of the working class is the work of the working class itself, and that is through struggle, primarily industrial struggle, that the mass of the working class achieves the consciousness and organisation for this self emancipation.

There are no shortcuts round this. Especially there is not the short cut of the tiny minority of those of us who are socialists now trying to cover up our weakness by simply trying to capture an electoral machine.

At the best of times that short cut would be doomed to ultimate failure in socialist terms. But in a time of serious downturn in class struggle it would be doomed to failure even in its own terms.

Most serious members of the new Labour left would indignantly deny that such fundamental issues are at stake. They would deny that they are trying to shortcut workers' struggle, they would deny that first priorities are electoral. Rather they claim that they are

pursuing the only realistic strategy of socialist mobilisation.

But a look at how the Labour left has responded to the events of the last eighteen months show how overwhelming is the pressure of electoral politics on them and how any attempt to reconcile these with socialist mobilisation has led to self-deception on a quite massive scale.

At the end of 1981 Tony Benn exited from the National Executive meeting which launched the witch hunt and announced 'I am the real deputy leader' (with the reasoning that Healey had lost his slim majority with the defection of some more of the MPs who voted for him to the SDP). It was exactly the move that his supporters would have welcomed a couple of months before. But now they greeted it with embarrassment.

Slide rightwards

Within days Benn backed down and within weeks he had agreed not to stand for the deputy leadership again. He, and his supporters, realised that another attempt would be crushed by the trade union bureaucrats. Now the fight was to be on 'policies'. 'Unity behind the present (conference) policies and the present leadership' became the Bennite watchword.

The Labour left presented it as a tactical adjustment. But it was an abandonment of what they themselves had previously made

the centre of their strategy. They themselves had spent the previous two and a half years claiming that conference policies were not worth the paper they were written on unless you had a parliamentary leadership prepared to implement them. Now they were claiming that a shadow cabinet composed of a vast majority of rightwingers with a sprinkling of Foots and Silkins could somehow or other be made to implement left conference policies.

The further slide was inevitable. As we have entered election year the public message from the Labour left is not 'will be forced to implement left policies' but just plain 'will implement them'. Few on the Labour left today see anything strange about Peter Tatchell canvassing at Bermondsey and saying 'Vote Labour—we will end unemployment'. And few on the Labour left seem to see anything strange in the sort of speeches Tony Benn is making now.

Take as typical the one he made to a packed meeting in Hackney Town Hall in January this year. It contained some familiar Benn themes, denunciation of the Tories and the mass media, the call for us to regain our lost sense of class solidarity. It contained *not one single reference to any fight within the Labour Party*.

There was only one reference to past Labour Governments: 'If we come to power trying to run this rotten system then we are going to fail'. That was followed by a few radical measures: 'We are going to have to



Tony Benn

requisition all the private clinics. Break with the Common Market. We've got to say to Reagan—get your nuclear bases out of Britain.' And how were we going to do it? At the next election. 'This is our great chance'.

Think for a moment. That 'great chance' will be to vote for a government of Michael Foot, Dennis Healey, Roy Hattersley etc. And on the basis of everything that the Labour left, including Tony Benn, was saying from 79 to 81 these people will be precisely 'trying to run this rotten system'.

There is as little chance of them requisitioning all private health clinics as there is of them sending the Paras to fight alongside the guerrillas in El Salvador. The wish, for Benn, has become the reality. Exactly as it has been for previous generations of Labour lefts before elections. The same pathetic performance is being repeated in meeting after meeting.

The same fixation on the election is to be found on what claims to be the 'hard' Labour left. It could be found at the national conference of groups modelled on *London Labour Briefing* in February. Speaker after speaker bemoaned the fact that they had not had a focus to organise around since the deputy leadership campaign.

What was to fill that gap?... the election. 'Don't focus on past defeats. The crucial battle going on is about what is in the next manifesto' (Jeremy Corbyn). 'The crucial question facing the left is the preparation for the next election—the resurrection of some type of socialist campaign for a Labour Victory' (Graham Bash).

It affects the way the Labour left now look at every campaign. Take *Socialist Challenge* (11/2/83) on Trade Union CND. They sneer at the SWP who 'saw the main thing as CND getting on the picket lines' because this: 'ignores the real question facing trade unionists in the coming year: how to elect a Labour government committed to stopping missiles'.

Alongside this ineluctable drift towards exclusive focus on the coming election, has gone a pretence by the Labour left that each of its retreats is merely a set-back that can and will be reversed.

A spot on the sun

The right wing gains on the national executive at the 1981 conference were considered a mere spot on the sun compared with Benn's performance in the deputy leadership election. With some serious organisation they could be reversed.

The Labour left duly organised its 'anti-witch hunt slate' (including by the way Alex Kitson who has consistently voted for the witch hunt) for the 1982 conference... and lost even more badly.

I remember the bluster at one of the fringe meetings on the first Monday night of that conference with Ted Knight introducing Joan Maynard to cheers with the words 'Every year they try and get her off the National Executive. Every year they fail.' The very next day they succeeded. But of course that did not stop the Labour left claiming that yet again they would reverse things at the 1983 conference.

It was the same on the witch hunt. Up until

a few weeks before the 1982 conference there were prominent members of the Labour left who believed it would be possible to defeat the register, or at least get it passed by such a small vote as to be ineffective.

The *Militant* sellers at the first day of the conference carried a paper which proclaimed:

'TGWU executive rejects register. This important decision by the Labour Party's largest affiliated union will be seen by Labour Party conference delegates that registers with their implications of expulsions and witch hunts will not be acceptable to the broad majority of Labour Party and trade union members.'

Of course the TGWU delegation voted for the register which was carried by 5,173,000 to 1,565,000.

Refusing to register

So the argument switched to organisations refusing to register. When both the Labour Co-ordinating Committee and the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy registered, it shifted again, refusing to recognise expulsions. But already, even before the pressure had been put on, Norwood Labour Party, where two of the expelled members of the *Militant* editorial board are members, has agreed to recognise their expulsions rather than risk disbandment. And it has done so with the full support of its leading left wing member, Ted Knight. And the London Labour Party Conference on 5 March voted to exclude Keith Dickinson, *Militant* supporter delegated from Hammer-smith CLP, after threats from the NEC.

That then is the background to Bermondsey. Eighteen months of defeats for the Labour lefts. Eighteen months of repeatedly overestimating their strength to resist. Eighteen months of increasingly subordinating everything to the coming election.

It is against that background that Bermondsey has to be seen as the last nail hammered into the coffin of the Bennite left.

Accepting that elections were a priority they had to accept Bermondsey as a test case. All the Labour left press highlighted appeals for canvassers. 'All out for Bermondsey' proclaimed the front page of *London Labour Briefing*. *Socialist Challenge* (11/2/83) carried lyrical (and quite apolitical) descriptions of canvassing in Bermondsey beginning: 'Ten thirty am at Lower Road, Rotherhithe. Shivering in the wind and already wet through by the sleet, workers arriving for the Sunday morning canvas...', and continuing in the same breathless vein. And in the week of Tatchell's defeat it was carrying an interview on what he would do as MP!

Accepting winning elections as a priority Peter Tatchell felt he had no option but to conduct his campaign on the most orthodox manner, sidestepping 'awkward' questions, kowtowing to the parliamentary leadership and so on. And no-one on the Labour left at the time criticised him for doing so.

It was then the Labour left themselves who set up Bermondsey as a test case. And they would have had to do very well even to stabilise their position. Instead, of course,

the result was worse than anyone expected.

And note that the disastrous nature of the result has nothing to do with the opinion-poll created bandwagon for the Liberals. It lies in the decline of the Labour vote, from 64 percent to 26 percent. No one on the Labour left expected anything as bad as that.

Nor do the two standard reasons for this catastrophic decline provide any comfort for the Labour left. First of all the vitriolic media campaign. No question it produced defeat. But what does the Labour left, or indeed any socialist expect? If our strategies are going to collapse because of a hostile media then what are they worth in the first place?

Then there is Foot's past denunciation of Tatchell. Again no question that it fuelled the media campaign. But the whole of the Labour left strategy is based on the idea that it can fight the right in the party and win elections at the same time. Even before the Bermondsey defeat it had decided that fighting the right would be sacrificed to winning elections. After all it desperately needed Foot's endorsement of Tatchell, it welcomed the likes of Roy Hattersley onto the Bermondsey platform and did its best not to offend them. After Bermondsey that process is going to go even further.

In every constituency Labour Party in the country there are going to be scores of activists who will fear 'another Bermondsey' in their constituency. They will, for instance, maintain their support for gay rights, but not want too much fuss made of it. They will look a bit more carefully at any grants their local left wing council might be making. They will be that much more reluctant to confront some local right wing councillor. They will even take another look at where their election leaflets are going to be printed! On every little issue they will be that much more cautious. It is the extent to which the Labour left had been pushed back before Bermondsey that marks its death.

That much weaker

It also means that any left revival after a defeat at the election (and there will surely be a revival in such circumstances) will be that much weaker and that much more isolated. Because in both constituency parties and left unions everyone is going to be that much more cautious second time round. That is the logic of making your priority the winning of the next election. And that as we have seen is the logic that ultimately dominates the Labour Party, the left included.

The only way of trying now to reconcile this with socialist mobilisation is to enter a world of total political fantasy. And it is that world that is to be found in the response of the 'hard' Labour left press to the Bermondsey defeat.

According to *Militant* (4/3/83) 'For the Labour Party generally the most important lesson from the whole (Bermondsey) campaign lies in the derisory vote cast for O'Grady'; and 'The Labour Party would not lose such seats (as Bermondsey) if it campaigned boldly for the socialist transformation of society, for the public ownership of the big monopolies that dominate all workers' lives, and for the introduction of a



Kelth Dickinson leaves the London Labour Party Conference

socialist plan of production'. In other words if it had been Peter *Taufe* who had been the Bermondsey candidate rather than Peter *Tatchell*...

Socialist Challenge in its last issue (4/3/83) before it re-emerges in yet broader guise as *Socialist Action* concludes from Bermondsey that

'The peace treaties in the party have been entirely onesided. The left can no longer afford them and neither can the Labour Party... "The existing policies, leadership and membership" is a hopeless slogan—a whole section of the leadership is trying to *smash* the existing policies and the existing membership!'

Fighting talk from which you might conclude that *Socialist Challenge* was about to launch a kamikaze mission against Michael Foot.

No chance. What they propose is that

'the left must re-organise around the fundamental plans for a Labour Victory:... for a Labour Government which raises the living standards of working people—no cuts, no statutory incomes policy: for full employment—a Labour Government must introduce a 35 hour week.'

Simple isn't it?

And much the same simple answer is given by *Socialist Organiser* (3/3/83):

'This vicious government *cannot* be allowed a second term... We must make every effort to get the best possible official Labour manifesto, but it is only too probable that the official manifesto will contain no more than a feeble reflection of the wide range of socialist policies and measures which are official Labour Party policy... We need to establish a campaign representing and uniting broad segments of the labour

movement, the women's movement, blacks, youth, and gays. It might perhaps be called "Anti-Tory League and Labour Victory Campaign" or "Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory 83".'

This call for a 'Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory' is the best that the Labour left now has to offer. What does it amount to? It is that some sections of the Labour left, having lost everything that they thought they had won in the Labour Party, having no hope of taking up the fight inside the party again, are going to *pretend* that the party is as they would dearly like it to be.

Hopefully, though, there may be a third

response to the Bermondsey election debacle on the Labour left. A majority will move to the right finally ditching any idea of socialist mobilisation in a desperate effort to avoid electoral disaster. An increasingly isolated 'hard left' will indulge in fantasies to try and reconcile the two. But there will also be individuals who will finally draw the lesson that there are no short cuts, that we socialists have to recognise how small in number we are, that we cannot cover up for that by trying to pretend we can win elections tomorrow. Instead, with hard arguments in the real struggles of today we can build for the far bigger struggles of the future. □

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The Broad Lefts

Last month the *Broad Left Organising Committee* held a conference in London. It was attended by 109 delegates from 19 different Broad Lefts. Colin Sparks looks at the strategy of these organisations.

In his new Year address to the faithful, Tony Benn claimed that there were Broad Left organisations operating in 40 unions. Some of these have a pretty shadowy existence: Benn claimed for instance that the Broad Left had won control of the ISTC executive. This body is currently split 10-10 over whether to implement a conference decision and affiliate the union to CND. If there is a Broad Left at all, it must be very broad indeed.

Despite the emptiness of the more grandiose claims, it is true that something is going on in a number of Unions. What are sometimes called the 'New Broad Lefts' undoubtedly do exist and have had some success.

When you start to look a bit closer, the 'newness' of these organisations is a bit difficult to pin down. The best working definition is that in the old-style Broad Lefts of the early 1970s the Communist Party was the dominant force: today it is usually Labour Leftists of various stripes who are making the running.

This difference should not be overstated. In both old and new Broad Lefts the various currents have been able to survive together. Despite their differences, there is no doubt that these currents are united by a common commitment to parliamentary reform in

politics and to capturing positions in the unions.

The various Broad Lefts existing today display very wide differences, but these are not simply along the lines of new and old. It is true that the decline of the CP has meant that their own Broad Left organisations only retain a real coherence when they are based on the control of the bureaucracy, most obviously in TASS. But, as we shall see, the new forces are capable of being just as bureaucratic.

In other unions the differences are not the result of these formal political distinctions. Thus the Broad Left in the POEU, which contains both CP members and Labour Party supporters, produces a regular, and fairly agitational, paper called *Spark*. On the other hand, the Broad Left in USDAW again involving both Labour and CP members, has no base in struggle. Its candidate for President, Jeff Price, states in his election leaflet that he 'works for World Books, a socialist book service for the Labour movement.'

Squabbles and haggles

There are, of course, squabbles between the various currents. In NALGO there are, at the time of writing, effectively three separate Broad Left organisations — dominated by different political tendencies. The situation in other unions is less extreme and concentrates on haggling over candidates and policies. Thus in the EETPU the recent influx of Labour Left elements has led to an orientation towards the union's elaborate machinery for relating to the Labour Party.

But whatever the leading bodies of opinion in these organisations might think they are doing, the situation in which they

operate today is very different from ten years ago.

The classic example of the old-style Broad Lefts was in the AUEW, and in the Engineering Section in particular. The roots of that Broad Left, and the force which carried it to the leadership of the union, lay in the shop steward organisation in the major engineering factories. The structure of the AUEW, with its powerful lay District Committees, its quarterly meeting of shop stewards on a District-wide basis, and the regular election and re-election of all officials, meant that the strategy of winning elections could only succeed if it could mobilise a wide layer of stewards.

But these same shop stewards were, in the conditions of boom and widespread piecework existing in the sixties, people who were regularly in conflict with their managements and who were continually leading small disputes. Thus the Broad Left was, at least in a distorted fashion, a product and a reflection of real struggles.

What was true of the AUEW was also, but to a much lesser extent, true of other Broad Left organisations. Although none of these organisations saw the struggles of workers as anything more than a means of putting pressure on bureaucrats and winning positions for themselves, they were at least in touch with struggles and were, in some cases, capable of leading them.

The most famous example was the struggle against the Industrial Relations Act launched by 1970-74 Tory Government. Opposition to this, including unofficial strike actions involving hundreds of thousands of workers, was organised by the Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions. Dominated, like the Broad Lefts of the time, by the Communist Party, it mobilised more or less the same people as the core of its actions.


The contrast with the New Broad Lefts is stark. Their recent conferences took place against the background of the reality of the Prior and Tebbit attacks on the unions and under the threat of new and harsher Tebbit proposals. It did not discuss them. The Conference took place in the middle of the waterworkers strike. It did not discuss the struggle. What the Conference *did* discuss was the use of union block votes.

The 'newness' of current Broad Left organisation consists essentially of the fact that they are almost totally divorced from real struggles. Consequently they are even more electoralist and even weaker than the old ones.

One of the major reasons for this is of course that the new Broad Lefts are operating in the downturn, and there is little pressure from the rank and file to draw their attention back to reality from their bureaucratic pipe-dreams. But this does not explain their stubborn refusal even to discuss the waterworkers: that derives from the dominating influence of the Labour Left, whose real interest in the unions is a result of their role inside the Labour Party. That is why the block vote is more important than the water workers.

The major currents inside the new Broad Lefts are the Bennites and the supporters of *Militant*. Let us look at what they think they

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are doing.

The Bennites begin from the absolute centrality of the Labour Party. The organising force behind the BLOC conference is the Labour Co-ordinating Committee, a Bennite pressure group. They have had the importance of the trade unions brought forcibly to their attention by their defeats inside the Labour Party. As Peter Rowlands, their trade union expert, put it:

'The Labour Deputy Leader campaign in 1981 also exposed the shallow nature of the left's support at workplace level.'

Events since then have no doubt strengthened that realisation: without some lever in the unions the Bennites will have to wait for ever to capture the Labour Party.

Official movement

Their way of doing this is not particularly new. Their perspective is based on:

'...a rejection of the view (associated particularly with the SWP) that reliance on rank and file activity is sufficient and that the official movement should be spurned. BLs explicitly organise at both levels, recognising that the real divide is between left and right rather than between the official leadership and the rank and file.'

Leaving aside the inaccurate statement about our position for a moment, this is almost word-for-word the same as that of the old Communist Party view. 'Left' and 'Right' in the trade unions are fixed categories which everyone recognises without having to look at what actually happens in the class struggle.

Unfortunately for Peter Rowlands, there really is a difference between the rank and file and the bureaucrats. It is so obvious that he is forced to recognise it. For example:

'In some unions with a left leadership and a democratic, left-dominated structure all the way down to the Branches — for example NUPE — it could be argued that a Broad Left is not required.'

Did all these wonderful things stop NUPE selling out the water workers or the hospital workers? Not for a moment. So presumably there is no need for a Broad Left to stop

workers losing strikes, only to ensure that the 'left' control the unions.

Or again:

'...there are some unions where for tactical reasons left wingers in the leadership do not ally themselves with the BL but nevertheless remain sympathetic to its objectives.'

'Similarly, fulltime officials at branch, district or regional level may be entirely at one with the BL's aims and activities, but are unable to identify themselves openly with it since to do so would invite reprisals.'

Reprisals from whom? From the members? If so, what is the point of being a 'left wing' official if you have to keep it secret from the people you are supposed to represent? Or perhaps from the other bureaucrats? If so, what is the point of being a 'left wing' official if you cannot fight for what you believe in?

As everybody knows, to be a militant worker, active amongst the rank and file, most certainly does invite reprisals. Certainly from the management, who will sack you if they think they can get away with it. Perhaps from trade union bureaucrats, even ones who sympathise with the Broad Left, if they think they can get away with it.

This sort of problem gets no attention from the Bennite left. Despite their occasional phrases about the rank and file their attention is firmly fixed on the bureaucracy. For good reasons, since it is the bureaucracy that wields the sacred block vote at the TUC and at the Labour Party Conference, which is where they are convinced the real action is.

Even if they had better intentions, they would still hit the same problem. In a period when the working class is on the retreat it might be possible to win a few positions by hook or by crook but it is much more difficult to influence the rank and file. So any attempt 'to combine the two' will have to make a choice between the different paths. The Broad Lefts have chosen the path of officialdom.

This is most clearly illustrated by the case of the NUR, in which the Broad Left is a

small and loosely organised body, but which is capable of commanding a majority on some issues on the Executive. The value of that was illustrated last summer when the Executive called for an official strike, saw substantial scabbing from its members, and was overturned by the National Conference after only two days of strike.

This defeat was so obvious that it has sunk into the skulls even of some of the Broad Left. Thus Ian Williams of the NUR Executive argues that they have operated with the idea that:

'Somewhere out there is a raving mass of militants. That is not true. While we have been gaining the apparatus, the apparatus has been losing credibility with the members.'

His solution, although still cast in Labour Party terms, at least acknowledges the real problems:

'It is not my job to switch 170,000 votes which do not exist. The union only has 150,000 members. My job is to get 150,000 NUR members involved. I would rather have 20,000 active members than wave a paper block vote bigger than the total membership. We have to look at the gap that exists between members at the bottom and the Labour Party. We want real votes. We won't win by taking over a bankrupt apparatus and changing its direction.'

Unfortunately, this idea goes down like a lead balloon with most of the Broad Left militants. Their attitude is much closer to the self-delusions of Colin O'Callaghan, editor of the POEU Broad Left Paper *Spark*: 'The working class is up, with its ears pricked, looking for a leadership.'

To the left

The *Militant* supporters have a slightly different rhetoric and theory, but in practice they are just about the same. The *Militant's* view of the trade unions is of a piece with their overall positions. As they put it in 1981:

'With setbacks, interruptions, backsliding there will be a move towards the left in the unions. This will be dictated by the experience of the working class themselves, there is no other way in which they can defend their living standards, their conditions and hours without transforming and changing the set-up in the unions themselves. This move towards the left is inexorable but that doesn't mean to say that there will not be temporary setbacks, vacillations and steps backward. But these in turn will prepare for even bigger moves forward by the workers and a further swing towards the left.'

This inevitable and irresistible development was already well under way when that passage was written: so much so that: 'Even in the unions where the extreme right wing is in control, like the EEPTU and the AUEW, the water is lapping at their feet.'

This process will thus be one of the ways in which the 'Marxists' come to be the leadership of the Labour Party. Once they have won control of the unions, they will be able to use the block vote for their own ends.

The best example of this theory in action is

the CPSA. In this union there is a long established Broad Left in which the *Militant* are the major influence. The Executive has a Broad Left majority and Kevin Roddy, a *Militant* supporter, is President.

The relationship of these electoral successes to the actual state of organisation on the ground is well illustrated by the recent strike by DHSS workers in Birmingham and Oxford. I do not wish to repeat the sorry catalogue of failures by the Broad Left Executive during this strike but to look at how it revealed the strength of their base.

The DHSS Central Records Office at Long Benton in Newcastle is the largest group of CPSA members in the Union; more than 7000 of them. The local Union branch has long been controlled by *Militant*. When the National Executive finally called for a one day strike in support of the Oxford and Birmingham disputes there was a proposal to exclude Long Benton.

The local Broad Left leadership were opposed to picketing the offices on the strike day. To his credit, Roddy travelled to Newcastle to whip them into line and the place was duly picketed. But on the day only a few hundred of the 7000 members came out.

This was not an isolated exception, since on the 22 September TUC Day of Action in support of the health workers only around 200 of the 7000 members had taken action.

It is quite clear that the *Militant* leadership, both locally and nationally, does not rest on an active and committed membership but on electoral manoeuvring.

Colossal frauds

It is the downturn which shows up these two strategies for the colossal frauds that they are, but in principle the same problem would exist even in a situation of greater militancy. You cannot ride the two horses of bureaucratic influence and rank and file activity at the same time because they pull in opposite directions.

If you have a rank and file perspective then you will not be seriously challenging for the leadership of the union until you have the mass of workers behind you. If you go after the bureaucracy then the real membership is forgotten. Their struggles and their ideas become important only in so far as they aid or obstruct your electoral ambitions.

That, after all, is what happened to the strongest of the old Broad Lefts *even in the upturn*. Winning control of the union machine without mass political support led the leadership to turn against its own supporters who were prepared to fight. Without a base they drifted sharply to the right. Hugh Scanlon, Broad Left President of the AUEW, ended up a travelling salesman for the Labour Government's incomes policy. The Broad Left collapsed and the right took control.

That time round there were elements of tragedy, this time there are elements of farce. The new Broad Lefts are so much weaker, so much less the product of struggle, that their posturing as leaderships appears grotesque. But it will have serious consequences in demoralising yet more people, and setting back the chances of building a movement really based on class struggle. □

The balance hasn't changed

As we go to press the outcome of the miners' fight against jobs hangs on the ballot result. David Beecham looks at the state of the class struggle today.

The water workers' strike was a reminder that the distance between overwhelming self-confidence and nagging self-doubt for the Government is still quite thin. The strike punctured the myth of invincibility so assiduously cultivated by Thatcher and Tebbit. The thing was a mess-up from start to finish.

We should bear this in mind when drawing the lessons from the dispute. Some special circumstances led to a rare victory. The victory was not total: once again union officialdom was weak and vacillating. The officials hailed the deal as a breakthrough—and a few days later sold the pass on the council workers' claim. For the water workers themselves the crunch is yet to come on productivity and job loss. Nevertheless in terms of the Tory plans for the public sector the settlement was a major blow.

One of Lenin's famous 'ingredients' for a successful revolution was a divided ruling class. In its own minor way, the water workers' strike bears this out. The Tories were profoundly unsure about their 'cadre' on the employers' side: hence the crude intervention to reduce the original pay offer from 6 percent to 4 percent. Further, the Government sailed into the dispute, despite its previous canniness in avoiding battles with strong groups of workers—miners, dockers, firefighters, power workers—and picking on the weak, such as the civil servants and the hospital workers.

Up until the water dispute, Thatcher and her ministers had either manoeuvred their way round difficult problems, or left them to the management of individual nationalised industries—as in steel or on the railways. There were several political reasons why this was not the case with the National Water Council, namely: distrust of 'Labour' figures on the employers' side; the presence of Tory backwoodsmen among the employers; eagerness to get their hands on a profitable industry with a view to privatisation; overconfidence about defeating a 'moderate' group of workers.

These factors and several other miscalculations led to a series of blunders—including the desperate attempts to fudge the settlement by first saying it was too high and then saying it was no more than was on offer to start with. On this occasion the Tories were in disarray.

Whatever happens to the miners we should not forget the disarray. It was a sign of what can happen in the future. Other critical lessons of the strike were that the relatively small number of militants were very quickly attracted to our ideas, and that

where there was a tradition of local steward organisation, the strike was strong. Conversely, it only just held together in other places because stewards were so bad.

But one relative success in the midst of a wave of defeats does not change the balance of class forces. Both the local authority manual workers and the power workers settled without a fight. And the defeat of the health workers remains the dominant feature of this period. We should not assume that the water workers' strike was just an aberration—it was more important than that—but the legacy of last year has to be set against it—the railways, the docks, the NHS, the miners ... not to mention the continued haemorrhaging of jobs in engineering, going without a fight and often without a protest.

What's been happening to the steel workers is a good example of the general trend. A threatened strike over flexible shift-working (again!) in South Yorkshire looked for a time as though it might force British Steel to concede. The left leadership settled at the last minute for a compromise solution which squashed any suggestion of militancy in the plants faced with a management productivity drive.

At the same time the national unions have been continuing their highly imaginative campaign for a national pay increase as opposed to local bonuses tied to plant productivity and job loss. This campaign consists of telling the local stewards not to sign agreements and calling on BSC to give a national increase.

Local deals

So far the net result is that the Corporation has declared it will not backdate any pay increase—and that if necessary it will impose the deals locally. At Ravenscraig the senior stewards signed a local deal, to be told by the main union, the ISTC, that they would lose their credentials. Whereupon all the other stewards put their names to the deal.

This is a particularly pathetic example of official union 'strategy' and its results: but the paralysis is typical. The mood is duplicated in the car industry—the TGWU campaign against imports of General Motors' 'S' car—and in aerospace, with unions flag-waving while management puts the boot in hard on productivity.

The left bureaucracy is focussing on the People's March II (the TUC's answer to Superman III?), on imports, on alternative programmes, on imports; or anything which does not concern itself directly with the uncomfortable reality.

This is not to say that nobody is fighting. There are still local disputes, mostly defensive, and still demonstrably there are minorities who are very angry. The water dispute itself was about this minority: small groups of workers involved and handfuls of militants trying to organise. Wherever you

look there is still a proportion—sometimes as many as 20 per cent—who want to battle on regardless. And this is true whatever barometer of the class struggle you use: from opposition to the Falklands war to strikes over jobs; from unilateral nuclear disarmament to support for the water workers.

Opinion polls may not be reliable but they show broad movements of opinion and they confirm the impression of the past few months that substantial numbers of workers—hundreds of thousands at the very least—are not prepared to be ground down.

But alongside this, the minorities are often very out of touch with those around them. The weight of opinion is against them and for passivity. Those who want to fight are not able to build a bridge to those without whom the fight is impossible. The water workers helped to inspire the Welsh miners. Small groups inspire other small groups but they are fragmented.

The first week of the miners' strike seems to bear this out. In South Wales the minority was able to win the arguments and pull the coal-field out. In other areas the picture was different. The price of defeat at Kinneil and Snowdown, and the delaying tactics of the local bureaucracy, was enough to hold back large scale solidarity action and allow the national leadership time to regroup and head things off with a ballot.

We do not know how that ballot will go. It is possible that in the intervening period the militant minority will be able to win the argument with the mass of miners. The important point for us is that this time round the South Wales miners' initiative got *less* of an immediate response than it did in 1981. Even in an industry which has taken far less of a hammering than engineering, the militants are still a minority and have to fight for support.

The stakes have risen very high in the meantime. Defence of jobs is a task the size of a mountain. The water workers held together partly because it was the first time out. More experienced strikers might have flinched. For a steel worker the possibility of resistance looks extremely slim. The official union policy is flawed from the start, weak

and vacillating when it comes to the crunch.

The likelihood of keeping your job is remote—waves of sackings in other industries; the international crisis in the industry; the unchallenged propaganda about competitiveness—all combine to create fear. And the same goes for miners, car workers, engineers. The outside world becomes so intimidating, your only instinct is to keep your head down.

The other side of the coin is that if people do decide to fight, they have to go for broke. So there is the possibility of brief upsurges of tremendous militancy, enormous momentary fluctuations in the struggle, sudden outbursts of anger. The problem is that the brush fires can disappear as soon and as quickly as they get alight. The element of confidence is crucial to their success. And it is precisely the element of confidence which has been sapped. Sapped first by years of 'social peacemongering' by the union bureaucracy and the Labour Party.

Then led by wave after wave of redundancies and nowadays frequently undermined by the unreal appeals of 'leaders.' The uncertainty and the political bankruptcy of the union bureaucracy was decisive in pulling the rug from under the health workers. At vital moments throughout the long campaign the officials of the different unions weakened, undermined and obstructed the development of the rank and file in different ways.

Look at reality

In the case of COHSE this involved secret parleying with Tory ministers. In NUPE's case it was the shelving of the all-out strike call. The result was seen at its best—ie worst—on the ambulance side, where one of the most militant sections, having been led up the garden path for the fourth time, turned on the unions in despair. Stewards only just held union organisation together. The cynicism may take years to eradicate.

Readers of this magazine must now be familiar with the exhortation to look reality in the face even if it hurts. At the risk of repeating the obvious: the present grim situation is not the result of a wicked con-

spiracy of the Tories or the media. It is the result of the accumulation of years of lies, pretence, cynical manipulation and deception inside what is often laughably called the labour movement.

You cannot fool people indefinitely. Bombastic appeals whether from the left or the right no longer convince people. A product of this is that many old assumed 'loyalties' break down. Workers no longer follow appeals blindly, still less do they like demagogic leaders who try to pretend nothing's changed.

We should not feel too depressed about this. On the contrary, it creates the opportunity for people to ask the questions which bring them towards revolutionary politics. The old answers do not add up. The old assumptions are undermined. And this means that numbers of individuals—not large as yet, but still significant—are being brought to question why the union officials vacillate and collaborate; why the Labour Party no longer works; why the mass of workers are passive; why the international system is in crisis ... and most important, how do you begin to change the situation.

The cause for optimism at the moment is not that 'things can't get much worse' (they still can, unfortunately)—but that the ideas of socialism from below and the principles of rank and file activity are becoming more relevant to those workers and others looking for answers to what is happening. Socialism through Parliament seems more and more of an illusion and the politics by proxy of the Labour Party a blind alley.

It is quite likely now that the period of set-piece battles of the last 12 months and more is over. There may be isolated flare-ups but our activity has got to take account of the small local disputes which are still occurring in considerable numbers: council workers fighting for regrading, factories with new orders where workers want a share of profits, small closures, sweatshop disputes, sectional walkouts etc etc. Things which may seem mundane but where a real intervention is possible and where the principles of self-activity and genuine, consistent work among the rank and file can be shown to work in practice. □



Picture: JOHN STURROCK (Network)



Racism—a parliamentary pawn

Pete Alexander and Christine Kenney look at new Tory attacks on black people and at Labour attempts to provide an alternative.

In recent months, immigration controls and nationality laws have been back in the headlines. The Tory Nationality Act is now in force and, despite a temporary defeat by the Tory right wing, new Immigration Rules have been brought in. The Labour Party, too, has been looking again at its policy on immigration and nationality and has brought out new policy statements.

The 1981 British Nationality Act which came into operation on 1 January 1983 is, in effect, an attempt to rationalise the impact that immigration laws since 1962, both Tory and Labour, have had on nationality legislation.

It creates three main new categories of British citizenship. 'British citizens' are now the only people with the *right* to live here. In the main, they are people born, registered or naturalised here.

A second class of citizen belongs to the British Dependent Territories — Hong Kong, Bermuda and some other islands in the West Indies, and assorted lumps of rock scattered around the world's oceans — relics of the empire that Britain has not been able to dispose of.

Even before the Act, these people had no right to come here but now, although they still have no rights, they are assured that they will be able to pass on their second class citizenship to their children.

The third category of citizens — British Overseas Citizens — are not so fortunate. They too have no right to come here, but it will be much more difficult for them to pass on their citizenship to their children. By and large, British Overseas Citizens are East African Asians and people of Chinese origin living in Malaysia and Singapore, who may well have no other citizenship. They are subject to the immigration laws of the

countries in which they live and, should they be expelled, will have no right to come to Britain and nowhere else to go.

When the Nationality Act was passed, assurances were given that no one who was entitled to enter the UK and settle here before the passing of the Act would be denied that right subsequently. While that may strictly speaking be true, the Act is certainly going to have very significant effects in the very near future.

Take for example the very common case of a woman born in Pakistan to a father of Pakistani origin who had registered in the UK as a citizen. She is, under the new Act, a British citizen by descent and, although she may have come here has a child and spent most of her life here, if she returns now to Pakistan and has a child there, that child will have no *right* to British citizenship, and hence no *right* to return to Britain with its mother. The child is subject to British immigration controls, which may change at any time.

Stateless child

To make it worse, if she had had the child in a country which does not confer nationality on all persons born there, the child would be stateless with no right to stay where it was, and no right to go anywhere else either.

Indeed, since the coming into force of the Act, not every child born in Britain will be a British citizen. Only the children of British citizens or of those 'settled' here, ie free of restrictions on their stay here, will become British citizens themselves. Children born to overseas students, visitors, workers on work permits or those in breach of their immigration conditions, will not get British nationality, as was previously the case, and could well be stateless.

The inherent racism and sexism of immigration laws has been brought back into focus by Whitelaw's defeat in December by the Tory right wing over his proposed amendments to the Immigration Rules.

Although the Rules were due for revision

in any case as minor amendments made necessary by the Nationality Act had to be incorporated, there was a much more pressing reason behind Whitelaw's frantic attempts to knock the Tory racists back into line.

In 1979, under right wing pressure, the Tories had changed the Immigration Rules to allow only UK citizen women who were born here or had a parent born here to bring in their husbands or fiancés. Men, whether UK citizens or not, born here or not, as long as they were free of immigration restrictions, were allowed to have their wives or fiancées join them. The Rules also made it necessary for the parties to any proposed marriage to have met beforehand — a blatant attack on the arranged marriage customs of many Asians.

However in 1982, three women were given permission to take cases of sexual discrimination in immigration controls to the Human Rights Commission in Strasbourg. Without waiting for the results of these cases (a foregone conclusion, hopefully) Whitelaw decided that the Rules had to be revised to spare the government the embarrassment of being found in contravention of the European Convention on Human Rights.

But the Tory right wing were having none of this. Despite Whitelaw's attempt to pacify them by extending to two years the period within which the Home Office could investigate marriages to ensure they were 'genuine,' and changing the burden of proof so that couples who wished to marry would have to satisfy the immigration authorities that immigration to the UK was not the purpose of the marriage, the racists voted, with the Labour Party, against the Rules.

More confident since the success of their campaign to have immigration controls lifted on the white Falklanders and Gibraltarians, they were in no mood to give in to the Tory wets and encourage more black immigration. In the end, it took Thatcher's talk of a coming general election combined with Whitelaw's increasingly desperate intransigence to get the majority of the December defectors to vote with the rest

of the party in February and thus get the new Rules through — minus, however, the provision for an extended period of 'trial' marriage.

Against this background of rampant Tory racism and a forthcoming general election, the Labour Party has recently produced a new set of policy documents on immigration and nationality which have, in some quarters, been seen as an attempt to develop a non-racist policy.

There are some important improvements on the current state of affairs — the right of every person born in Britain to British nationality, the liberalisation of rules concerning the immigration of dependent relatives and children under 18, the right of entry for foreign husbands and fiancées, removal of 'good character' and language tests from naturalisation applications and a right of appeal against refusal of British citizenship, as well as various administrative improvements.

But it would be a mistake to see this as a radical new departure. Labour's attitude towards immigration is still determined by its two overriding concerns — acting in the best interests of the national economy, and winning votes. A brief look at post-war immigration policy will demonstrate this.

Cabinet minutes indicate that in 1951 Clement Attlee, the Labour Prime Minister, proposed a complete ban on black immigration to Britain, and that Winston Churchill, who succeeded him in office, supported this view. Nevertheless, no change was made in the law which allowed Commonwealth immigrants to enter freely and work in the United Kingdom until the introduction of the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act.

Immigration encouraged

For most of the 1950s, official policy was aimed at actively encouraging Commonwealth immigration as a means of alleviating the labour shortage which developed in certain sectors of the economy. Enoch Powell, in fact, was one of the ministers whose overseas agents recruited black workers for Britain's public services.

The 1962 Act introduced a voucher system for Commonwealth immigrants: 'A' vouchers for those who had jobs to go to; 'B' vouchers for those with skills and qualifications; and a 'C' category, always restricted in number, for unskilled and semi-skilled workers. At the time, the Labour opposition claimed that the Act was inspired by racist sentiment and opposed it 'in principle', Denis Healey providing a 'solemn pledge' that it would be repealed by a Labour Government.

The Labour position in this period was summarised by Arthur Bottomley who told the House of Commons in December 1958: 'We on this side are clear in our attitude towards restricted immigration. I think I speak for my Right Honourable and Honourable friends by saying that we are categorically against it.'

However, by November 1964, the position had changed dramatically. Sir Frank Soskice, the new Labour Government's Front Bench spokesman, told the House:

'There should be no doubt about the

Government's view. The Government are firmly convinced that an effective control is indispensable. That we accept and have always accepted.'

Not only was the 1962 Act not repealed, but the Labour Government rapidly removed any possibility of entry for category 'C' workers and started deportations. Having accepted the need to control immigration, in practice black immigration, Labour policy shifted from bad to worse.

In 1968, the Labour Government had a new Immigration Act pushed through Parliament in just three days. This despicable statute was aimed at removing the right of entry and settlement in Britain from United Kingdom passport holders who lacked a 'close connection' with Britain, including certain Kenya Asians. In future, such people had to obtain a special voucher before being allowed to enter, and these vouchers were to be severely restricted in number.

Just to show that Labour could play the racist game as well as the Tories, they included a clause in the Act that continued



the right of free entry for those, almost all of whom were whites, who had a grandparent born in the UK.

A further Act was introduced in 1969 by Labour which made it obligatory for dependents of Commonwealth immigrants to obtain an entry certificate before coming to Britain, thereby ensuring lengthy delays and increased hardship while people queued to join their families.

The Tories' 1971 Immigration Act, which still controls immigration to the UK, was opposed by Labour, who promised its repeal. James Callaghan said that it gave 'a badge of respectability to prejudice', but — the same old story — Labour went on to implement the Act for the next five years they spent in office. The Act was an attempt to stop virtually all primary black immigration and to ensure that all future labour obtained from abroad would be on the *Giastarbeiter* basis, where workers would come on work permits for a limited period and without the rights of immigrant settlers.

To make matters worse, the 1971 Act served as a basis for Labour's Green Paper

on Nationality, which was, in turn used to lend added credibility to the Tories' new Nationality Act.

From a policy of opposition to restrictions on immigration in the late 50's and early 60's, the Labour Party has followed the Tories in acceding to more and more restrictions. We need to ask why this change took place, and what is the significance of Labour's new policy statement.

The nearest that Labour have come to an explanation of their policy change in the 1960's was provided by Roy Hattersley in a speech made in March 1965. He began by explaining that he now thought that he and other Labour politicians had been wrong to vote against the 1962 Act, and went on to state:

'I now believe that there are social as well as economic arguments and I believe that unrestricted immigration can only produce additional suffering and additional hardship unless some kind of limitation is imposed and continued ... We must impose a test which tries to analyse which immigrants ... are most likely to be assimilated in our national life.'

In other words, Labour had swallowed the racist arguments which they (and the Tories) had previously rejected. Certainly, racist propaganda was a factor and events like the Nottingham and Notting Hill riots of 1958 were exploited by the racials. However, agitation for controls had existed throughout the 1950's. What transformed the situation was the development of cracks in the system and the need to look for scapegoats.

Housing problems

During the 1960's, the problems were in housing rather than employment. There were still shortages of labour in some sectors, which is why the voucher system was introduced. Eventually, however, the racist arguments became sufficiently pervasive for Labour to find it necessary to make concessions in order to retain their electoral support among white workers. A reformist party cannot afford principles, even if individual members retain them.

The 1964 election campaign in Smethwick demonstrated the Tories' ability to win working class votes on the basis of racism and it had a profound effect on Labour. Even before the election, the incumbent Labour MP, Patrick Gordon Walker, had been moved to comment: 'This is a British country with British standards of behaviour. The British must come first.'

In the 1966 elections, even though immigration played a less prominent role, the IWA (GB) advised their supporters to withdraw their votes from two of Birmingham's Labour MPs because they had a bad record on immigration, with the effect that their majority declined in a General Election where there was an overall swing to Labour.

In 1968, the Wilson government, beset by a multitude of economic and political problems, went even further on the question of the Kenyan Asians than the Tories, who were demanding a policy of phased entry. With the Gallup poll giving the Tories a record 22½ percent lead and a number of by-

elections pending, Labour pushed to secure its base among the more backward sections of white workers. Richard Crossman, in explaining his support for the proposals, simply comments: 'I'm an MP for a constituency in the Midlands where racialism is a powerful force.' (*Diary* 13.2.68.)

In considering Labour's new policy document it is clear that the party is intent on removing the more overtly racist and inhumane elements of the present legislation while retaining the block on new primary immigration. Hattersley, who would change his mind on almost anything to win popular support, now says that Labour was wrong to rush the 1968 Act through Parliament (*Guardian* 8.4.81).

Despite this radical-sounding denunciation of previous policy, Labour in no way intend to return to the pre-1968 situation. Although they propose to restore British citizenship to East African Asians, they have made no promise in regard to similar rights for other UK passport holders, such as an estimated 130,000 Malaysians whose only passport is British but now conveys no rights at all.

In one important respect Labour propose to introduce *increased* restrictions. They state that: 'When we leave the EEC ... the admission for employment of workers of other EEC countries will end.'

The numbers game

Another favourite claim of the Labour Party is that: 'Immigration must no longer be debated as a numbers' game about black people.' (*Policy Statement*.)

But on radio and in the House of Commons, Hattersley has tried to allay the racists' fears by emphasising that the new policy would only lead to a small increase in immigration. Which is true. The two and a half million British Dependent Territories Citizens in Hong Kong (former Citizens of the UK and Colonies) will certainly be deprived of any right of abode in Britain. Here the racism which Labour claims to have eradicated comes back into focus, for Labour will not remove the newly acquired rights to full citizenship of the Gibraltarians and Falklanders whose homes are also in the 'Dependent Territories.'

And racism exists elsewhere in the policy. One of the chief complaints about the 1971 Immigration Act was that it introduced the notion of 'patriality' which included the right of abode in this country for people whose grandparents were born in Britain. This obviously included a large number of people from the old (white) Commonwealth countries, but very few from the New (black) Commonwealth. While the term 'patriality' was abolished by the 1982 Nationality Act, the substance remains, yet Labour's new statement contains no proposal to change this position.

But the most significant sentence of the immigration policy statement comes in a section on 'principles':

'Immigration policy will continue to control, as part of economic planning, the entry of those who wish to come to work in Britain, but do not have over-riding claims of family life or the need for

asylum.'

In the programme they state: 'In the near future it will not be possible for the economy to provide jobs for significant numbers of workers from overseas.' So, in future, immigration is to be determined by the needs of British capitalism. The rights of workers to seek employment where the conditions of service are best is of no consequence. Divisions between the working class of different countries are to be promoted. 'British jobs for British workers' is to be the order of the day. Labour's identification with the 'national interest' leads them, inexorably, to the promotion of immigration policies which are racially divisive and anti-working class.

The core of Labour's immigration and nationality policy is still rotten, even if there has been a superficial improvement. Underneath the anti-racist veneer, the substantial restrictions introduced during the last



twenty years are left unchallenged. So what has been the point of the new policy, and why has it been adopted now?

Undoubtedly, many of the Labour Party members who have helped develop this policy are motivated by a genuine desire to oppose racism, a desire engendered by campaigns that have developed, for the most part, outside the Labour Party. They have been forced to take note of the resistance to racism, particularly that coming from blacks themselves. But there is another, more important reason. Labour is now more concerned about winning the black vote than the racist vote. At a recent Campaign Against Racist Laws conference, John Tilley, a Labour MP, was quite open in putting forward this position.

In 1966, only 1.7 percent of the population had come from the New Commonwealth and Pakistan. By 1981, the proportion had risen to 4.1 percent. Furthermore, although proportionally more whites than blacks were registered as voters, surveys indicate that the registered black vote increased from 57 percent to 74 percent between 1974 and 1979. In addition a greater proportion of blacks than whites turned out to vote. In 1979, in the twenty marginal constituencies where the black vote was of greatest significance, the average turnout among Asians was 79 percent compared with 61 percent for others, including whites.

The black vote in the key marginals will clearly be of great importance in the next election, and while it appears that about 75 percent of blacks support Labour, this

cannot be taken for granted.

Race relations and immigration are extremely important issues among blacks. Although whites placed it only 7th out of a list of 14 issues in a 1979 survey, it was placed 2nd by Asians and 4th by Afro-Caribbeans — prices, unemployment and education being the other vote-catching matters.

Several points must be made in conclusion. Immigration policy is an attempt to resolve the contradiction between a world economy and its nationally based political units. There is a requirement for cheap labour, but a need, heightened in periods of crisis, to secure the loyalty of the local working class. Economic arguments for immigration controls (and repatriation) — at their crudest, the view that fewer immigrants would mean fewer unemployed — are absolute nonsense. Explicitly or implicitly, controls are concerned with winning the allegiance of the local working class to the 'national interest.' Such racism is the very antithesis of socialist internationalism.

The Labour Party's central justification for immigration controls is its desire to plan the national economy. But planning will only become possible when the means of production are in the hands of the working class.

While the rule of capitalism dominates society, crises will occur, and crises will encourage racialism.

Socialist test

Challenging the development of racial prejudice amongst workers and rejecting every national particularism is a test of every socialist and socialist organisation in Britain today. The Labour Party has failed, and it will continue to fail because it sets as its goal, not the overthrow of capitalism, but the winning of votes and the reform of the system.

Especially in matters of immigration policy Labour cannot be trusted. Their record is unambiguous.

Opposition to the 1962 Act, but introduction of the stricter 1968 Act when returned to government. Opposition to the 1971 Act, but its implementation and the production of the 1977 Green Paper when in office.

It is not difficult to imagine a Labour government faced with 20 percent unemployment making further concessions to the racists.

Organisation and activity independent of the Labour Party will be necessary to prevent them from renegeing on their own limited proposed immigration reforms.

* Quotes in Paul Foot's *Immigration and Race in British Politics* 1965, still the best book on the subject. A good and more recent analysis is to be found in two articles by A. Sivanandan republished in *A Different Hunger: Writings on Black Resistance* 1982. Also worth reading are two articles by Joanna Rolla on the historical aspects in *International Socialism* 1:96 and 1:97 (1977). Information on blacks and elections comes from two reports produced by the Commission for Racial Equality and published in 1974 and 1979. □

FIGHTING THE BOMB

A canvass isn't a campaign

The CND leadership has gone overboard on winning 'public opinion'. Martin Roiser looks at the polls and the conclusions we can draw from them.

Last Autumn a Gallup poll showed that 58 percent of the electorate was opposed to cruise missiles and 56 percent was opposed to Trident. This implied considerable support from the centre ground of political opinion.

CND's emphasis has shifted away from massive ban-the-bomb demonstrations. Instead members are being asked to do a country-wide 'peace canvass' aimed at moving even more public opinion towards the campaign's most acceptable demands.

But public opinion is a deceptive ally. A thorough examination of the figures shows that only some of CND's demands are endorsed by the polls. And even if they all were there is no indication that the figures alone would impress the government.

For two years a majority of public opinion has opposed the siting of cruise missiles in this country. In 1980 49 percent were in favour and 44 percent opposed. But by 1981 41 percent were in favour and 49 percent opposed. In 1982 31 percent were in favour and 58 percent opposed. Finally in January 1983 only 27 percent were in favour and a massive 61 percent were opposed. Figures for Trident are similar but majority opposition goes right back to 1980. This impressive and increasing level of opposition obviously reflects the campaigns waged both by CND and the women of Greenham Common.

Less than half this opposition is unilateralist. In 1980 Gallup reported that 23 percent thought Britain should 'give up relying on nuclear weapons for defence no matter what other countries decide'. This rose to 33 percent in 1981 and fell to 29 percent in 1982. Marplan reported 31 percent in 1982 and in January 1983 Marplan and MORI reported 21 percent and 23 percent respectively. The recent decline in unilateralist opinion reflects CND's neglect of their central demand. The last national demonstration was in June 1982, and was called under the non-specific slogan of 'Europe demands a future'.

It is particularly ominous that anti-cruise sentiment can rise while unilateralism declines. The Armed Forces Minister, Peter Blaker, was swift to tell television viewers last Autumn that an increasing majority of the country was in favour of nuclear deterrence. And although that was not then clear from the data it is now undeniable.

AND NOW THE RESULTS OF THAT LATEST OPINION POLL IN FULL...



Opposition to NATO is a policy repeatedly endorsed by CND annual conferences and clearly required by the campaign's constitution. However it is kept pretty quiet by the leadership. One reason for this reticence can be found in an ORC poll carried out in early 1982 which showed that only 18 percent of electors wished Britain to withdraw from NATO. But, on the other hand, the government's policy of increasing Britain's financial contribution to NATO was endorsed by an even smaller 9 percent in a 1981 MORI poll.

The much publicised policy of multilateral disarmament has been rarely polled. However the World Disarmament Campaign commissioned a poll in which a question was asked concerning 'an immediate halt to the manufacture and installation of nuclear weapons throughout the world as the first step towards international disarmament'. Sixty five percent supported this policy while 22 percent opposed it.

Campaigning strength

Asked what are the most important problems facing the country, people have generally placed unemployment, law and order and inflation ahead of nuclear or disarmament and defence issues. However, recent evidence is that defence and disarmament issues are rising in relative importance.

There are considerable gender and class differences in nuclear attitudes. A substantially greater percentage of women than men are opposed to cruise, Trident and nuclear bases. On the issue of unilateralism there is no consistent difference between male and female views.

There is also a difference in class attitudes to nuclear weapons. Working class respondents record between 8 percent and 12 percent more opposition to cruise, Trident and nuclear bases than do middle and upper class respondents. In its account of the 1982 Gallup poll *Sanity* concluded: 'CND backing is not

particularly outstanding among the "B" group which comprises people like senior executives not at their career zenith, vicars, secondary school heads, university lecturers, accountants, surveyors and business people employing between five and 24 people. But belief in CND policy is massive in the socio-economic groups C1, C2, D and E...' In short, CND has much more support from the working class than the middle class.

Although several of CND's demands do not achieve poll majorities the figures are impressively large. CND policies have much wider public endorsement than would be gained for any positive statement about trade unions or any enlightened opinion about law and order.

The figures should not convince CND that they are winning the struggle against nuclear weapons. Public opinion, by itself, does not influence anything.

Not only are nuclear issues given a relatively low priority but recent poll findings indicate that opinions on these issues do not even influence the way people vote. Fully one quarter of those opposed to cruise intend to vote Tory and a smaller proportion intend to vote SDP/Liberal. These parties do not even promise anything in the way of nuclear disarmament.

Even more damaging to the argument that opinion polls have influence is the fact that there are a number of issues which regularly return large anti-government poll majorities without any noticeable effect on policy. For instance, the withdrawal of troops from Northern Ireland has been supported by about 55 percent of the electorate for a number of years, with only about 30 percent wishing them to stay. The figures are in fact strikingly similar to those on cruise missiles. The withdrawal of Britain from the Common Market has been supported by about 50 percent of electors with only about 20 percent wishing membership to continue, for about 15 years. (The electorate was briefly pro-market about the time of the referendum!)

The Tories feel little pressure on these issues. Traditionally they have treated opinion polls lightly and the idea of extending opinion polls into referenda has been dismissed as unconstitutional. Heseltine dropped the idea of holding local referenda on rates rises.

Early this year Douglas Hird ruled out the idea of holding a referendum on cruise

55% OF THE POPULATION ARE AGAINST TRIDENT, BUT GIVEN THE CHOICE BETWEEN A CRUISE IN THE MEX, OR A CRUISE IN THE BACK GARDEN MOST PEOPLE CHOSE THE LATTER...



missiles. It would depend too much on how the question was worded, he said. (In fact it would be extremely difficult to phrase cruise into acceptability.) In any case, he concluded, the people elected the government and it was their job to govern. So much for opinion polls and referenda as sources of influence.

The reason for the Tories' disquiet is not to be found in the poll figures, though these no doubt reinforce their fears. It is to be found in the campaigning strength of CND which has caused the changes in opinion which the polls merely reflect.

The Tories are worried because CND can mobilise 250,000 on the streets of London, because it can turn out leafletters on every high street in the land. They are more worried that CND may provide a focus of opposition to a wider range of government policy and that it might build active links with the trade union movement. It might upset the passive and patriotic mood of the country.

Relatively important

The Tories are aware that the spending of billions on nuclear weapons is integral to their political outlook. They know it is nonsense to be anti-cruise and pro-Tory. They are worried that people in CND will also make that connection and widen their concerns from armaments to health and education cuts and even further.

The CND leadership is doing everything it can to prevent such connections being made. They want an organisation broad in membership and narrow in outlook. To this end they have chosen to channel their members' energies into the 'Peace Canvass'.

CND members are being asked to go from door to door obtaining answers to questions about cruise, Trident, American bases, non-nuclear defence and electoral importance. Even the questions are fudged. NATO is not mentioned and unilateralism is watered down to: 'Do you think that this country needs nuclear weapons for its defence?'

There is nothing wrong with canvassing, but the aim should be to persuade and mobilise. It is rather pointless to do a recount of a poll much better conducted by the professional agencies. As presently conceived the peace canvass is a passive and abstract exercise. The advice from CND runs: 'The first task of the canvasser is to listen...canvassing is asking people about their opinions...the more people think about these questions the more they will come to support us.'



Ironically it may fail even to change opinion. Past experience shows that active campaigning is the way to influence opinion polls.

A further criticism is that the Peace Canvass locates the argument firmly on the doorstep and not in the workplace. CND opinions are thus likely to be cast as matters of personal morality not linked to the collective strength of the union. The idea of doing the canvass at the factory gate is not mentioned in CND's circulars.

The Peace Canvass has been adopted by the CND leadership because a General Election is round the corner. It is aimed, quite reasonably, to ensure that nuclear issues will feature highly in the election. However, it is phrased so as not to embarrass a Labour Party committed to staying in NATO and about to exclude unilateralism from its manifesto.

At the same time it will divert CND members from more 'militant activities'. The Labour Party, moving rapidly to the right, would prefer to avoid a large unilateralist demonstration in the pre-election period. Militant tactics against cruise will also be avoided. After all, dancing on missile bunkers and invading prisons is distinctly extra-parliamentary. This might explain why CND is leaving the women of Greenham Common to do all the hard work in the anti-cruise campaign. The reason why CND's recent tactics so closely follow the electoral interests of the Labour Party may be found in the very large preponderance of Labour Party members on CND's national council

and executive.

While CND is on the doorstep talking about cruise and Trident, the government spokesmen are already on the television and the front pages attacking unilateralism or 'one-sided disarmament'. Like it or not this is the crucial topic of the nuclear debate. If CND talks merely about cruise and Trident it will just be argued off the stage. Once the Tories have rammed home the argument about unilateralism the body of opinion against cruise, which is loose-knit in any event, will be shattered. The CND leadership have subordinated the defence of their key policy to a misplaced faith in majority public opinion.

A ray of hope in all this is that the active membership of CND appears to be made of better stuff than the leadership. A survey of the 6 June demonstration showed that 94 percent of the marchers were unilateralists, 88 percent were opposed to the Falklands war, 68 percent wanted to get Britain out of NATO, and 63 percent were opposed to increasing conventional weapons. These people are unlikely to be impressed by the respectably-phrased Peace Canvass or the milk-and-water multilateralism of *Sanity* magazine.

CND is far too important a movement to be thrown away on public opinion politics and electoral manoeuvring. Its tradition of mass active campaigning must be re-asserted. It must not be allowed to renege on unilateralism and opposition to NATO. And its focus must be steered from the doorstep to the workplace. □

THIS GRAPH SHOWS HOW MUCH I GET PAID FOR TALKING RUBBISH...



Search for respectability

The search for the 'broadest possible unity' dominates CND. Chris Stephenson looks at their arguments.

Nothing illustrates better the attempt to broaden CND than its official magazine *Sanity*. This was for years an unspectacular bi-monthly magazine which went out to the members. The massive growth of CND prompted a rethink and at the end of last year it was relaunched in a blaze of publicity.

The idea was that the new monthly would have a broad popular appeal and sell to a wide audience. It was the standard bearer of the 'broadest popular unity' approach.

To that end the magazine has been based around using the names of famous people. Roughly one third of the major articles in the first four issues were about the famous. Some were even written by them.

In terms of the conventional wisdom of the bourgeois press this approach ought to ensure high sales. Writing about famous people is after all the mainstay of the popular press, and it sells papers. The trouble is that it has not worked with *Sanity*.

What has happened is that paid circulation has declined in every issue since the relaunch and is now not high enough to make commercial distribution economically viable. At the same time, it has failed to catch on with the membership. Half of local CND groups do not even take a single copy.

Half the problem lies with the sort of famous people that the magazine concentrates on. These can be divided into two groups: entertainers who support CND and politicians who don't. The latter group includes David Steel, David Owen and Field Marshal Lord Carver. They are all opposed to the basic reason for CND's existence: the fight for unilateral nuclear disarmament. One person who refused to be interviewed was Michael Foot: the old unilateralist campaigner no doubt thinks that anything he might say as Leader of the Labour Party would start another internal row.

All of these concessions to moderate opinion fit in quite well with the current CND leadership's idea that the way to build the campaign is by watering down the demands; keeping quiet about NATO for instance, in order to win 'a majority.'

The other half of the explanation for the failure of *Sanity* follows directly from that: if you think that CND has made it as a part of respectable opinion then you produce a magazine which apes the main organs of respectable opinion.

The trouble is that CND only exists because it is an oppositional campaign. It depends for what success it has on its ability to get dedicated volunteers to organise its mass actions. Such people do not want to read an alternative version of the bourgeois press: if they want to read about famous people there are hundreds of other magazines which do that already, rather better than *Sanity*.

That is why the local CND groups do not use *Sanity*; it is not an appropriate magazine for a campaigning movement. One of the most notable things which is *not* in the magazine is any attention to action. The massive 12 December demonstration at Greenham Common was not even mentioned in the issues of *Sanity* running up to the mobilisation.

Broadest support

The only mention of the action was a statement from one of the Greenham Common women advocating non-violent direct action. This was put in quotes to make sure it was seen as a piece of reporting and not an editorial call to action.

What is more, the people who are active against the bomb have a wide range of different opinions and are often quite keen to argue about them. *Sanity* carries no discussion of the strategy and tactics of CND; no discussion of how to widen and strengthen support; no discussion of how to win.

The failures of *Sanity* are not the result of the mistakes or lack of talent by the people who produce it. They illustrate the central problem of the current strategy.

The idea of winning the broadest possible support is an attractive and influential one. After all, the bomb is such a serious question that surely it is better to forget about secondary questions like class and all work together. Once we have got rid of the bomb then we can tackle the minor issues.

The trouble with this road is that it leads to defeat. The bomb is supported by powerful interests in our society, and they support it



One of *Sanity*'s famous people, Field Marshal Sir Michael Carver, seen here on the right with some of his buddies.

Sanity

Voice of CND

for good reasons. It is important to their continued hold on their wealth and power. Any opposition to the bomb has to cut against the grain. No amount of trimming will ever make it respectable enough to be acceptable.

Because it has to work against the dominant interests in society, and their media, any such movement has to rely on active supporters who are convinced that the campaign is correct. They are the people who have the dedication and determination to stand out against the pressures of pro-bomb propaganda and make quite considerable personal sacrifices to keep the campaign going. That is why the vast majority of activists in the campaign, and even those who come on demonstrations, are so determinedly unilateralist and anti-NATO.

No oppositional campaign can ever be built without such people. It is they, and not 'public opinion' that actually make sure that the coaches are there on the day of the big demo. It is they, and not public opinion, that keep the campaign alive.

The search for respectability means watering down the aims of the campaign. It means that in order to get the token support of people who do not agree with the campaign you drop its central demands. In order not to frighten respectable opinion, you soft-pedal on the activity of the campaign.

The sum result of all the trimming is to leave the activists with a growing sense of frustration. They see the ideas they believe in being traded off to win the 'support' of politicians whose whole record proves they will never fight the bomb. They see their opposition to war machines being traded off to get the support for some brutal military murderer who only wants a slightly different war machine. They find it more and more difficult to think of ways of keeping a local group together without any real sort of focus

for their activity.

The search for respectable and unreliable allies leads slowly but surely to losing the unrespectable and the reliable who are vital to building the campaign. Go to any big CND rally. The audience will listen in polite silence to some eminent non-entity; they will cheer to the echo calls for direct action.

This search for the broadest possible unity is not a new idea. It is a version of what is called a 'popular front.' If we look at an earlier attempt to build such a movement on a grand scale, we can see just how disastrous it can be.

Demoralise defenders

In Spain in 1936 a 'popular front' government was elected. It soon faced a military coup organised by General Franco. The most determined opponents of the coup were the workers and peasants of Spain, who took over the factories and land in order to use them for their own defence.

The popular front government had other ideas. In the interests of the broadest possible unity they wanted to win the support of some of those very owners of the factories and the land who had just been shown the door. There was a long struggle between the government and its most determined defenders over how to fight Franco. It was ended by the government using armed forces to hand the factories and land back to their respectable owners.

Not only did this 'civil war in the rear' siphon off desperately needed resources for the *real* civil war against Franco but it also demoralised the best defenders of the government. The few factory and land-owners were no substitute for the energy and dedication of the workers and peasants, and they usually took the chance to defect to

Franco as soon as they could get away with it. And, as everybody knows, the popular front went down to defeat.

Things are not yet that disastrous with the struggle against the bomb, but there is a real danger that exactly the same sort of thing will happen. The stress on respectability and on the broadest possible unity will prevent the energy and enthusiasm of those who really do oppose the bomb being utilised.

You only have to think about what *Sanity* could be like in order to see how true this is. Instead of a glossy magazine devoted to the famous it would be a magazine that the members could use. It would carry the arguments for CND rather than interviewing those who are against it. Then it could be sold to people who are hesitating on the brink of commitment.

It would see its major role as acting as a focus for the activity against the bomb. Then it could be useful to the activists in the campaign trying to build support for a demonstration or picket.

It would not be frightened of debating the very real differences of opinion inside the movement because that would make it essential reading for everyone who was concerned to find a strategy for *stopping* the bomb.

To argue this is not to argue against 'unity.' Of course CND needs all the allies it can get. The question is who those allies should be and what they will do. Take Field Marshal Lord Carver. What is he actually going to *do* about fighting the bomb? What do we know about his general views?

The soldier of today

We know, for example, that he once wrote a foreword to a book which said: 'This book is written for the soldier of today to help him prepare for the operations of tomorrow.' The book was by one General Frank Kitson and is a handbook designed to teach 'counter-insurgency.' It is called *Low Intensity Operations*. It talks specifically about waging war at home; ie in mainland Britain.

We know, then, that this is an ally who thinks it important that the army learn the techniques which they could use to arrest the likes of the CND membership.

CND then has a choice: it can try to win allies whose loyalty is to keeping things the way they are, or it can try to win allies who, in however a confused a way and at however low a level, are actually fighting to change things. It can have Lord Carver. Or it can have the miners. It can't have both because the two are natural enemies. They can't and won't stop fighting each other just to stop the bomb because they are different classes of people and their whole lives are bound up in struggling, now openly, now silently, against each other.

Those other allies are there to be won. All the evidence suggests that when Lord Carver speaks against the bomb he speaks at best as an isolated eccentric, at worst as a man who sees spending money on Trident as a diversion from the real task of preparing for a civil war in Britain. And all the evidence suggests that when a trade union votes to affiliate to CND it reflects substantial opinion of the people that it represents. □

To win those other allies to active support is a big job. It needs another direction for CND and a different sort of *Sanity*. The space that is devoted today to stars and soldiers needs to be devoted to water workers and miners. It needs to speak their

language and reflect their concerns and struggles.

And without such supporters, no matter what the opinion polls say, and no matter how much publicity is won, CND will lose the fight to stop the bomb. □

Women's suffrage at war

The idea that women are especially opposed to war has considerable support in the anti-bomb movement. The Suffrage Movement was the largest organised women's movement this country has seen. **Marta Wöhrle** looks at how they split when confronted with the First World War and how effective opposition developed in the working class.

The Suffrage movement was thrust down two opposing but equally destructive blind alleys. On the one hand there was an arm of the movement led by Christabel and Emmeline Pankhurst—the 'Suffragettes'—that dissolved into a jingoistic support for the war and nationalist fervour. On the other, there were the women's and socialist groups spearheaded by Mrs Fawcett's propagandist National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies and Sylvia Pankhurst's East London Federation, the 'Suffragists.' They both adopted a pacifist position that divorced the war from any real criticism of capitalism.

The Suffragettes and Suffragists were already divided over the correct way of fighting for the vote. Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst's Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) advocated the tactic of civil disobedience. The WSPU's 'militant' protest consisted of demonstrations, window breaking, stone throwing and hunger strikes, but although it helped to make women's suffrage an issue in the House of Commons it never once challenged the system. Suffragettes had narrowed their demands down to the vote and nothing but the vote.

The radical Suffragists, like Selina Cooper, saw enfranchisement as a part of a wider reaching feminist and socialist programme. But as the war progressed the radical suffragists became an increasingly weaker voice and arguments for pacifism elbowed aside the cause of working class women.

When war broke out the Pankhursts and Mrs Fawcett and Helena Swanwick in the National Union gave up all their work for the vote. The only groups to continue with the cause of women's suffrage were the Women's Freedom League and Sylvia Pankhurst's East London Federation, with the latter becoming increasingly involved

with community work.

Christabel Pankhurst made the position of the Suffragettes clear. The logic of their interpretation of the tactic of civil disobedience led them to argue that they couldn't be pacifists in the war any more than they could in the struggle for the vote. It was completely consistent with the elitism cultivated during the last decade that they should turn their backs on working class women and then ignore suffering caused by a war which they welcomed with gusto. She wrote:

'This was national militancy. As Suffragettes we could not be pacifists at any price. Mother and I declared support for our country. We declared an armistice with the government and suspended militancy for the duration of the war.'

Annie Kenney, almost the only working class woman close to the decision-making leadership of the Suffragettes, and Christabel offered their services to the government and embarked on a national speaking tour in support of the war effort. Mrs Pankhurst, meanwhile, called for conscription of men and argued that women should replace them in the munition factories.

National effort

Suffragettes in London set up the Women's Service Bureau to provide information about jobs for women thrown out of work by the war crisis and suggestions for other women on how they could help the national effort. Their support for the war was based on the belief that once a democracy resting on the victory of the allies was won, women could then bring about a real peace. Once women were a partner in the decision-making processes of British capitalism the likelihood of violence and war would disappear. As Mrs Pankhurst put it:

'We believe that under the joint rule of enfranchised women and men, the nations of the world will, owing to women's influence and authority, find a way of reconciling the claims of peace and honour and of regulating international relations without bloodshed. We nonetheless believe that Great Britain should take part in the war and, with that patriotism which has nerved women to endure the torture in prison cells for the national good, we ardently desire that our country shall be victorious — this is because we hold that the existence of small nationalities is at stake, and that the status of France and Great Britain is involved. It will be the future task of women, and only they can perform it, to



**From opposition to the government
on the vote...**

ensure that the present world tragedy and the peril in which it places civilisation, shall not be repeated.'

The Pankhursts argued that if the Suffragettes abandoned their programmes of civil disobedience for the duration of the war and redirected their energies for the national effort they would be duly rewarded by the vote. And so they embarked on a national propaganda campaign — a campaign that was often almost a caricature of the government's own national chauvinism. Annie Kenney described the nature of the war effort propaganda:

'We held gigantic meetings all over the country. Both men and women munitions workers were appealed to, and the danger of a munition strike, a coal strike and a dockyard strike were explained ... We called it the Anti-Bolshevist campaign.'

The position of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies was less clear cut. In the decade before the First World War they had opposed the militant Pankhursts arguing that stone throwing, arrests and disruption were nothing more than stunts. The National Union criticised the war but their criticism was based on the belief that women were the natural peacemakers and had a moral obligation to distance themselves from all violence.

Despite the links that had been cultivated between the radical suffragists and the working class women of the north of England, few members of the National Union could appreciate that the working class would be the real losers in the war. Eventually the National Union opted for a position of the least resistance and settled for work that would alleviate some of the



...to national chauvinism against the Germans

suffering caused by the war.

Throughout the course of the war they did Red Cross work and opened soldiers' canteens and women's workshops to teach welding and other skills demanded by wartime industry.

But by 1915 there was a split in the National Union. The national officers, including the radical suffragist from Manchester, Helena Swanwick, wanted to adopt a more positive pacifist position and they resigned from the National Union to form the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.

Ada Neild Chew, a member of the National Union spoke for all pacifist Suffragists when she criticised the jingoistic Pankhursts and their followers. They felt that while they could only condemn the tactic of direct action in the struggle for the vote they could not blame their men for fighting for a just cause. She wrote:

'The militant section of the movement would without doubt place itself in the trenches quite cheerfully, if allowed ...

This is an entirely logical attitude strictly in line with its attitude before the war. It always glorified the power of the primitive knock on the nose in preference to a more humane appeal to reason ... The non-militants — so-called — though bitterly repudiating militancy for women, are as ardent in their support of militancy for men as their more consistent and logical militant sisters.'

This position — that women could not engage in direct action although it was perfectly acceptable that men could if the national interest demanded it — was founded on Victorian ideology and bourgeois feminism.

Christabel and Mrs Pankhurst made nationalist propaganda and recruitment their primary objective. *Suffragette* changed its name to *Britannia* in October 1915. Many Suffragettes were among those most eager to hand out white feathers, whilst Mrs Pankhurst called on men to go into war saying, 'to give one's life for a great cause, is a splendid thing.'

Class distinctions

The Suffragettes increasingly lost touch with their former allies and supporters in the Labour Party and became blind to the realities of class society. Defending why the nation should be put on rations as the soldiers were, Christabel Pankhurst argued that if there were no 'class distinctions on the front, why should there be class distinctions at home where the question of bread and butter is concerned?' Any soldier could have told her class distinctions were far from being ignored in the trenches.

Lloyd George, who had maintained a staunch opposition to the issue of women's right to the vote and whom Christabel had once described as the most bitter and dangerous enemy of women, recognised the Pankhursts as useful political allies.

He encouraged Mrs Pankhurst (with the generous grant of £2000 from the Ministry of Munitions) to organise a new style of Suffragette demonstration on the pre-war model but on the theme of 'Women's Right



to Serve.' It was linked in Pankhurst-style to a:

'Vigorous prosecution of the war so that all danger of a compromise peace may be averted and the allies be in a position to impose upon Germany and the nations who have helped to commit criminal and murderous assault on Europe, a victorious and therefore, permanent peace.'

The very methods of the WSPU's form of direct action were now being used to gather support for the government and the war.

The Independent Labour Party (ILP) was the only group to oppose the war because it was imperialist. The bulk of the members shared Hannah Mitchell's view that 'war is the main struggle for power, territory or trade, to be fought by the workers who are the losers.'

But their analysis of the war was only formal and in practice they opted for a pacifist position. They formed the No Conscription Fellowship and helped conscientious objectors and acted as a pressure group on the government. The leaders of the No Conscription Fellowship, Clifford Allen and Fenner Brockway, disappeared into prison and were replaced by older men. When they too were arrested the women took over and ran it on behalf of men. But there were few links made between the No Conscription Fellowship and the rise of anti-war activity in the industrial areas of the north.

Sylvia Pankhurst with her newly formed Workers Suffrage Federation resolutely opposed the war. She argued against the National Register for War Work and the Federation advised women to refuse to register as a protest against the war and conscription. If women couldn't avoid the register she told them to insist on equal pay with men. She had by now drifted completely away from the politics of her mother and sister and she wrote of how the WSPU had now departed from the Suffragette movement giving:

'Its energies wholly to the prosecution of the war, it rushed to a furious extreme, its chauvinism was unexampled amongst all other women's societies.'

But Sylvia Pankhurst became increasingly pessimistic. She lost faith in working class

protest. As the war progressed she felt that she could do little more than alleviate some of the suffering caused by the crisis. Although a committed socialist, she failed to see beyond her own work in the East End, and the protests of the conscientious objectors, to the working class opposition to the war and the increasing politicisation of the rank and file movements. Nowhere in her book, *Suffragette Movement*, does she make any reference to the growing independent working class leadership and some of the effective organised challenges to the war and the toll it was taking on workers' lives and living standards.

Many workers were caught up in the jingoistic tide and the movement was in disarray. But out of the rank and file of the socialist and trade union organisations a new independent leadership grew up. The pacifist ILP and other conscientious objectors exhibited much personal courage and principle and they had a measure of effect on public opinion. But their opposition was brief and ineffective.

As the war progressed living standards got worse and prices outstripped wages. It was on the Clyde that anti-militarist and anti-war feeling was most intense. The first public anti-war meeting was held on Glasgow Green on 9 August 1914 and by 1915 it was clear that the government could no longer rely on the goodwill of a union leadership whose authority was being questioned by the rank and file.

In the coalfields existing agreements were running out, and though in most areas new ones were reached by granting concessions, in South Wales 200,000 miners struck in defiance of the Munitions of War Act. Lloyd George was forced to hurry to South Wales and make a settlement conceding to most of the men's demands.

Dilutions of labour

The most notable feature of the Munitions Act was the 'dilution of labour' clause. The War Office forced the pace of the dilution of labour and military recruiting schemes took single men first, with married men to follow, according to age. There was an influx of unskilled workers, many of them women, into industry which roused skilled workers into action to defend their jobs.

The unions arranged with the Munitions Department that workers required for munition work were exempt from military service. But a skilled worker, William Hargreaves, at Vickers in Sheffield was taken into the army against all the agreements with his union, the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE).

Although the action which ensued in support of Hargreaves was primarily a defence of skilled workers' jobs rather than part of a wider anti-war campaign, it is a wonderful example of the growing power of rank and file organisation.

The case of Hargreaves was promptly reported to the shop stewards' committee and publicised throughout the workshops in the area. When the usual means of negotiation failed the ASE and the shop stewards called a mass meeting of engineers and skilled workers from other unions. The response of

the men was unanimous and determined: the government was given one week to return Hargreaves to his job and if they failed work would cease in all the engineering factories in Sheffield until he did. The day after the meeting the shop stewards' committee sent delegates to the principal engineering centres throughout the country to urge them to be ready for strike action too.

On 15 November 1916 the ultimatum expired. The strike was called and the shop stewards rushed to the factories, messengers on motorcycles sped across the country and the strike was complete. More than 10,000 skilled workers walked out of the factories. And to counteract any government tricks two delegates were sent to the camp where Hargreaves was stationed.

Sure enough, the government issued a telegram claiming Hargreaves had been returned to normal life. But 20 minutes earlier a statement had come from Hargreaves denying that he had heard any mention of release. On the third day of the strike the government capitulated and Hargreaves was returned to work. It was a victory for the strikers and a boost for the prestige of the shop stewards' committees.

More in three days

The action of the engineering workers achieved more in three days to disrupt the course of national conscription than all the protests, imprisonments, hunger strikes and deaths of the conscientious objectors

For the workers on the Clyde, rent rises as well as dilution of labour, became an important part of an anti-war campaign. And it was the women — a fact ignored by the pacifists and Suffragists in the National Union and Sylvia Pankhurst's Workers' Suffrage Federation that were the central organisers of the street pickets. Willie Gallacher has recalled the triumph of working class women against the rent increases:

'In Govan, Mrs Barbour, a typical working class housewife, became the leader of a movement such as had never been seen before ... Street meetings, backyard meetings, drums, bells, trumpets — every method used to bring women out and organise them for the struggle. Notices were printed by the thousand and put up in the windows ... When evictions were attempted, Mrs Barbour's team, who could smell a sheriff's officer a mile away, called the women from the washing and cooking and before the officer and his men could get near their destination, they would be met by an army of furious women who drove them back in a hurried scramble for safety.'

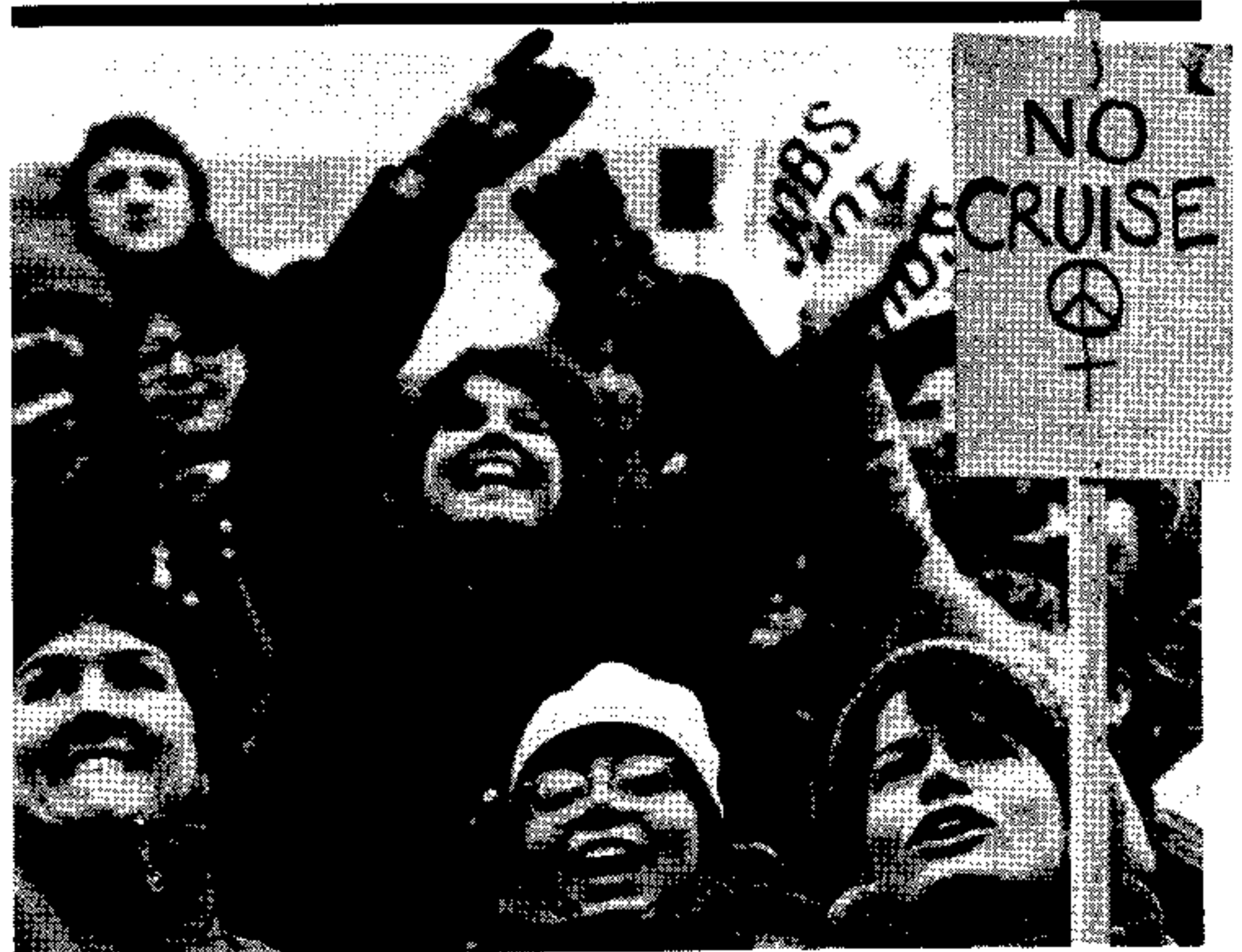
The issue came to a head when 18 munitions workers were summoned for non-payment of increased rent. 10,000 engineers and shipyard workers left their work and marched to the court. At the same time they sent a telegram to the government informing them that unless something was done the strike would continue. The cases were dismissed and the Rent Restriction Act was rushed through parliament.

As the Suffragettes degenerated into arch

chauvinism and the Suffragists into impotent pacifism, the rank and file movement assumed a more political complexion in the last two years of the war. Declining living standards and a general weariness with the war helped to nurture opposition to the war amongst some of the most powerful sections of the class. The dilution of labour had primarily been an industrial question and

was fought largely by skilled workers anxious to maintain exemption from war service at the expense of the unskilled.

But military service clearly became a wider political problem and the reflections and forms of action against recruitment were necessarily political. The war transformed revolution from a theory to a possible base for action. □



Very powerful forces

Stopping the bomb is an urgent and important task. Peter Goodwin shows why revolution is the only practical way of getting rid of it.

Let us start with something that will be obvious to virtually any CND supporter. Some very powerful forces are openly lined up against unilateral nuclear disarmament.

Just look at the list for Britain, starting with the obvious ones:

The whole of the Conservative Party (and that includes the, anyway quite marginal, Tories Against Cruise and Trident.) The whole parliamentary leadership of the SDP. Virtually the whole parliamentary leadership of the Liberal Party. The vast majority of the Labour shadow cabinet.

The whole of the military top brass (including the much-vaunted Field Marshal Lord Carver). Virtually every top civil servant. The whole of the national press (and that includes the minority of national newspapers, the *Daily Mirror* and the *Guardian* which are willing to report CND activities in a half-favourable light). The controllers of the BBC and ITV.

To that obvious list we can add another

less remarked upon group: the whole of big business. It is very revealing that over the last three years when the nuclear disarmament campaign has produced echoes, however distorted, in virtually every forum of public debate, the one place where there has not even been a murmur is the Confederation of British Industry.

Of course there are some disagreements about nuclear weapons among the different members of this list. For example, 'independent' British nuclear weapons have long been a bone of contention within the British establishment, including the military establishment.

'Why pay a fortune for a weapons' system which simply duplicates that possessed by the Americans?' And that argument has always hotted up when the system comes up for extremely expensive renewal. So there is some genuine opposition to Trident in establishment circles, and it is not impossible that it might win out.

But so far as nuclear weapons in general are concerned then the British establishment retains a powerful and vociferous unanimity — in favour.

The same goes for the American and Russian and European establishments. Again, there are disagreements over this weapons system or that, and there are

shufflings for advantage within each alliance. But even the most 'doveish' leaders on both sides, in even their most doveish moments, have been resolutely opposed to unilaterally abandoning the nuclear weapons they already have.

Not only that, they have resolutely increased their arsenals. And they have equally resolutely been supported in that by the *whole* of their establishments — not just the military and not just the hawks.

Why? Why are the members of these different national establishments so committed to weapons whose use would kill most of them (despite their fall-out shelters?) What sort of madness is this?

Exactly the same madness as compels each of them to try and out-sell and out-produce the other, despite the fact that the end result of this is a world economic crisis in which all suffer and none can escape.

For each of these bomb-loving establishments is a national capitalist ruling class.

Each ruling class reaches for its guns

compelled to compete in a world capitalist economy, for fear of being taken over and absorbed by its rivals. (And that goes for Russia too — what else makes it tick?)

The whole experience of the last hundred years tells us that the economic competition of capitalism increasingly goes hand in hand with military competition, as each capitalist ruling class groups increasingly round its state, using it as a lever to prize open its rivals 'spheres of influence' — its markets and its sources of raw materials.

Of course, time and time again during these last hundred years there have been those who claimed that this drive to war simply came from jingoes, generals and arms manufacturers and that sensible capitalists were opposed to militarism and had an interest in restraining it by mutual international agreement.

The past incarnations of such theories lie with the dead of the first and second world



wars. In each case it was the *whole* of each national ruling class that reached for their guns. Mutual agreement to disarm has proved as illusory as mutual agreement to end trade wars. And for exactly the same reason. Even the serious pretence of either has only flourished during periods of economic boom.

As each ruling class is compelled to compete economically so it is compelled to try and match the economic achievements of its rivals, regardless of the consequences. Similarly as each ruling class has to extend the competition into the military sphere so it has to match its rival weapon for weapon.

That was the inexorable logic of the battleship race before World War One, that was the logic of the race to produce the atom bomb and that is the logic of the nuclear arms race today. And as military and economic competition are bound up together then that logic gets extra impetus

from a world economic crisis that grips both west and east.

There is then method in the madness of the nuclear arms race: capitalist method. And it is that method that lies behind the deep attachment of American, British and Russian ruling classes to their bombs.

Nuclear weapons, then, are not simply some terrible excrescence. They are part and parcel of the system we live in. And most serious supporters of CND are willing to half recognise this. They are willing to recognise that to finally eradicate the threat of nuclear holocaust requires some more general change in the world order.

But alongside this goes another more immediate belief. Nuclear weapons are such an overwhelming threat that we must tackle them before anything else. Hence the insistence on the single issue campaign drawing on the widest possible basis of support. Hence the hostility to those like ourselves who insist on bringing other issues in.

If such a strategy had the slightest possibility of succeeding it would have much to commend it. Because the starting point is quite right, nuclear war does threaten the imminent destruction of humanity and with that the destruction of any other political hope. But it is precisely because of that we have to take even more seriously here and now the fact that the bomb is inextricably bound up with the system.

Take for example the Labour Party's well-known miserable record on the bomb. Why was it that Harold Wilson abandoned his extremely modest commitment to stop Polaris within three months of attaining office? For exactly the same reason as he abandoned other commitments — because he was committed to running a system which would not grant them.

Or take the case of an open unilateralist like Michael Foot. How on earth could he sit

BY PETER BINNS

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through five years of Labour government, 1974-79, which not only totally ignored conference commitments to unilateralism but actually spent more than £1,000 million modernising Polaris? Again, quite simply because he was committed to managing the system and if the system would not permit nuclear disarmament, then he would simply make the best of it.

Labour's miserable record demonstrates something more general. Those committed to tinkering with the system do not, when the crunch comes, make exceptions for what they have may quite seriously believe to be 'the overriding human issue.'

They fudge and compromise on that just as they do on any other issue, confident in the belief that they are getting the best they can out of the system. Given the deep commitment of that system to nuclear weapons, then fudges and compromises achieve nothing.

The deep roots of the bomb within the system also affect here and now that other great hope of orthodox CND thinking — the mass pressure of public opinion.

It is not simply that majorities in opinion polls in and of themselves do not change things. Otherwise the hospital workers would have won their claim last year with no trouble and the fight on Cruise missiles would be already won. It is also that the very formation of public opinion itself is subject to the logic of the whole system.

When Margaret Thatcher raises the spectre of the Russian threat, she wins arguments, because people accept the more general argument about the 'national interest', that is you, me, the directors of ICI and the Queen, all in it together against 'the Russians' or, when comes to cars, 'the Japanese.' It is impossible to win the argument *in such a way that people will really stand up and be counted* unless you convince people on a whole range of related issues.

Opinions of sand

By trying to fudge these other issues, by for example pretending that unilateral nuclear disarmament will not require leaving NATO, that we too are in favour of 'defending the nation', or that Andropov is a much misunderstood man, then we are building public opinion on sand. And it will eventually crumble away just as totally as it did after CND's first wave in the early sixties.

But there is another side to militarism being rooted in the system. For that same system that drives its rulers to war also produces a powerful working class in at least potential conflict with it. A class that does not have the same stake either in the battleships of the past or the nuclear weapons of today.

Of course that working class can be as jingoistic as its rulers. But the very crisis that drives its rulers to war also pushes the working class to question the very idea of national interest in whose name not only war, but wage cuts and redundancies are imposed.

This is no mere abstract speculation. In the years around the end of the First World War such a working class movement was a reality in Europe. The Russian Revolution of 1917 was won on the slogan 'Peace, Bread and Land.' The great strikes which swept

Germany and Austria in 1917 and 1918 were strikes both against war and against the economic ravages it produced. The revolutionary wave that gripped Europe after the war was also a movement in which the fight against capitalist crisis and capitalist war fused together.

Should anyone object that these movements were eventually defeated, then we reply that they came a thousand times nearer succeeding than the now forgotten pacifist campaigns or pleas for international arms' limitation that both preceded and followed them. E P Thompson is not alone when he sneers at our 'revolutionary posturings' and argues that the point of politics is 'to act and to act with effect.'

But so far as 'acting with effect' is concerned then the revolutionary movements of 1917 to 23 are easily the best historical model of a movement against war that we have. And their effectiveness came precisely because they directed their energies not merely against war but against the system as a whole.

But where is the working class in the campaign against the bomb in 1983? Potentially receptive, the opinion polls tell us that, but passive. As passive as it is in the fight against closures or on wages. Passive because it has been worn down by prolonged crisis. That means that those of us who propose revolution as the only road to stop the bomb cannot offer strikes for CND today or next month. But what we can say with certainty, because such downturns in workers' struggles have happened before, is that this passivity will come to an end, with for example a slight upturn in the economy that gives new confidence to struggle. And when it ends then the bitterness built up in the meanwhile will make the struggles that erupt that much more explosive.

And if in the meanwhile the arguments against the bomb are taken into the workplace — the hard arguments, like that against NATO — then the general upturn in workers' struggles will also build the only movement for nuclear disarmament that can win. □



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What a good idea!

Marx became a Communist in 1843. He owed a heavy debt to those 'Utopian Socialists' who preceded him. **Gareth Jenkins** looks at some of their ideas.

In the *Communist Manifesto* Marx both praised the Utopian Socialists for their criticisms of bourgeois society and put forward his own different views. None of these thinkers saw socialism as the self-liberation of the working class.

Saint-Simon was the first. Born an aristocrat in 1760, he identified with the aims of the French Revolution of 1789 to the point of renouncing his title. Struck by the growing power of science to transform the environment, he was also acutely conscious of the failure of the revolution for 'Liberty, Equality and Fraternity' to do anything to alleviate the miserable lot of the vast majority of the French population.

He concluded that the French Revolution was just the beginning. Political revolution must be followed by social transformation. The key to this would be the application of man's growing technological capacity to large-scale industrial projects such that 'la classe la plus nombreuse et la plus pauvre' (the largest and poorest class) could now benefit. The dramatic advances in productivity would end scarcity. The full realisation of human need would begin.

What stopped this exciting vision being realised? Saint-Simon concluded that the idle parasites who controlled but contributed nothing to society were responsible.

Time, therefore, to hand over control to the producers, the new industrial producers—what Saint-Simon called 'les industriels'. They were the fundamental class, the nourishing class of all society, without which no other could exist.

Unfortunately, there was an ambiguity in Saint-Simon's thinking. In this class he included not only the industrial working class but all those identified with industrial development (for example, entrepreneurs and even bankers!). He was aware of class conflict within industry, but regarded it as more accidental than fundamental.

Saint-Simon was in favour of legal reforms that would force property and capital into productive rather than merely speculative channels.

For his followers this became a full-blown belief in abolition of the right of inheritance, large-scale public works, and a high degree of state intervention. They brought out the radical implications of Saint-Simon's ideas. Thus:

'If, as we proclaim, mankind is moving toward a state in which all individuals will be classed according to their capacities and remunerated according to their work, it is evident that the right to property, as it exists, must be abolished, because, by giving to a certain class of

men the chance to live on the labour of others and in complete idleness, it preserves the exploitation of one part of the population, the most useful one, that which works and produces, in favour of those who only destroy.'

And in order to abolish want and waste:

'A social institution is charged with these functions which today are so badly performed; it is the *depository* of all instruments of production; it presides over the exploitation of all the material resources; from its vantage point it has a comprehensive view of the whole which enables it to perceive at one and the same time all parts of the industrial workshop.'

This social institution would be a reformed, state-run central banking system.

However, the ambiguity of the Saint-Simonian view of 'les industriels' meant that this was to be socialism from above, and on behalf of the largest and poorest class. Because working class self-activity was denied the key historical role in bringing about these changes, his philosophy was directed at those like enlightened financiers and bankers

Sir Thomas More, originator of 'Utopia', but his idea of a perfect society would be our idea of hell.



who would play a leading role in directing production, and his appeal was very much to technocrats. Thus began a long tradition of identifying state control with socialism, public ownership with human emancipation.

The subsequent fate of the Saint-Simonians shows the consequences of failing to grasp the centrality of workers' self-activity. They developed a new, semi-mystical religion, complete with apostles and a Supreme Father. In order not to discriminate against women (they became ardent feminists), they also decided to appoint a Supreme Mother.

None of the immediate candidates seemed

suitable, so they set out for the Middle East (the idea being to unite East and West). Eventually, a faithful but dwindling band finished up in Egypt. They never found the Supreme Mother, but they can be held indirectly responsible for the construction of the Suez canal, the only Saint-Simonian industrial project ever fully realised.

With the second major Utopian thinker, Charles Fourier (1772-1837), the conclusions about how society should be reorganised were rather different from the Saint-Simonians. The main focus of his criticism of 'civilisation' (ie the new bourgeois order) was the way work remained degrading, despite the fact that overall the means for satisfying human wants had now been vastly expanded. Above all he condemned the division of labour that forced people to a lifetime of drudgery in a single occupation.

"We must love work," say our sages.

Well! How can we? What is lovable about work in civilisation? For nine-tenths of all work procures nothing but profitless boredom. Rich men, consequently, find work loathsome and do only the easiest and most lucrative kinds of work such as managing companies. How can you make a poor man love work when you are not even able to make work agreeable for the rich? This would require elegant workshops, division of tasks and courteous, loyal and polished fellow-workers. All these conditions are impractical in civilisation. They can exist only when work is organised in passionate series.'

By 'passionate series', Fourier meant subdividing each task into series of units, each of which would be sufficiently attractive over a short period of time to make different individuals passionate enough to want to do them.

Thus labour would lose its compulsive character and become a pleasure. That would be true, he believed, even of dirty, but necessary, jobs, such as rubbish collection or sewage disposal. What made it unpleasant in present society, was that some people were forced to do such jobs all the time. Fourier believed that everybody enjoyed temporary indulgence of dirty or destructive impulses.

He felt children might be particularly useful in performing 'repulsive' jobs—such as street cleaning—because they naturally: 'love to wallow in the mire and play with dirty things. They are unruly, peevish, scurrilous and overbearing, and they will brave any storm or peril simply for the pleasure of wreaking havoc.'

But for work to become free and pleasurable, society would have to be reorganised into communes he called 'phalanxes'. These Fourier worked out in great detail, fixing the optimum size (about 1600) in order to show just how work could be sufficiently varied in order to lose its alienating character.

Not only work would be transformed. Desire (particularly sexual desire) would be freed from restraint. In particular he argued in a passage Engels later took up that:

'Social progress and changes of period are brought about by virtue of the progress of women towards liberty, and social retrogression occurs as a result of a

diminution in the liberty of women... In summary, the extension of the privileges of women is the fundamental cause of all social progress.'

The drawbacks to Fourier's utopianism lay in his mistrust of industrialisation. His notion of liberation from 'civilisation' was that of a return to nature, though a nature much richer and more productive than the eighteenth century had understood it to be. Being something of a gastronome, and very fond of salads, Fourier concentrated on horticulture as the predominant productive activity for his future society.

This meant that, even less than Saint-Simon, did Fourier see any central role for the working class brought into being by industrial progress. In his phalanxes, rich and

'Everybody enjoys temporary indulgence in dirty or destructive impulses.'



Fourier

poor, capitalists and workers continue to exist, as well as forms of commerce and transaction. Class and property forms are purged of these unnatural aspects that hinder the realisation of pleasure and work (synonymous for Fourier). But that does not entail their necessary abolition.

Fourier's ideal world is created as a result of individual will only. And if social relations can be so transformed, Fourier sees no reason not to recreate nature as well, in order to purge it of unpleasant features that restrict human gratification. Fourier is therefore bold enough to imagine anti-lions and anti-hippopotamuses—cooperative rather than aggressive creatures—and to imagine the ocean brine changed into refreshing lemonade.

For all the nuttiness of his speculations (many of which he kept to himself), the adventurousness of his critique of bourgeois society gained him a following. Alas, attempts to set up Fourierist communities ended in failure.

The first one in France (founded as a joint-stock company!) was denounced by Fourier himself for failing to follow his doctrines. As two leading commentators remark: 'When the architect built a pigsty with stone walls eighteen inches thick and no entrance, Fourier became convinced that he was in the

pay of the Saint-Simonians.'

Implicit in Fourier's libertarianism is a despotism. Obsessed with classification, he planned his phalanxes down to the last detail of a daily timetable of work and recreation. Self-governing though each phalanx might be, they were to be federated under the control of a coordinating governor, called an Omniarch.

Even his radical sexual proposals (he believed every man and woman was entitled to a 'sexual minimum') were to be supervised by a 'Court of Love'. Monogamy, the family, and heterosexism, might be abolished, but the institution he devised to solve the problem of sexual liberation possessed a formidable hierarchy of officials—high priests, pontiffs, matrons, confessors, fairies (?), fakirs, and genies.

This despotism should not surprise us. If no class is responsible for the creation of the future society, then the individual dreaming it up holds unlimited sway over the object of his (or her) creation.

When we turn to the last of the three major Utopians, Robert Owen (a year younger than Fourier but only dying in 1859), we enter a very different world. Industrialisation, and the working class movement, were far more advanced in Britain than in France.

His ideas can be readily summarised. He was a materialist who believed that bad conditions produced bad people. Change those conditions and humanity can be liberated from its imperfections. This he set out to prove in his famous community experiment, based on the New Lanark cotton mills in Scotland acquired in 1800.

He showed that the working day could be reduced to ten and a half hours (fourteen was the norm) and that full wages could be paid even when a cotton crisis stopped production—all without the collapse of society as we know it (in fact, profits boomed). He also did away with police and magistrates, introduced free education and transformed the working and living environment.

It was a triumphant vindication of how competition could be replaced by cooperation, and how industrialisation could enrich the lives of the masses, rather than (as in its use by capitalism) benefit the few at the expense of the many.

But there were problems. As Owen himself came to realise, it was reform dependent on the good will of enlightened factory owners—Owen's early appeals were all directed to catch the ear of the powerful and influential.

The problem was inherent in Owen's materialism. If conditions determine human conduct, then the conditions can only be changed by those who in some unexplained way are not determined by those conditions. As Marx was to point out in his *Theses on Feuerbach* (1845), 'this doctrine necessarily arrived at dividing society into two, of which one is superior to society (in Robert Owen, for example)'.
In true English style, Owen was not one to let a theory stand in the way of a fact, and when he saw that the 'superior' section (frightened by his attacks on Church and Constitution) would not reform society, he moved to an involvement in what the

majority was doing for itself, particularly the trade union movement of the 1830s.

So when Owen returned from America in 1829, where he had gone five years earlier to set up communities on the New Lanark model (all of which failed), he discovered that, while kings and politicians had turned their backs on him, leading sections of the working class movement looked to him as their leader.

Thus it was that he can be seen as largely responsible for bringing into being in 1834 the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union, described by the socialist historian, GDH Cole, as an 'ambitious attempt to combine the entire force of labour for a direct onslaught on the capitalist system.'

Not that Owen saw things in these terms. His idea of a General Union was rather to introduce the new social order 'at a single blow by a concerted peaceful refusal to continue production under the capitalist system' (GDH Cole). Owen disliked class struggle, seeing the Union as the instrument for persuading the employing classes to accept the rationale for their own extinction.

The union movement rapidly collapsed, and part of the cause lay with the Owenite doctrines it had espoused. The theory of

'The working class was to follow his grand design. When it pursued its own interests he parted company.'



Owen

founding a cooperative communist society through labour exchanges was in essence a reformist one since it never properly confronted the problem of political power.

Owen's communism was the most successful of all critical-utopian systems of thought. Unlike Saint-Simonianism or Fourierism, it attracted a large, and militant, working class base. But ultimately its utopianism proved to be a paralysing constraint on its radicalism.

Owen and his followers had looked to the working class movement only in so far as it could be converted to his grand design. As soon as it followed its own interests (as it did in the late 1830s when it pursued political power through Chartism), Owen parted company with it.

He reverted to pet schemes for cooperative

colonies and for the propagation of rationalism (Owen blamed Christianity for most of the ills of society).

Saint-Simon, Fourier and Owen were not the only important early 19th century utopians. Some were active revolutionaries in the working class, in a way that distinguishes them fundamentally from the three discussed in this article. Weitling, for example, was one of the leaders of the secret 'League of the Just', which participated in the abortive 1839 revolution in Paris led by Blanqui and Barbès. His first book was hailed by Marx as the 'incomparably brilliant debut of the German worker'.

Yet Weitling could never break with utopianism. Communism was ultimately some kind of new religion which would triumph when the working class had been converted. Marx, who had joined the League of the Just on condition that it abandoned its conspiratorial secret status, found himself compelled to do battle with what he regarded as a dangerous influence.

The result was the victory of Marx's communism, which was scientific in that it deduced the advent of the new society, not out of someone's head, but out of the real movement of the working class, its objective formation in the development of industrial capitalism, and its subjective formation through its own struggles and collective purpose. □

The revolutionary ideas of

MARX



Alex Collinicos

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Plays, prefaces and polemics

Shaw was one of the backbones of Fabianism. Yet his biting social satire makes modern reformists appear mealy-mouthed. Ian Birchall assesses the basis of Shavian politics.

Slagging off George Bernard Shaw has long been popular among British Marxists. In the thirties Christopher Caudwell labelled him a 'Social Fascist'; in the eighties Terry Eagleton dismissed him as 'the grandfather of all naturalists.' The lesser fry have followed suit.

And certainly Shaw's political record invites denunciation. In 1882, at the age of twenty-six, he discovered Marx and rapidly became a socialist activist. He was well-known as an open-air speaker, adept at dealing with hecklers.

But this was a short phase of his career. On 13 November 1887, 'Bloody Sunday', Shaw took part in a demonstration viciously attacked by police. This seems to have shaken his faith in mass action. He broke with his old friend William Morris and became openly identified with Fabianism. There can be no doubt that it is Morris, not Shaw, who represents the best tradition in British socialism. For Shaw it was downhill all the way. Fabianism meant a contempt for trade unionism and all forms of working class self-activity and a belief that reform would be carried through by benevolent intellectuals.

In 1914 the First World War left Shaw confused; his position is so contorted that it is hard to say if he was for or against the war. (Yet such was the craven capitulation of his fellow-writers that Shaw's position is still better than any other member of the British literary establishment, with the solitary exception of Bertrand Russell).

About his last years the less said the better. In *Back to Methuselah* Shaw looked forward to an extension of the human life-span — but if his own had been thirty years shorter his reputation would have been sweeter. Support for Stalin, vilification of Trotsky and flirtations with Hitler and Mussolini marked his long decades of senile decline from the twenties to his death in 1950.

But there remains the Shaw that Lenin and Brecht admired, Shaw the writer of plays, prefaces and political polemics. And from this Shaw there is still something to be learnt.

First of all there is Shaw's unashamed partisanship. Unlike so many mealy-mouthed writers of today's left, Shaw made no attempt to conceal the fact that he was writing for a purpose. The Preface to *Widowers' Houses*, his first—and finest—play states that the work is 'deliberately intended to induce people to vote on the Progressive side at the next County Council election in London. (Where is the radical playwright today who would do as much for Ken

Livingstone?) Shaw even claimed that he wanted to bring a blackboard on stage in *Widowers' Houses* in order to explain value theory to the audience.

This partisanship is a major merit in Shaw — but what makes him truly valuable as a writer is his ability to write effectively, to fight for his ideas in prose that is both powerful and entertaining. As Brecht put it:

'He knows that there is nothing more time-wasting and distracting than a particular kind of seriousness which is popular in literature but nowhere else ... He gives the theatre as much fun as it can stand.'

It is here, above all, that we can learn from Shaw. Most left propaganda today comes in drab journals, carefully edited to ensure political orthodoxy and stylistic anonymity. Shaw's indictment of bourgeois society remains as true today as in 1883, when he wrote *An Unsocial Socialist*:

Unfavourable impressions

'Modern English polite society, my native sphere, seems to me as corrupt as consciousness of culture and absence of honesty can make it. A canting, lie-living, fact-hating, scribbling, chattering, wealth-hunting, pleasure-hunting, celebrity-hunting mob, that having lost the fear of hell, and not replaced it by the love of justice, cares for nothing but the lion's share of the wealth wrung by threat of starvation from the hands of the classes that create it.'

And as Thatcher prepares to complete the destruction of the National Health Service, it is well worth looking again at the Preface to *The Doctor's Dilemma* (1906), where Shaw explains what private medicine really means:

'It is not the fault of our doctors that the medical service of the community, as at present provided for, is a murderous absurdity. That any sane nation, having observed that you could provide for the supply of bread by giving bakers a pecuniary interest in baking for you, should go on to give a surgeon a pecuniary interest in cutting off your leg, is enough to make one despair of political humanity. But that is precisely what we have done. And the more appalling the mutilation, the more the mutilator is paid. He who corrects the ingrowing toenail receives a few shillings; he who cuts your inside out receives hundreds of guineas, except when he does it to a poor person for practice.'

Shaw was a Fabian. But compare the fire and wit of Shaw's prose to the mincing evasive liberal platitudes of one of today's Fabians, Tony Benn. Nothing could more graphically illustrate the historical decline of reformism. The only alternative is revolution — the revolution Shaw ran away from in 1887, but which haunted him for the rest of his life.

The sounds of struggle

Music makes socialists argue. Noel Halifax, for example, started his literary career by denouncing *Socialist Worker's* coverage of Bruce Springsteen. Here he takes a longer view of the relationship between music and the working class movement.

The relationship between music and socialists has been a long and confused one, from the Chartists, marching bands and the strike bands of the 19th century, through the CP supported folk groups of the 60s to RAR and 'born again' punk of Oi. Throughout the history of the socialist movement there have always seemed to be those who saw in popular (or not so popular) music a taste of the socialism to come, to see certain forms of music as 'ours' and to romanticise both its production and success. We may not be able to win many strikes but 'we' can still get *Musical Youth* to Number One. A few years ago it seemed that large sections of the left judged the progress of the revolution by how many records Tom Robinson sold.

Time and again a group, or type of music, is latched on to, only to see it 'sell out' or 'go commercial' and fail to live up to revolutionary expectations. A recent list of such bands would be long—*The Clash*, *The Jam*, *PIL*, *Joy Division*, *New Order*, *The Stranglers*, etc. On each of them the arguments rage as to whether they've sold out yet; whether *The Gang of Four* are going right; whether *The Aupairs* are still the height of revo-rock, and so on.

On a wider and more farcical level there's the never-ending debate over Oi. Is it fascist or the vanguard of the proletariat? Gary Bushell and friends versus the rest of the world. The arguments over music seem to be where usually quite sensible people lose all sense of perspective, Marxist or otherwise.

Many of these questions have been looked at before by Marxists.

In 1929, Trotsky wrote:

'The heart of the matter is that artistic creativity, by its very nature, lags behind the other modes of expression of a man's (sic) spirit and still more of the spirit of a class. It is one thing to understand something and express it logically, and quite another to assimilate it organically, reconstructing the whole system on one's feelings, and to find a new kind of artistic expression for this new entity.'

A dispute arose inside the Russian Soviet state over the question of literature that evolved into a debate over culture or art generally, its role and nature in a socialist society and its relationship to the working class. The debate in the mid twenties became polarized between the supporters of the group 'Prolekult' and Trotsky.

Prolekult argued that all art, music included, was part of the class struggle and the role of the party was to encourage 'proletarian culture' that expressed the aims and spirit of the vanguard of the working class. They wanted to wage a war against all existing art forms as being of the age of capitalism and hence bourgeois. The relics of old Russia should be destroyed or only studied for their historical value. Burn the old icons and put the old music scores in museums.

Against them Trotsky argued that they had transformed Marxism into a crude dogma:

'One cannot approach art as one can politics, not because artistic creation is a religious rite or something mystical, as someone here ironically said, but because it has its own laws of development, and above all because in artistic creation an enormous role is played by subconscious processes—slower, more idle and less subjected to management and guidance, just because they are subconscious.'

He argued that Proletarian art will only be created when society itself has been transformed. Art is largely a mirror of society not a creator of social conditions and you cannot force it to conform to political and tactical demands.

With huge internal upheavals, a prolonged civil war followed by Stalinism, it is surprising the amount of new art that flowed

from Soviet Russia (the films of Eisenstein, poetry of Mayakovsky, the art of the futurists, the agit-prop train, etc). But no new great musical forms developed.

By the 30s Stalin was in power and art transformed into propaganda by a distorted form of Prolekult called 'social realism'.

For music this meant a turn away from atonal experimental forms to the great Russian tradition based on programme music. The modern traditionalist composer Prokofiev who had fled the revolution returned to serve the new Tsar Stalin and along with the now reformed Shostakovitch churned out the programme symphonies and opera in the grand manner. It was the music of the privileged elite once again, in the velvety world of the opera house, chandeliers and all.

'For the dutiful round the deathbed, death-rattles are so wearisome they fall asleep. Their snoring sounds similar and so it is difficult to ascertain who is actually dying. That is the relation between bourgeois society and modern music.'

So wrote Hanns Eisler, the German composer and Communist, in 1928, in an essay called 'On the Situation in Modern Music'. He was reacting to both the 'serious' music of the German music academies and the organised music of the German workers movement. The German Social Democratic Party had built a huge organisation of the working class that covered the whole range of workers' lives, including culture.

Even by 1932 the SPD choral societies, called DASB (German Workers' Choral Association) had a membership of 315,000. It was then past its hey-day; it had been founded in 1908. Inside DASB the com-



unist and revolutionary musicians and singers organised. They were expelled in 1931 to form their own 'Fighting Association of Working Class Singers' with their own periodical 'Kampfsmusik'. Their opposition to the reformist DASB was based both on wanting to put forward a marxist analysis of musical history and a disagreement of what songs DASB should sing.

It was also part of 'third period Stalinism' when on instructions from Moscow, Communist parties all over the world broke away from reformist unions and associations. As a tactic it was a disaster, as Trotsky at the time predicted. It led directly to the rise of Hitler in Germany and, as far as music was concerned, to an isolation of the communist music of Brecht and Co.

DASB spent its time singing workers' songs of struggle at sedate concerts, a bit like Welsh male-voice choirs or colliery bands today. It was all rather staid and part of the SPD respectable world. Against this, Eisler, amongst others (Brecht, Rankl, V Vogel, Vollmer, Meyer) wanted to revolutionise the whole performance, to make the concert much more political and involve the audience. As Eisler put it in 1931:

'We are well aware that it is wrong only to listen to a fighting song; that the activating purpose of a fighting song can only be achieved if the people sing it themselves.'

Eisler and Brecht wanted to make popular fighting songs that could be sung on the streets and related to the street-fighting traditions of the working class, not the concert halls and trade union congresses.

Eisler was particularly impressed by the activities of unemployed workers of the Fichte organisation. This was a working-class sports movement with a long tradition which had formed choirs that sang their own songs at mass meetings and demos. It was from this experience that the 'Brecht style' of agit-prop play and song arose.

Eisler argued

'Further experience induced us to reject the concert form... it is useless for the purpose of the revolutionary class, it can only offer noncommitted pleasure and make the listener passive. In the next few years it will be our task to develop further the ideas of the didactic play.. progress achieved were and are only possible in close association with the militant working class.

'We must never forget that those cultural organisations which sever their connection with the political organisation of the working class will necessarily become shallow and petty bourgeois.'

If you ignore the Stalinist distortions, there is no doubt that this has been the fate of Brecht's plays and music, just as Eisler predicted. No longer sung on the streets or at agit-prop mass meetings at factories, they have become shallow performances in concert halls to petty bourgeois audiences, totally divorced from the class struggle.

The modern debate over music really began with the rise of youth cults after the Second World War, with the music that grew independently from a mix of poor white American country music and black American rhythm and blues that became



Tom Robinson

known as Rock and Roll. Ian Birchall argued:

'For a hundred years or more there had been songs which expressed working-class oppression. But rock and roll was the first music to express working class aggression. Arising out of the self-confidence engendered by the post-war boom, it was thus to become potentially one of the key art forms of the socialist revolution.'

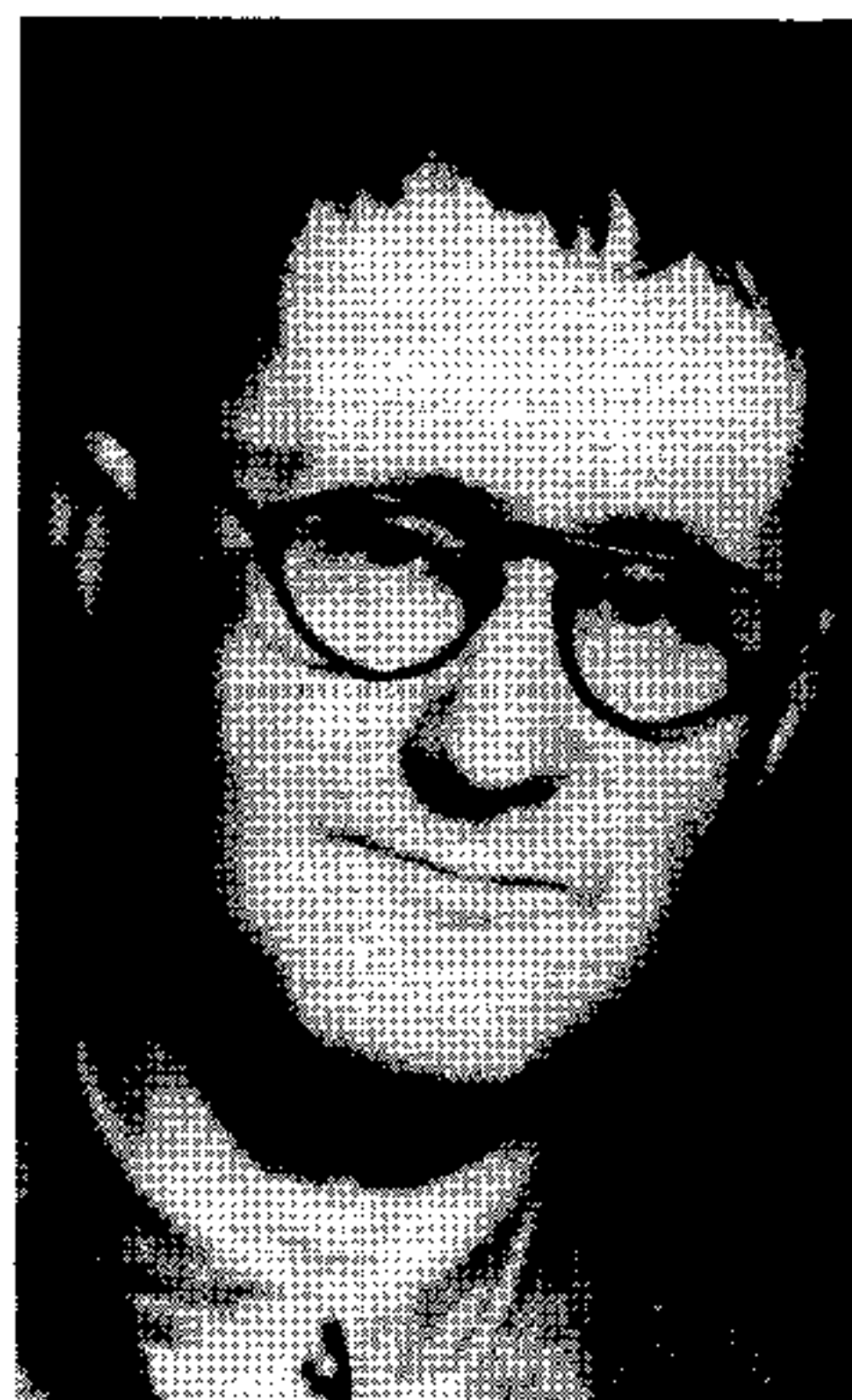
In Britain with rock and roll came the teds, to be followed by the mods, rockers, hippies, yippies, skins, suede-heads, soul-boys, punks, new romantics etc—a whole stream of youth cults, each associated with a type of music, dress and attitude to life hostile to the 'straight' world.

Waves of style

The lefts' reaction to those waves of style and youth rebellion has been often blind hostility or wild adoration—usually both at the same time. Skins are seen as all that is good about the working class, aggressive, combative, hating authority; or all that is bad, racist, sexist, elitist, thuggish. But both assume there is some political essence to being a skin. The argument is then: what essence?

This is not to say that you can't make some political generalisations about youth cults. The most obvious and the one used most to support one or all of them is that they give a sense of collective strength to male working class youth and are an act of rebellion against 'the system'. No matter how nasty the effect can be, the act of being a skin is better than being a follower of Cliff Richard

This is undoubtedly true but they also divide as much as they unite. They are by definition elitist. I remember being a mod. It was having to have the right clothes, records and knowing the latest dance. It was also hating rockers (working class youth in other clothes). Most youth cults are like this. They



Bertolt Brecht

can be just one part of the working-class isolating themselves off and waging war on others.

With 3½ million on the dole and a pool of permanent jobless, these tendencies to divide will increase. The place of unity for the class, to become aware of itself as a class, is the workplace. You do not choose your work-mates, every sort of person can be found there, with certain limitations based on sexist and racist recruitment. Like it or not you have to work with people you wouldn't choose to speak to. It unites the class often against the wishes of the class. But youth cults are self-choosing—they separate you off from others, they divide.

The other pernicious effect of music and identification with a style is that it becomes an escapist avoidance of the nasty world. Music so often romanticised either a style, a particular group, or star. All the illusions of living your life through someone else occur. The effect often reminds me of the old worship of Russia and Stalin by other workers in different circumstances. It is a wish to believe that so and so is totally right on, and being thrilled 'our' star becomes a success. As if it were a success for us.

One aspect of music that is often taken as the base for political analysis is the words of a song. This gives far too much importance to words. It simply is not that straightforward. The interpretation of stupid words can contradict their 'meaning.' A singer can subvert the meaning by the way it is sung. Billie Holliday is one classic example, Sid Vicious's 'My Way' another.

You can even have good music with pernicious words produced by reactionaries, just as you can have good novels written by the likes of Celine or Dostoyevsky. Politics in music is not just in the words. Often the following of a band can be more important than the music itself.

Under capitalism all the dominant ideas are capital's, all the art forms are dominated by the ideas of the ruling class. But some are

more dominated than others, and some almost rise above the domination. Of all the art forms, popular music is the one where the working class is most involved.

This does not mean that it is free of nasty ideas and ideologies but that it has a relationship with the class that is not true with other forms.

The inter-action between a band and its following is different to a writer and his/her readers. It means that the fans influence the band and think of them as 'ours', like the football fans of Newcastle once felt about 'our Jackie.'

Music remains one of the few outlets for working class creativity. Together with sport it is one of the few ways you can make it to the top. It is this contradiction, rising out of your class by being idolised by it, and singing about it, and to it, that lies behind all the talk of 'selling out.' It is this direct contact with the fans and bands that can give music such political relevance. Once they become rich and famous, the music often becomes about the problems of being rich and famous (like West Coast sound) or falling into self-pity and a hatred turned inward, as John Lennon seemed to do.

Making it

What distinguishes the music of the 50's onwards from that which went before is that it has been the spontaneous creation of the working class. Comparing the music of the German Communist party in the 30's to today is like comparing a low-key, well organised strike with a riot. One shows great control and organisational strength but is rather boring. The other has excitement and spontaneous creativity, but can evaporate overnight.

The trouble with many people is that they fail to notice when a style moves from being in the initial period of revolt to being staid and a new conservatism. The style remains but it becomes an empty shell with just the ritual remaining. The evolution of progressive rock to heavy metal is the best and obvious example.

A list of youth cults and style that have been created since the 60's would make a long and impressive list. They are an example of working class creativity in their struggle against passivity and alienation. At present they seem to happen every three or four years. What is noticeable about this is not only how wonderful it all is—a 'revolt into style' or 'youth attacking the system'—but also how quickly it all gets co-opted and absorbed into the system.

It becomes like football violence, a useful way of diverting energy which might otherwise be directed against capitalism. Except that this revolt is far more profitable. In short, all the contradictions of life are in music. It is not an exception or haven from a nasty world. We can appreciate the element of revolt and creativity without having illusions about its social function or pretension. Given all the shit that people are fed to make them believe that they are useless or stupid it is indeed encouraging that, in spite of it all, the working class is capable of creating such great music. If this much is possible, now, just think how it could be. □

Not a moral question

The situation facing women in the Kings Cross area of London has been much debated recently. Ann Rogers looks at the problems and at the solutions.

Prostitution increases when unemployment rises. The slump of the 1860's led to a twenty-fold increase in street prostitution in London. One in eight houses was a brothel by 1867. At the same time petty crime rockets, as individuals take increasingly desperate measures to climb out of poverty.

This pattern has been repeated during the present economic crisis. As women, often single mothers, were forced out of jobs it was inevitable that some would take to the streets to try and make ends meet.

Prostitution has increased at the lowest end of the market—on the streets. Street prostitution does not demand any resources except one's body. You don't need a car, a room, or even nice clothes. Although it's the lowest-paid type of prostitution it brings in a far higher income than the wage a working class woman could expect to earn, between £100 and £150 per week in 1979. As childcare provisions have been cut to the bone it also has the advantage of flexible hours.

Street prostitution flourishes in deprived urban areas like Kings Cross in London. It makes life unbearable for women who aren't prostitutes but have to live in the area. Women who live in Kings Cross can no longer walk down the street without being harassed by men looking for prostitutes. Some have given up work as they are afraid

to walk home at night.

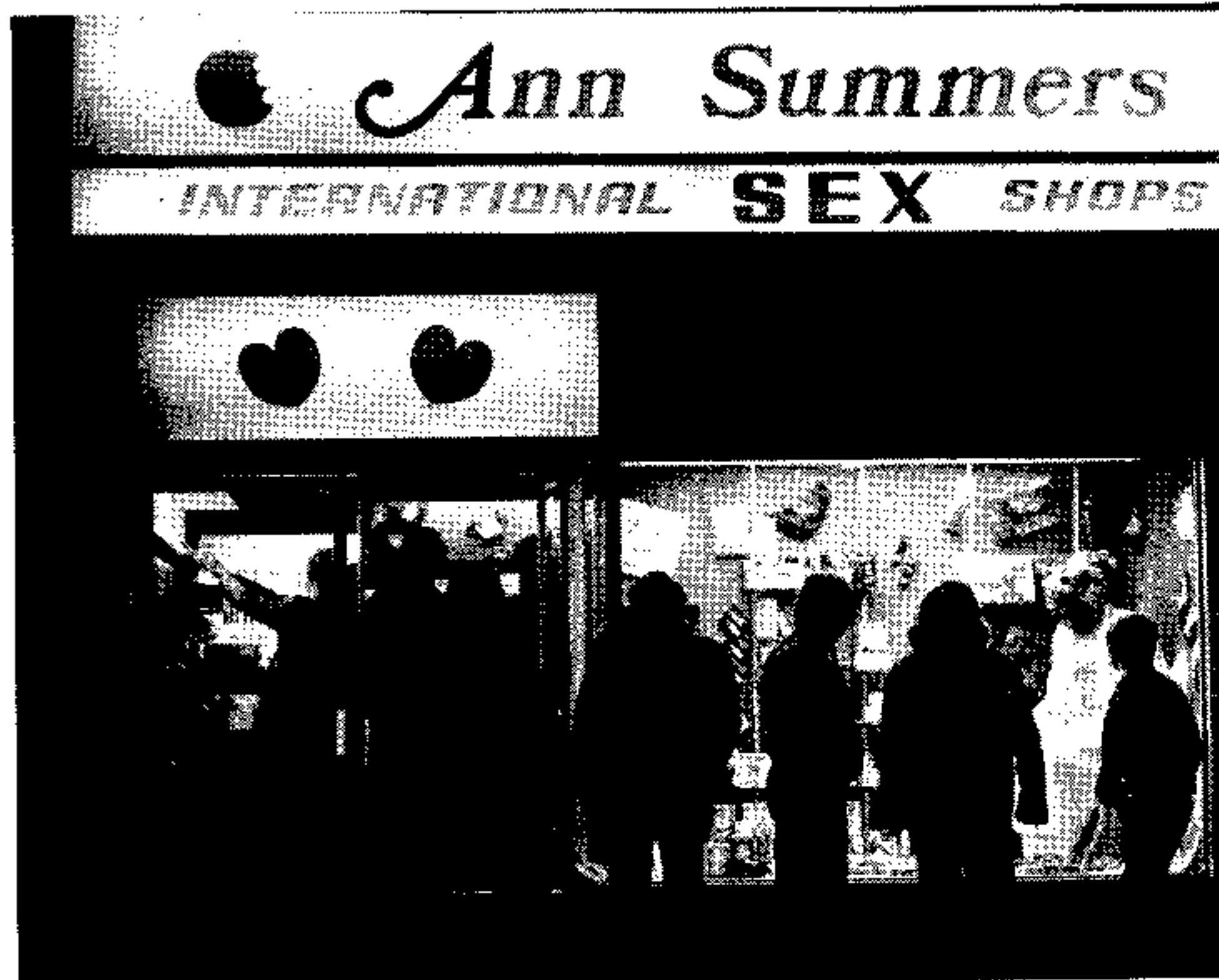
Many women who live in areas like Kings Cross feel that the existence of widespread street prostitution is undermining those rights which the Women's Liberation Movement fought for in the '70s, such as a woman's right to work, or the right to walk the streets without the protection of a man. Arguments about what should be done about prostitution are raging.

Separatist feminists argue that prostitution is a product of a patriarchal society. The cause of prostitution is the men who buy prostitutes, and if we could change men's sexuality then everything would be alright. Separatists frequently fall into the trap of calling for a strengthening of the forces of the state. If the fault lies with men, then the easiest way to stop prostitution is to punish the men who go to prostitutes.

At the same time they defend a woman's right to choose to be a prostitute. Because they see any relationship between a man and woman as inherently oppressive, prostitution is very similar to all male/female relationships.

Some separatists will even argue that prostitutes are the shock troops of the feminist movement. Prostitutes are the women who make men pay for what they usually get for nothing. Others swing to the opposite position saying that prostitutes reinforce women's oppression by allowing their bodies to be used as sex objects.

Whichever side they take, all separatists are discussing prostitution from a purely moral standpoint. They divorce prostitution from the material circumstances which produce it. They are forced to rely on educa-



Mass produced sexual spare parts.

tion and consciousness-raising to eradicate it.

Women become prostitutes because they are poor. Men go to prostitutes because capitalism creates the belief that people can be bought and sold. The distortion of human relationships takes different forms, for example wage labour and monogamous marriage. One such form is prostitution. The higher income of most men, and the denial of women's rights to an independent sexuality, means that men buy women rather than the other way round.

The fault lies not with individual men, but with a system which creates both an ideology and a reality in which human sexual behaviour is reduced to an economic transaction.

Prostitution reveals the asymmetry between men's and women's control over their own lives. It also shows how distorted and alienated sexuality is under capitalism. It is the absolute antithesis of a free relationship.

Reformist feminists (and reformists in general) will admit that prostitution is socially created. What they fudge is how it can be dealt with. The situation in Kings Cross has reached such a level that the reformists on Camden Council have been forced to respond. The way they have responded is an object lesson to all revolutionaries in the pointlessness of reformism.

Useless action

Following the occupation of the Holy Cross church in Kings Cross, by the English Collective of Prostitutes, Camden Council Women's Committee put out a leaflet. They announced that they were launching a campaign 'to call for a review of policing in the area'. They appointed a 'monitor' to 'record the relations between women and police in the area.'

Their idea of useful action by local women was talking to the monitor, signing a petition, passing resolutions, writing to the Home Office, and asking your MP 'to raise questions in the House.'

Nowhere in the leaflet did they explain why prostitution in Kings Cross has rocketed. *Nowhere* do they attempt to explain the role of the police in the area. The whole impression is that if we object loudly enough, if the monitor collects enough information, and if we all write to our MPs, somehow the police will realise the error of their ways and start protecting women who live in Kings Cross. It should have been obvious that local women had 'little faith' in police protection, without paying someone to find out.

There has been a very sharp shift to the right among some erstwhile feminists in the area. The most frightening example of this was an article by Eileen Fairweather in December's *New Society*. The article is a screech of moral outrage, born of an inability to see the world except in terms of good and evil.

In her confused vision the left are lining up with the pimps and the prostitutes in an all-out attempt to ride rough-shod over the local women. She misrepresents the politics of the SWP and other socialists who live in Kings Cross, pretending that they believe that pimps and criminals are the vanguard of the



Picture: ANDREW WIARD (Report)

Women's oppression or sexual shock troops?

revolution.

For Fairweather, this is just a stupid slander to attack socialists, but it is worth pointing out why the SWP believes no such thing. However much these people may hate the police, they are quite incapable of playing a leading role in a revolution.

They are not wage workers. They live by exploiting women. They are not organised collectively by the very process of capitalist production. There is nothing in their lives which makes them *necessarily* opposed to capitalism. Indeed, at the top end of the market, they actually provide valued service for male capitalists.

Exceptional individuals might, conceivably, rise above their social conditions and see the need for revolution. As a social group they might be dragged behind an upsurge of working class militancy and support a revolution. But no scientific socialist can possibly suppose for one moment that such people are the vanguard of the revolution.

The mud-slinging and lying about the activists in the area pales into insignificance against the rabid solutions proposed, by

Fairweather. This ex-revolutionary demands that 'Something Should be Done'. As she dismisses any talk of crisis and inner city deprivation as pie in the sky liberalism she is left demanding that we reclaim law and order from the Tories and bring it back to Kings Cross.

Though she admits that the police are corrupt and biased she pleads:

'Let us continue at least trying to reform and improve them, for anything else has to be a last resort.'

It doesn't occur to Fairweather that trying to reform the police is an even more stupid project than trying to reform the pimps. Both are in a position where they exercise massive power over the lives of others by using violence or the threat of violence.

But the police are less susceptible to reform because they have the support of the state. Someone who scoffs at the idea of reforming pimps, but who thinks it is possible to reform the police, might be plain daft. But it is more likely they are trying to sneak Tory law and order through the back door of feminism.

Fairweather finishes her article by saying

that the Left has refused to 'take any responsibility', and have opposed any 'clampdown on crime.' We would happily plead guilty to both charges.

All the solutions put forward by feminists are at root reformist. They all suppose that the problem of prostitution can be solved within the system. Their solutions are different—moral exhortation from the separatists, research from the reformists, law and order from Eileen Fairweather, but they all share a total ineffectiveness.

At best such solutions would simply shift the centres of prostitution from one area of urban decay to another. At worst they feed the law and order lobby by giving it a left cover.

Prostitution is a result of women's oppression in this society. But prostitutes are not well placed in terms of economic power and organisation to challenge that oppression. That task must remain largely with those sections of the working class, both female and male, who have the power to overthrow capitalism.

There is no middle road between the state controlling people's lives and people taking control of their own lives. All reformists suppose that we can wrest control from the state in small areas without taking control of the whole system.

When it comes to a particularly nasty manifestation of capitalism, such as prostitution, the faults of reformist politics are thrown into sharp relief. They are unwilling to attack the whole system, so they are left to do a sort of social work to alleviate the worst aspects of the system.

Wouldn't choose

Few women would choose to become prostitutes if they were guaranteed a well-paid job and free nursery facilities. But capitalism, especially in a slump, cannot deliver this.

Nor can capitalism provide people with control of the area they live in. The rotten and corrupt police in Kings Cross are not an exception. Capitalism tolerates them and their petty profiteering because it needs them to protect its own rule.

Only when the working class controls its own state machine will the workers of the area be able to exert their control over the area and stop the brutality and harassment that is rife today.

Attempts to nibble at the edges are deeply impracticable. They are simply overwhelmed by the brute economic reality which drives women into prostitution. Attempts to strengthen the police are certainly practical, but they only strengthen a force dedicated to perpetuating that economic reality.

Prostitution will never be eradicated by dealing with it in isolation. This isn't dodging the issue, it's just accepting the truth that power is unevenly distributed under capitalism.

Only those who have economic muscle have the power to bring about a wholesale overthrow of the system which creates prostitution. And this system cannot be quietly reformed away. We need a revolution. □

Sixty years of struggle

Steve Dowdall died on 18 December aged 86. He was one of the handful of members of the Balham Group expelled from the Communist Party in 1932, and for sixty years was dedicated to the fight for socialism.

Born into a South East London Irish family, he left school before 14 to become a van boy, became involved in the 1911 transport strike, then was drafted into World War I.

After the war he became a skilled bricklayer and tiler, for fifty years an active trade unionist. He became involved in the Daily Herald League, an unofficial group supporting Labour's daily paper, and when the Battersea branch joined the groups forming the British Communist Party, he became an early member.

He read a lot, studied the Russian revolution and marxist economics, winning influence among his fellow workers. One memory is of him standing up after a long and

boring speech saying, 'I'm only a Jimmy Higgins,' referring to the character in an Upton Sinclair novel, the rank-and-filer who does all the tedious, thankless jobs, but gets little reward, then proceeding to take the speaker to the cleaners.

His expulsion from the CP separated him from many of his closest friends, some of whom joined in the denunciation, but it was because of the older and more experienced people like him and Jim Barrett that the younger ones attracted to Trotskyism stuck with the Balham Group.

The group went on working in the unemployed workers' movement, the unions and labour and socialist organisations until the war. Steve continued to be active, through the death of his wife in 1968, and the infirmities of old age.

All of us who knew him, remember him with respect and affection.

Reg Groves

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Labour on Ireland

Troublesome Business

Geoffrey Bell

Pluto Press

£4.50

In 1981 as Bobby Sands lay dying due to the effects of his hunger strike, Don Conannon, Labour's shadow spokesman on Ireland paid him a visit. The purpose of Conannon's visit was to urge Sands to give up his hunger strike, and to inform him that he would receive no support from the Labour Party.

It is hard to imagine a sicker act from a so-called socialist. Yet the message which Conannon brought can hardly have come as a surprise to Sands. For anyone who studies the history of the Labour Party and its attitude to Ireland past and present will find a sorry tale of prejudice, ignorance and, worst of all, a bi-partisan and pro-imperialist approach to the question of Ireland.

Troublesome Business is a book dedicated exclusively to the Labour Party's attitudes to the Irish question from the founding of the Labour Party to the present day.

At its outset Labour's opposition to Irish Nationalism was based on a phoney internationalism which the First World War would soon expose.

In 1900 a Fabian anti-Home Rule pamphlet argued 'the plain reason why Englishmen care so little about the wrongs of Ireland is that they suffer the same wrongs themselves on a much greater scale and in a crueller form'.

Such a statement at a time when Dublin had the highest infant mortality rate in Europe, the lowest living standards and some of the worst sweated labour was just plain rubbish. James Connolly, the great Irish marxist, answered the phoney internationalists by explaining that internationalism meant the voluntary co-operation of workers of all countries, not the domination of the strongest country.

When Connolly was executed following the 1916 rising, a Labour cabinet minister, Arthur Henderson, led the cheering in the House of Commons. This was just



the worst example of Labour's attitude to the Rising, in fact all sections of the party condemned it.

At the outbreak of World War I all the pretence at internationalism was dropped as Labour threw themselves whole-heartedly behind the war effort.

The contrast between the Labour Party and the Red internationalism of the Bolsheviks could not have been sharper. Once the Russian revolution had taken place the Bolsheviks began the process of ending the war. Labour sent various MPs to try to persuade Russia to stay in the war. They tried to argue that Britain was fighting a war of liberation on behalf of small nations everywhere. The Bolsheviks replied 'you say you are fighting for the rights of small nations, but what about Ireland?'

When the Treaty was signed in 1921, and the sectarian Northern Ireland state was formed, the move was welcomed by the Labour leaders. They stood up in parliament and declared it was 'a heroic peace.'

The much-hailed Attlee government was to be the one which would write in the guarantee ensuring the link with Britain, unless the majority of the northern population voted otherwise.

When, as a result of the discrimination and sectarianism of the Northern Irish state, the Civil Rights movement spilled onto the streets, it was the Labour government which sent in the troops. Those troops are still there, a legacy of Labour's jingoism, ineptitude and reformism.

All this information is available in Bell's book. It's the first to look seriously at the relationship between the Labour Party and the Irish question, and is therefore very welcome.

Unfortunately the book has many faults. There is too little on the general political background of both England and Ireland, and an obsessive preoccupation with Labour Party conference votes and decisions. Bell tries to show that at times there was a serious rift between the leadership and the rank and file, but the evidence he gives is weak and inconclusive. Finally while the book is critical of Labour's past and present leaders it is totally uncritical of Tony Benn and today's Labour left. It fails to challenge the notion that UN troops are a solution. And it does not attack the Labour left's craven failure to call for troops out.

Much of this may have to do with the political direction in which Bell himself has moved. Now a member of the Labour Party, he ends his book by arguing that until Labour gets Ireland right it cannot regard itself as a socialist party.

This is really standing the ar-



gument on its head! Labour can't get Ireland right precisely because it is *not* a socialist party—it is a reformist party committed to maintaining the present system.

James Connolly understood this

better when he said 'The British Labour Party won't lift a finger to help us.'

Bell quotes this. I'm not sure he understands it.

Pat Stack

Democracy US style

Bitter Fruit

Stephen Schelsinger and Stephen Kinzer

Sinclair Browne, £3.95

In March 1982, a General called Rios Montt led a military coup, to become President of Guatemala. He was, according to the US State Department, a born-again Christian who would rid the country of corruption and restore human rights.

In the year since he came to power, thousands of people have been savagely murdered by this 'constitutional army,' their lands and crops burned, while whole communities have been transferred across the country to 'strategic hamlets' modelled on the camps of South Vietnam. This represents a 'con-

siderable improvement in the human rights' situation,' according to Ronald Reagan; so much so that Reagan has argued strongly for ending the ban on arms exports from the United States imposed in 1977.

The rise of Rios Montt, and American efforts to argue an improvement in his government's record on human rights point, above all, to the rising tempo of mass struggle, in Guatemala and in El Salvador.

Rios Montt is the latest in a long line of military presidents of Guatemala. The first, Castilla Armas, came to power in 1954, through a coup organised directly by the United Fruit Company and the US State Department headed, respectively, by the brothers Allen and John Foster Dulles. It was their

active support, both within the US itself, and in the provision of arms, which enabled Armas to overthrow the elected government of Jacobo Arbenz.

Arbenz was a moderate democratic politician who aimed, in his own words:

'To convert Guatemala from a backward country with a predominantly feudal economy into a modern capitalist state.'

A central element in his programme was land reform, including the expropriation of some of the unused lands owned by the giant United Fruit Co. It was this that led the Company to organise a coup to overthrow him.

Bitter Fruit describes the careful preparations for the coup; the correspondence between the State Department, the Company and Castillo Armas has only now become available, and provides most of the material for the book. It was neither the first nor the last time that the US had organised direct military intervention in Latin America—US troops landed in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Nicaragua between 1898 and 1909. Many of the people who figure in this book reappear again in the Dominican Republic in 1965, in Chile in 1973, in El Salvador in 1979... only the companies changed; here it was United Fruit, elsewhere the Kennecott Copper Corporation, or ITT, or Standard Oil. For anyone who doubts the role of the United States government in the defence of the interests of its multinationals on a world scale, *Bitter Fruit* is a detailed and undeniable proof.

Yet the book is limited by a theory of conspiracy, which describes the Machiavellian intrigues blow by blow, but offers no explanation of them beyond the evil intentions of unscrupulous people. After the Chilean coup of 1973, the accusing finger was pointed at ITT. Their role, of course, was undeniable. Yet to lay the blame at the door of the multinationals, was to ignore the developing internal class struggle within these countries, which finally determined US intervention on behalf of an embattled ruling class. In Guatemala, 2.2 percent of the population owned 90 percent of the wealth; it was that society that the US moved in to defend.

A myth has grown up around Arbenz, as it has around Allende; both are seen as courageous nationalists leading a united nation against an insidious external attack. Yet in both cases the attack was mounted by an internal ruling class, with external support, against a workers' movement which had begun to move into active struggle for its own emancipation. In both cases, the head of government tried to mediate between those contradictory interests, and suffered exile or death as a result.

These differing perspectives led, in each case, to a different politics for the struggle. Arbenz decried 'external interference', and protested the 'illegality' of the move to overthrow him; he appealed to the

nation—and tried to mobilise this nation around its common interest. For Arbenz, like Allende, this meant *restraining* the class struggle and diverting it towards national unity, precisely at the moment when the class struggle was at its most intense.

Bitter Fruit does not deal with these questions; yet it does show very clearly the *absence* of any mass response to Castillo Armas' military coup; it does show how reluctant Arbenz was to mobilise the masses in defence of his 'democratic revolution' except at the very last moment, when it could be little more than an empty moral gesture. In any case, the truth of the matter is that there was no mass mobilisation; the 'revolution' had been from above, and did not involve the mass mobilisation of the workers of city and country. Half of Guatemala's population are Indian; the land reform was never explained to them, and the much-vaunted influence of the Communists on the government of Arbenz did not touch them—they remained the pawns of power games

played out in the state. Thus they did nothing to defend Arbenz, and neither they, nor the urban working class, offered any response when, at the very last moment, Arbenz called on them finally to become the subjects of their own history.

Today, for the first time, the Indian peasants are carrying the struggle directly; this time, the revolutionary organisations of Guatemala have carried out the long, slow, hard work of preparing the *self-organisation* of the working class; it is that qualitative change in the level of the struggle that has moved Reagan to a new sense of urgency, and Rios Montt to an intensification of repression. And this is precisely the moment when the lesson of the Arbenz government and the 1954 coup should be learned: that the revolution itself can only be won by a working class movement prepared to carry that process through to its necessary conclusion—socialism, and the destruction of the bourgeois state.

Mike Gonzalez

Granada cashing in

The Spanish Civil War

David Mitchell

Granada £9.95.

The Spanish Civil War

Antony Beevor

Orbis £12.00.

These are two books trying in different ways, to cash in on Granada's recent series on the Civil War.

Mitchell, a journalist who obviously knows little about Spain, has attempted to cobble the TV script into a book. The result is less than impressive. The series itself improved as it went on, culminating in the surprisingly good fifth episode on the revolution. The book has

none of the advantages of fascinating film footage or live interviews with the survivors.

The result is vaguely modelled on Ronald Fraser's *Blood of Spain* (like the series itself) but with none of the style, depth or analysis. Minor points of interest in the series, notable because of archive film available, become key historical facts in Mitchell's hands. This book, despite some wonderful photos, is a waste of money.

Antony Beevor's offering is, at first appearances, a more substantial piece of work. Orbis are better-known for producing cookery books and the like but Beevor has obviously persuaded them to part

with a large sum of money to produce a glossy history to coincide with the television series.

This book boasts of being 'the first full-length account of the Spanish Civil War to appear in English since the death of Franco' thereby suggesting that a really *new* contribution is on offer. Nothing could be further from the truth. The most outstanding thing about this book is that it says absolutely nothing which countless other works in English haven't said before. Totally undocumented, it is based solely on secondary sources and littered with well-repeated historical clangers. My personal favourite is a picture caption below a photo of militiamen of 'POUM volunteers at the Karl Marx barracks in Barcelona' — if these POUM militants had been in this particular barracks, armed to the teeth, the outcome of the revolution may have been a little different, as this was the Stalinist PSUC's headquarters!

If you want to read something substantial about the Civil War then there are plenty of better, and cheaper, products knocking about. Even the standard liberal histories by Hugh Thomas, Gabriel Jackson or Raymond Carr are preferable to these glossy versions. Better still, of course, is Fraser's excellent contribution and Burnet Bolleten's *The Spanish Revolution* (Chapel Hill) which despite its cold war background is a brilliant and well-documented account of the Stalinist counter-revolution, and is now available in paperback.

If publishers have so much money to chuck about then they could do us all a favour by republishing what is probably the best overall history of the war and revolution, Pierre Broué and Emile Témime's *The Revolution and The Civil War in Spain*, now sadly out of print.

Andy Durgan



Evading the problem

Socialist Economic Review 1982
 Edited by David Currie and
 Malcolm Sawyer
 Merlin. £4.95

This is an odd book. It is a collection of fifteen papers from a 1981 conference on alternative economic strategies (for a Labour Government, presumably), with eight commentaries, but lacking either a common political conception or a central preoccupation. Thus, to the patchy quality inevitable in any collection of this kind, is added a central political difficulty. The best pieces are those most removed from any particular 'socialist' concern, the most academic pieces (see Rubery and Tarling's *Women in recession*); the most 'socialist', those that rant. Only one contributor, John Palmer, steps outside the parochial concerns of this island to the awful realities beyond.

However, underlying the book — or rather, many of the contributors' pieces — there is a unifying problem, a problem most people seem to want to evade: that of power. There are those whose primary concern is to identify a problem:

'Women remain trapped in a vicious circle that can only be broken by a major and comprehensive set of initiatives on the part of a government committed to ending women's financial dependence on men.' (Gardiner and Smith, p39).

There are those ingenious in formulating remedies. But who is to do what needs to be done, and how plausible is it to assume they will do it? Most quietly assume the government will somehow do something — in principle; the State is the friend of the reformers, not part of the problem (whoever forms the Cabinet). It is the lack of attention

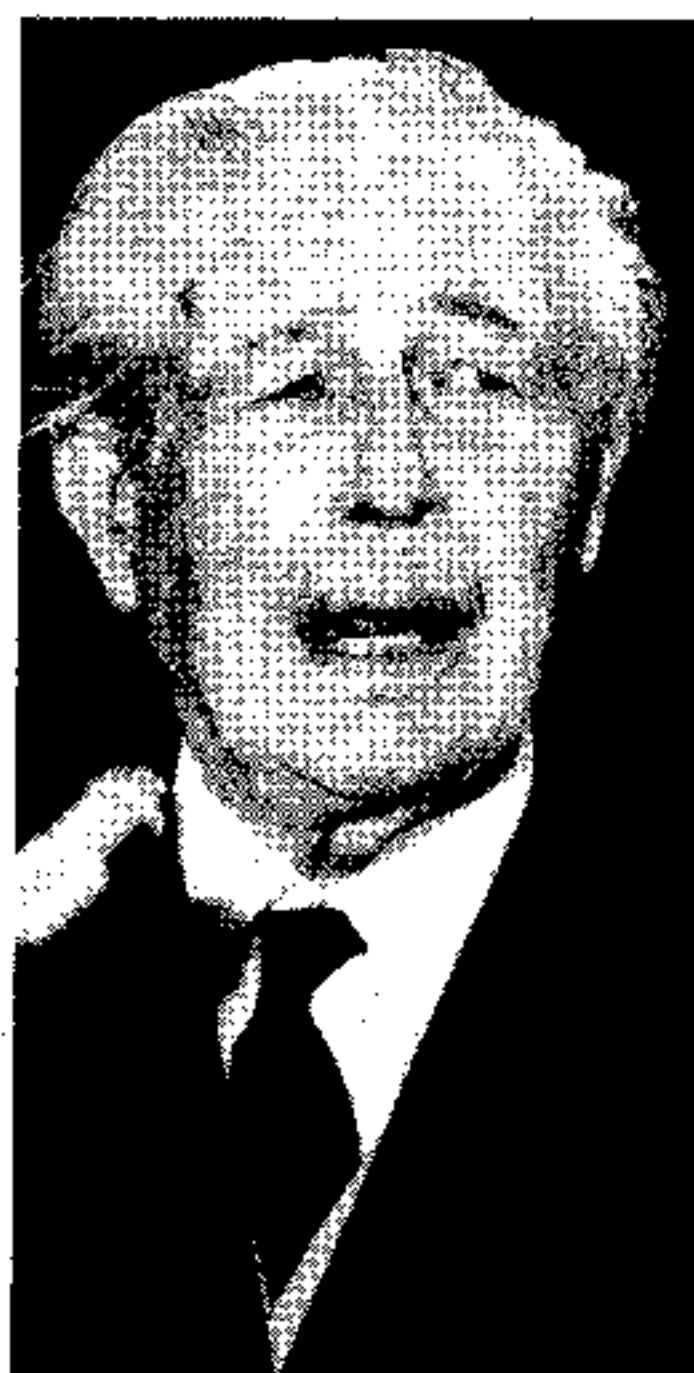
to means which gives what Schott calls 'that certain air of utopia that surrounds Alternative Economic Strategies' (p176).

Can the State be an agency for reforms? Clearly it can, as the historical record shows. But it would be foolish to think it is with equal intensity at all times. Is this the time when reform is part of the potential agenda? What are the conditions of reform? There are two obvious ones. The first seems to be when the State is obliged to reform for fear of something worse (a question we will return to). Another is when the State's revenue is buoyant so it has greater capacity to increase expenditure on worthwhile things. This second condition is lacking today; the slump, flat profit rates, squeezes the State's capacity to reform. Thus, it might seem, the serious reformer must pay attention to raising the State's financial capacity to reform — that is, undertake measures to restore profit rates and so, buoyant public revenues.

The particular features of the present time do not receive searching examination, although John Harrison (the Left opponent of Alternative Economic Strategies) remarks that revolution is easier in present circumstances than reform simply because of the nature of the times:

'It would be harder to implement a radical Alternative Economic Strategy than a fuller take over. In fact, it would be damned near impossible.' (P126).

Some contributors embrace the belief that a reorganisation of the State and its relationship to companies can overcome the underlying economic problem. The 'planning agreement' at times comes to bear the magic of a wand.



Alternative Economic Strategies: 1938 and 1964.

But the magic unfortunately varies also with the profit rate: with more profits, there might be more agreements; with less, companies are forced to fight for their survival. Then someone must decide who is in control: as Harrison asks:

'Who decides when agreement cannot be reached? Capital or government? Who has real control?'

If the hypothetical government's grip on business is slippery, what of labour? There is much loose talk of 'industrial democracy,' forms of organisation to mediate controls. David Lipsey (the Right opponent of the Alternative Economic Strategy) is no less brutal than Harrison:

'Either the (National Planning, NH) Commission will tell the workers what to produce, in which case they are not behaving democratically. Or the workers will tell them what they will produce, in which case there is precious little planning.' (p113).

If the State is a weak reed for the reformers, they need a force capable of obliging the State to reform. But that logic goes in the opposite direction to the inclinations of many of the contributors. Of course, all are inclined at lagging moments in the drama to wheel in the secret weapon from the wings — the 'working class'. But it is play, a character, without flesh, hypothetical. MacLennan notes regretfully that the Alternative Economic Strategy seems to be 'something devised by the big battalions, institutions like the Labour Party or the TUC' (p103). Or, more accurately, not devised by, but devised for, by outsiders seeking to influence the 'big battalions.' Yet the big battalions cannot remain enamoured simply with good ideas for reform; they have to worry about the survival of the 'British economy,' which brings us back to

the unpleasant problem of the level of profits.

There is one sad little piece — by Owen Jones — that pleads for a larger role for 'working people' in the Strategy. But, regrettably, the piece collapses into a plea to sugar the Strategy pill — it needs to:

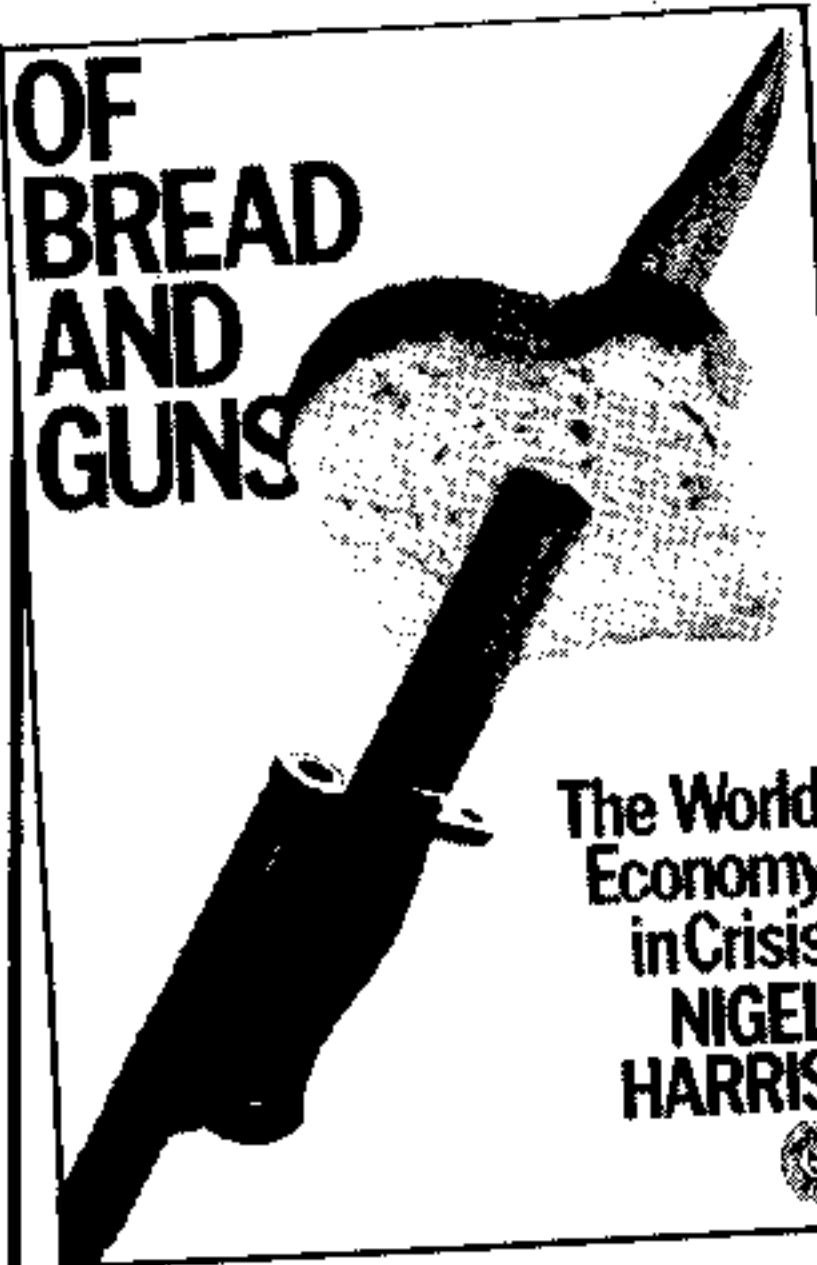
'offer concrete advances (to workers, NH) while simultaneously promoting a sense of hegemony amongst working people.'

Leaving aside the hint of 'economism', much deplored by other contributors, the last proposal smacks of persuading workers that they can ride the horse without actually doing any riding.

The 'working class' is a myth for the contributors beside the well-trodden paths of economic analysis and speculation. Indeed, apart from wanting to do workers good and talk of 'industrial democracy', there does not seem to be much that is socialist about the volume at all. All too often the issue of power fades into 'opening up space for socialist and feminist ideas and greater equalitarianism to flourish' (Gardiner and Smith, p39). Hearts and minds may run society, not capital; and even if they don't, the Left can find some corner to hide.

The harder people keep their eye firmly on the State. Here the elasticity of language allows the 'abolition of capitalism' to merge imperceptibly in 'the defence of capitalism', just as it did between 1945 and 1951. Then a Labour Government, in order to 'abolish capitalism', implemented a programme which was a diluted version of one put forward by Harold MacMillan in 1938 with the intention of protecting capitalism. In 1964, Harold Wilson borrowed the same bag of tricks. Then the fight for reforms becomes a means of recruiting the Left for the defence of established society. Meanwhile, the struggle for socialism goes on.

Nigel Harris



OF BREAD AND GUNS

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NIGEL HARRIS

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Soap with some froth

Once in a while the goggle-box comes up with something not quite as depressing as everything else on it. Alan Gibbons explains why he has missed a couple of paper sales recently.

Watching television is a bit like farting. Everyone does it but nobody likes to confess they do it a lot.

And no wonder. From *Game for a laugh* to *The Professionals* cultural reaction is rampant. The dominant ideas presented are the ideas of the ruling class with a vengeance. A racist, sexist, oppressive society produces, not surprisingly, a racist, sexist, oppressive television. So when the old Ferguson comes up with something above the average, you tend to treasure it.

We treasured *Boys from the Blackstuff* and *United Kingdom* but they were one-offs. When it comes to soap operas, the staff of life for the TV programmers, we have been rather poorly served.

Crossroads was plain bad, and bloody right wing. It gave Benny two different occasions to pontificate on the evils of abortion. *Coronation Street* is better, but it is fantasy. Eddie Yeats and Hilda Ogden are Billo the Bear and Korki the Kat for adults. The Street has a life and momentum of its own, it's caricature writ large.

The recent soap operas have been rather different. Both *Grange Hill* and *Brookside* are from the Phil Redmond stable. They are the new realism. They have stepped out of the settled, 'you've never had it so good attitudes' which most soap operas are still immersed in.

Just compare *Grange Hill* with the other schools' saga *Dear Sir*. 'Sir' lived in the world of carry-on-teacher. It had 'tough' kids who wouldn't scare a neurotic marshmallow and were so old they made Ted Moulton look like a babe in arms. To look at them you'd think they'd be more scared by menopause than detention.

Grange Hill does live up to Thatcher's Britain. School cuts mess up your options, blacks exist, girls have periods, racists try to push you around, kids run protection rackets. There is much talk of a future on the dole. Schoolkids don't have to be played by adults to convey their concerns. In *Grange Hill* fourteen-year-olds are played by fourteen-year-olds.

Brookside has a similar toughness. Forget the media's 'bad language campaign'. I've heard 'frigging' once and 'screw' once. Shocking!

The toughness lies in the content of the episodes. Unemployment is a grinding, endless reality, not a brief episode you knew would finish, as in *Coronation Street*. Schoolgirls are on the pill, people do 'foreigners' to survive on the dole, sexuality



Real life in *Brookside*. Ricky Tomlinson becomes Bobby Grant.

is central, factory life strikingly realistic.

Brookside broke the mould by dispensing with 'name' actors and using unknown Scousers or people from outside acting. The most obvious example is Ricky Tomlinson who plays Bobby Grant. Tomlinson was one of the Shrewsbury Two building workers who served two years in jail for his union activities, in the 1972 building workers' strike.

Brookside is also real in another way. *Coronation Street* is its own mythical world, the Rovers or the front room of the charac-

ters. *Crossroads* too inhabits its own world. *Brookside* is set in Croxteth. Scenes are often played out in Church Street or Renshaw Street, recognisable places in real Liverpool. And it nips into the bedroom as well as the living room.

Both *Grange Hill* and *Brookside* have attracted much abuse, from the *Guardian* as well as Mary Whitehouse. From the daily organ of the radical middle class to the wailing matron of the ultra right, there is hatred for TV which portrays a world where people swear, sleep with more than one person, or where schoolkids are shown trying to enter the adult world of sexuality and power relationships.

In trying to tell it like it is the Phil Redmond school of realism becomes ever so slightly unsafe.

After all strikers were sympathetically treated in *Brookside*, and racism is severely caned in *Grange Hill*. Politics occasionally becomes overt. The 'Trots' have influence in Bobby Grant's factory, Gripper Stebson is a dead-ringer for a young NFER. You often feel you are watching something genuinely radical.

Now, it is a healthy response to say 'The enemy of my enemy is my friend'. Any programme loathed by Mary Whitehouse and Jean Rook can't be all bad. But there are problems.

Firstly the episode format sometimes makes *Grange Hill* like *Bash Street Kids* for the sophisticated palate. There is a tendency to tell little morality tales. One week it was 'don't get into a car with a strange man' featuring Anita who of course escaped intact. Sometimes the issue of the day is a little strained, as when Randir, the Sikh kid, is going on about 'solidarity against racists.' A bit wooden, I thought.

Most of all reality is, in the end, safe and static. It is the teacher who puts a stop to racism by saying it is bad, the teacher who cures Suzanne's anxiety by changing her options.

As a kid I gave up chemistry to do language. It wasn't the end of my problems! Because *Grange Hill* describes what is, it ends up justifying the here and now. It shows problems, like racism and the arrogant bullying of some teachers, but tells you they can be put right by nice teachers.

In *Brookside* too, Mrs T will be glad to know there is no alternative. You can either retreat into the family, for all its warts, or survive on your wits, like Gavin. Like *Grange Hill*, it's a good picture of the way things are at times, but it describes; it doesn't prescribe. As you watch you may think some things are wrong, but, after all, you can't really do anything about it, can you? Unemployment, it's like the weather.

Now nobody would expect an SWP member to walk on and point out the revolutionary road. But the limitations of *Grange Hill* and *Brookside* are similar to the limitations of Channel 4 at its best. They are good, often very good. But in seeking to be a bit more real than a run-of-the-mill TV show they accept the reality they try to convey as the only one possible. They are good, but they are not revolutionary, in the end they are not even that subversive. □

Leaders and the led

'The idea of equality is all very well, but there have always been leaders and led, and there always will be.' So runs a common argument against the idea that we can build a society free of classes and free of the state.

It is true that different individuals have different qualities and that will persist as long as there is a human species.

No one seriously supposes that in communist society everybody will be five feet nine inches tall. And even though many other human qualities are much more affected by social conditions it is not necessary that everybody be equally good at a social skill like mathematics in order to have a *classless* society.

The class structure of society is something quite different. It is the fact that one group of people have domination over the lives of another group of people. And that is quite independent of any personal qualities that each group of people might have.

Fair enough, some people might argue, but even if you did away with inherited wealth and power, by far the most important factor in class position in Britain, the new society would still need experts to run it and they would eventually come to form the new ruling class just like they have in every previous society.

The last bit of that argument is certainly factually wrong: there have been many human societies in which there have been *no* classes, no evidence of leaders and led.

An example is the prehistoric village of Koln-Lindenthal. Exhaustive study of this example of neolithic 'Danubian' culture failed to find any evidence that the population was divided into classes. They all had houses of the same size and all used the same sort of instruments.

We can be sure that there were no leaders in that society because the people who did the excavation were desperately searching for evidence of just that. They were Nazis who were committed to the 'leader principle' as a central part of their ideology and would have found it if it was there.

Of course, these societies had some collective activities which required organising and directing. But the people who led these activities did not form a special privileged group. What they did was the technical function of direction, not the social function of domination. The reason for this was simple: the societies involved were simply too poor to support a separate class of people free of daily labour.

To the extent that human societies engage in collective activities, they require such 'leaders'. As Marx put it in Volume One of *Capital*:

'All combined labour on a large scale requires, more or less, a directing authority ... A single violin player is his own conductor; an orchestra requires a separate one.'

In all class societies up until capitalism this directing function was closely linked to the

ruling class. In these societies the amount of surplus was small and only a small number of people could benefit from it. It was simply not possible for everybody to have the time, resources and education necessary to become 'conductors'.

Capitalism provided the material basis for altering this prison of immediate production. By socialising labour to an undreamt of degree capitalism created an enormous surplus, and thus laid the basis for the mass of the population to free itself for the business of organising production.

Owners and supervisors

But of course capitalism had another use for that surplus: accumulation. So the potential has not been fulfilled. What happened instead was that the business of 'supervising' became much more widespread and was tangled up with the business of exploitation. In the early days of capitalism the two functions were often bound up in one and the same person but as capitalism developed they became separated out. Returning to his 'conductor' analogy, Marx wrote in Volume Three of *Capital*:

'The capitalist mode of production has brought matters to a point where the work of supervision, entirely divorced from the ownership of capital, is always readily obtainable. It has, therefore,

come to be useless for the capitalist to perform it himself. An orchestra conductor need not own the instruments of his orchestra, nor is it within the scope of his duties as conductor to have anything to do with the "wages" of the other musicians.'

So once again the conditions exist for the job of 'conducting' to become a purely technical one. And because the amount of surplus, freed from the capitalist imperative of accumulation, is so great it is now possible to begin to generalise that work.

The whole of the existing order, and in particular the state, is organised to keep the conductors part of a privileged class. That is why the state machine and similar massive bureaucratic apparatuses have to be *smashed*.

As Lenin put in in *State and Revolution*: 'Capitalist culture has created large-scale production, factories, railways, the postal service, telephones etc, and on this basis the great majority of the functions of "the old state power" have become so simplified and can be reduced to such exceedingly simple operations of registration, filing and checking that they can be easily performed by every literate person, can be quite easily performed for ordinary "workmen's wages", and that these functions can (and must) be stripped of every shadow of privilege, of every semblance of "official grandeur".'

The setting up of a workers' state is the first step on the road to abolition of leaders and led, from a start where every cook can govern to a world where no one governs at all.

Colin Sparks



Walter Hargreaves, conductor of Fairey Engineering Works Band.