

socialist worker Review

January 1986

Issue 83

60p



The crisis of the left

THE COLLAPSE OF MUNICIPAL SOCIALISM

Politics of Militant

NOTES OF THE MONTH 3
Note of the year, Labour's witch hunt, South Africa, CND and students

NIGEL HARRIS 8
On the car industry world wide

THERE'S MORE THAN ONE DEBT CRISIS 9
Pete Green reviews a new book on the problems facing our rulers

THE POLITICS OF MILITANT 11
Gareth Jenkins on the ideas behind the tactics

THE COLLAPSE OF MUNICIPAL SOCIALISM 15
The end of the local road is charted by Ann Rogers

LET'S BE POSITIVE 16
Arguments for positive discrimination from Norah Carlin

MARX AND POLITICS 17
The second in a series of articles by Duncan Hallas

LOST IN THE BLACKBOARD JUNGLE 20
A discussion among teachers and students on the Poundswick dispute in Manchester and wider questions of discipline in schools

INTERNATIONAL 23
Phil Marshall analyses recent developments in Egypt, and we interview the leader of a Greek trade union, who has recently been expelled from the socialist party

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY the tribune of the people? 26
Andy Zebrowski explains

A RICH SEAM 27
The history of the American mineworkers' union and its lessons by Jonathan Neale

MARXISM & CULTURE 28
John Rees on the art and politics of the cartoonist David Low, Noel Halifax on the rising tide of soap and Nic Cicutti and Clare Fermont on the Italian film director Francesco Rosi

REVIEW ARTICLE 31
Donny Gluckstein's new book on Western Soviets is reviewed by Alex Callinicos

REVIEWS 32

LETTERS 34
On Trotsky, workers' states, Poundswick, *Militant*, France and Xmas

OUR HISTORY 36
Mike Thompson tells the story of a concert that turned into a right wing rampage

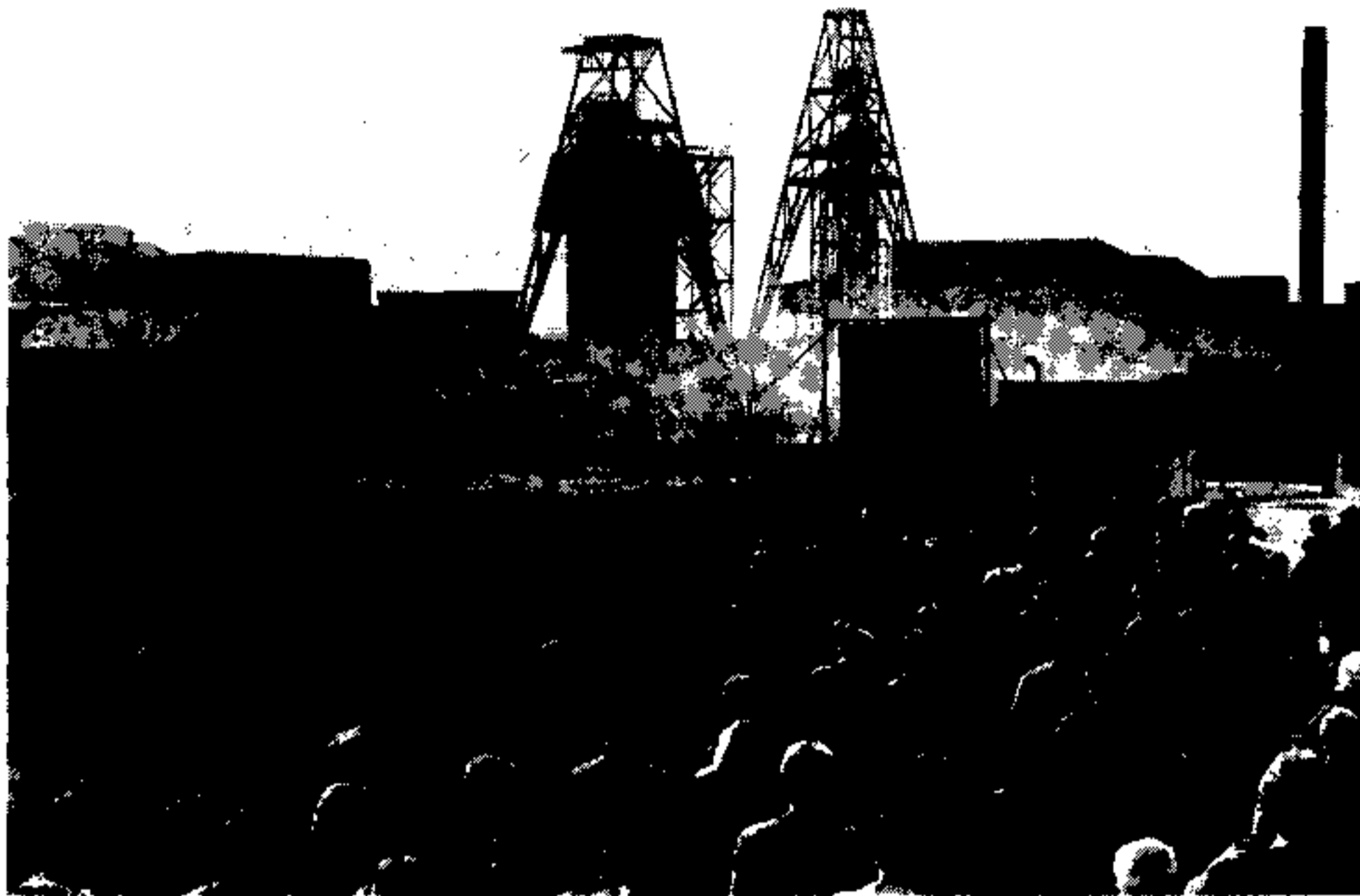
Edited by Lindsey German
Assisted by Jane Basset, Pat Stack, Gareth Jenkins, Andy Zebrowski, Noel Halifax, Dave Beecham, Norah Carlin, Laurence Wong, Rob Ferguson, Bill Thompson, Sean Piggot, Pete Binns, Simon Terry, Harriet Sherwood, Lindsey Greig, Clare Fermont, Pete Green and Lesley Hoggart

Production and business Pat Stack and Liz Abraham
Reviews Colin Sparks

Subscription rate for one year:
Britain and Ireland £8 Overseas surface £9 Europe Air £11
Elsewhere Air £14.50
(institutions add £7.50)
Cheques and postal orders payable to Socialist Review.
Socialist Worker Review is sent free to all prisoners on request.
ISSN 0141 2442
Printed by Laneridge Ltd (TU all depts) London E3 3LH.

NOTES

of the month



CLASS STRUGGLE

No cure for the patient

THE LAST YEAR has proved quite a watershed for the working class movement and for socialists working within it. A year ago there were still two months of the miners' strike ahead. There was the prospect of mass defiance of government policies from local Labour councils and their workforces. There was at least the possibility that other sizeable sections of workers would follow the miners in striking against the Tory government.

Now those hopes seem remote and to some unrealistic.

The miners' strike ended after a back-to-work movement had begun to fray support for the strike at the edges. There was no formal settlement to the strike but its effects are clear. Cortonwood and other pits have since been closed. Thousands of jobs are set to go in the foreseeable future. And the scab union, the UDM, has so far succeeded in undercutting the NUM on a much wider scale than its original base of Notts.

Other workers have been reluctant, in the face of the miners' defeat, to take their chances. The NUR railway guards balloted *not* to strike in defence of jobs—a serious defeat. And the strike figures among other groups of workers have fallen dramatically.

As we write, the only major strikes are

Silentnight in Barnoldswick and Forge-masters in Sheffield—both bitterly fought, but both also localised and defensive. The major national dispute over teachers' pay is characterised by fragmentation and tokenism.

The outcome of the miners' strike was, it is true, not totally unexpected by this time last year.

In January 1985 we wrote that:

'many supporters of the miners enter the new year feeling less than optimistic about its outcome. They reflect the nature of the strike itself, and the political mood and ideas it has generated, which are full of contradictions.'

The qualms we expressed then were all too well founded.

The political implications of the strike's defeat are much wider than what happens to the miners or their union. Growth of support for the strike led to many people being pulled leftwards in its wake. Its decline has had the opposite effect.

The mood inside the Labour Party has been one of a sharp shift rightwards. Many of the erstwhile left—who defended extra-parliamentary action, who collected for the miners and who believed that the victory of the strike would help Labour gain support—have abandoned such views.

The move happened with remarkable rapidity. It was abundantly clear when any fight against ratecapping collapsed. Despite fine words from 42 Labour councils (it seems an astonishing figure now), Ken Livingstone led what proved to be an almost total retreat. Only Liverpool seriously attempted a course of action which could challenge the govern-

ment. Now Liverpool's resistance, too, has collapsed without a real fight.

But Liverpool wasn't applauded for sticking to the policy which the Labour conference had voted for in the middle of the miners' strike. Instead the councillors and their supporters in Liverpool and elsewhere have been subject to some of the most vicious and vile abuse from the Labour leadership for daring to fight the Tories.

Meanwhile, the policies and ideas on which Labour seems set to fight the next election are becoming crystal clear. In the name of realignment and realism, many of Labour's traditional policies have been ditched. Kinnock is backing out of any commitment to re-nationalisation of, for example, British Telecom or British Gas. There is no commitment to establishing full employment. Labour's economic policy is a package which is hardly distinguishable from the SDP or indeed wet Tories.

Kinnock and Hattersley's counterparts in the TUC have also grasped the opportunity given by the decline of militancy, to reassert control. Increasingly, this is on the terms of the extreme right wing of the trade union movement. The EETPU and AUEW seem able to defy TUC policy on receiving government money for ballots with impunity.

Support for the move right has been provided by a whole range of ideologues from *Tribune*, with its enthusiastic backing of Kinnock, to the Eurocommunists round *Marxism Today*, who even attracted the praise of Peter Jenkins in the *Sunday Times* recently. A brief glimpse at their ideas shows why. They have not only been the keenest on dialogue with the right. Today they are adopting many of the ideas of the right and claiming them for their own.

Stuart Hall in December's *Marxism Today*, for example, puts forward this idea on public spending:

'If you are providing for people's social wants and needs with their money, there is nothing "essentially capitalist" about asking what comparative costs are, the constraints on different types of expenditure at different times and how one arrives in a more public or collective way at the choices and priorities which will have to be made in the "real world".'

What Hall and people like him are talking about is not a 'realignment' but such a re-definition of socialism that it becomes meaningless.

NOTES

of the month

The move to the right inside the Labour Party and the unions can only help the government. Yet 1985 has not been a good year for Thatcher and her ministers, or for the ruling class. The government has entered successive political crises—some of them small but all of them symptomatic of a much greater crisis.

The miners' strike didn't have the effect the Tories hoped. Although strike figures have been low, pay increases have been substantial. *The Economist* estimates that real wages in Britain have increased by 13 percent since 1979.

This is a far cry from what they deemed necessary to solve the problems of British capital's profitability—real wage cuts of 20 percent. And although public sector wages have been held much lower than those in the private sector, the tenacity of the teachers' dispute shows the strength of feeling among some public sector workers and the ensuing problem for the government.

Unemployment shows no sign of going down. It threatens to remain a serious electoral liability for the Tories without having succeeded in its purpose of holding down wages and increasing the profitability of British industry. The revenue from North Sea Oil is limited and threatens to run out fairly rapidly.

Worse still, recent cuts in the world price of oil make nonsense of Lawson's economic predictions for the next year and in particular the promised vote-catcher of tax cuts. And Britain is now a massive importer of manufactured goods.

Far from Thatcher's monetarist policies helping the economy get straight, as was promised in 1979 and 1983, they have clearly done nothing to solve any of the problems of British capitalism. The danger of a further recession throughout Europe yet again poses particular problems in Britain where there has been no real 'recovery'.

Politically, the Tories seem to have recovered from their spate of banana skins earlier this year. But there are still major problems. There are the political crises over issues like rate reform which threaten some of their middle class base.

There is the stench of something rotten in the city of London, with the Johnson Matthey and Lloyds affairs being only the tip of the iceberg. There is the dilemma over public spending where again a section of the middle classes are likely to be hit if further cuts occur. Even things like the legal knock-

backs over issues like social security payments cause havoc with Tory plans.

The stalemate in bourgeois politics—all three parties more or less level pegging in the opinion polls—is a symptom of the very deep malaise of British capital. Thatcher's strategy was the big stick—on jobs, wages, union power. The patients may have taken their medicine, but there has been no sign of a cure. Her opponents want to return to less coercion and more cooperation in order to achieve exactly the same aim.

This was the strategy followed for most of the post-war years. But then Britain wasn't one of the weakest links in a thoroughly crisis ridden system. Today no one is confident that this approach will work either. ■

LABOUR PARTY

Hunting the heretics

THE WITCH hunt Kinnock has launched against the 'hard left' in the Labour Party is of much greater severity than its most recent predecessor in 1983. Then the net result was proscription of organisations which weren't part of an official register, and the expulsion of the five editorial board members of *Militant* newspaper.

Today the investigation into Liverpool District Labour Party and the threat to expel even prominent councillors like Derek Hatton or Tony Mulhearn—coupled with expulsions in places like Cardiff—suggest a course of events which can seriously damage the left.



Mulhearn: target of witch hunt

What is the witch hunt about, and why is it taking place now? On the left inside the Labour Party, there seem to be two basic views. The first is that the attack on the left is inconsequential and that it amounts to very little. This argument was put some months back by Peter Hain in an interview with *Socialist Worker*. It is echoed by many on the left.

But the argument doesn't stem from political naivety. Rather it is a wilful blindness to the reality of what is going on. In the case

of Hain and his organisation, the Labour Coordinating Committee, it is also a cover for the fact that they too have joined in the witch hunt against the left. So the recent LCC conference—deliberately held in Liverpool to bolster support for the anti-*Militant* Liverpool Labour Left—voted by 200 to 2 to back the inquiry initiated by the Labour NEC.

The second response by the left is to claim that any attacks are a sign not of weakness of the left, but of its strength. This is the argument in particular of those around *Militant*. Yet it ignores the fact that the outcome of Kinnock's speech at Labour conference and of the subsequent moves against Liverpool, has led to a significant weakening of the left. It is true that Hatton and Mulhearn are just individuals, but expulsion of individuals is a blow to the left as a whole.

Both analyses are wrong. The witch hunt is real and it is serious. Anyone who still doubts that is likely to be severely disabused over the coming months.

Nor does the witch hunt have much to do with Kinnock's assessment of the strength of the left.

It has everything to do with Kinnock paving the way for what he hopes will be an electoral victory in two years time. In order to do so, he has to prove firstly that he can be trusted in government. Big business already has little to fear in terms of Labour's policies, which present absolutely no threat to its privilege and power. But they need to be convinced as well that Kinnock is capable of carrying out these policies. They want to ensure that he is not in hock to the left of the party, to the rank and file of the unions or to anyone else.

The attack on *Militant* and other socialists is about proving that he can deal with any troublesome problems from the left. It has a second function, however. It acts as a sort of loyalty oath from the soft left. The general right wing drift, plus the pressure for unity in the run up to the election, allows Kinnock to demand that the left back him publicly. For him, the sacrifice of genuine socialists inside the party is a small price to pay to achieve this.

Some of the left will have real reservations about Kinnock. They will feel unhappy that he is attacking everyone who wants to stand up and fight. They remember his disgusting role in the miners' strike. They see that all the attacks of the leadership are reserved for the left and not the right.

The importance of the petition against the witch hunt which *Socialist Worker* has supported is to commit those with reservations to opposing the witch hunt. Even before Xmas signatures numbered into tens of thousands, showing a level of feeling that needs to be organised.

Of course, signing a piece of paper doesn't necessarily mean fighting in every constituency party to prevent expulsions. Some people may have reservations now, but they can still be pulled to the right as the election draws nearer and they are put under pressure by the Labour leadership.

But the more people who sign now—and hopefully commit themselves to further action—the harder it will be for Kinnock to isolate socialists. ■

SOUTH AFRICA

One big union?

THE FORMATION of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) on 2 December is obviously an event of the greatest significance. It brings together 34 non-racial unions with nearly half a million mainly African members into a united 'super-federation'.

COSATU is the fruit of the explosive growth of the black trade unions since the Durban mass strikes of 1973, which marked the revival of the African working class after the defeats of the 1960s. In 1979 the regime was forced to legalise black unions. Today there are 800,000 black trade unionists out of a total registered union membership of 1,406,000.

The independent unions have been, however, bedevilled by deep-seated divisions, fragmenting them into rival federations. For five years there have been negotiations aimed at achieving broader trade union unity. COSATU is the result. It brings together three distinct elements.

First, there is the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU), which developed out of unions formed after the Durban strikes. Many of its organisers were white radicals. FOSATU is distinguished by an emphasis on non-racial (rather than exclusively black unions), an emphasis on methodically building industry-wide unions based on strong shop stewards' organisation, and concentration on economic issues (wages, conditions, etc) rather than broader political questions.

Secondly, there are the very different 'community unions'—most notably the South African Allied Workers Union (SAAWU) and the General and Allied Workers Union (GAWU). These are, unlike the FOSATU unions, affiliated to the United Democratic Front (UDF), the main legal

black resistance organisation, whose politics are close to that of the banned African National Congress (ANC). They are general rather than industrial unions, explicitly concerned with political issues such as the pass laws, and committed to campaigning in the community as well as organising in the workplaces.

The third factor in the COSATU equation is the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), which now claims 230,000 members, 40 percent of the black workforce in South Africa's most important industry. The NUM emerged from the Council of South African Unions (CUSA), a federation influenced by the black consciousness movement and therefore opposed to the involvement of whites in African unions. However, since its extraordinary growth in the past two years, the NUM has drawn much closer to FOSATU.

Left out of the new super-federation are CUSA and another group of black consciousness unions, the Azanian Confederation of Trade Unions, which between them organise 150,000 workers. They couldn't stomach one of COSATU's five basic principles, non-racialism. A quarter of COSATU's affiliates have white general secretaries.

The UDF unions would have had no difficulty in accepting non-racialism—the ANC broke with the ancestors of the black consciousness movement back in the 1950s because it defended the role of 'white democrats' in the struggle against apartheid. However, SAAWU and GAWU, along with some other small general unions, have had to accept the principle of 'one union, one industry' which represents the triumph of FOSATU's industrial unionism.

FOSATU too have made concessions. The 'super-federation' has adopted a much higher political profile from the start. To quote *Socialist Worker's* correspondent:

'At the two-day inaugural conference workers debated the question of alliances and the kind of society that should replace apartheid. A number of significant resolutions were passed calling for the lifting of the state of emergency, equal rights for all, abolition of migrant labour and Bantustan systems and for the right



NUM: major force in COSATU

NOTES

of the month

to strike and a national minimum wage.'

'The question of alliances' is a coded reference to the ANC strategy of a two-stage struggle, first an alliance of black workers and capitalists to achieve national liberation and only thereafter a separate proletarian struggle for socialism. FOSATU leaders have in the past rejected such a broad alliance, for example refusing to affiliate to the UDF. Their alternative has been an essentially syndicalist strategy of trying to preserve working class independence through strong trade union organisation.

It has been impossible consistently to pursue this line in the turmoil of the past 18 months. In November 1984 FOSATU and CUSA called a successful two-day general strike in the Transvaal in protest against repression in the townships. Now they seem prepared to go further, at least in rhetoric. At the Durban rally which launched COSATU, Elijah Barayi, a NUM member and ex-ANC activist who is president of the new federation, threatened among other things to launch a pass-burning campaign unless the pass laws are repealed in six months.

These widely publicised remarks should be taken with a large pinch of salt. It will be the NUM and the big ex-FOSATU unions, such as the Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU), who will call the shots in COSATU. NUM general secretary Cyril Ramaphosa has pursued a very cautious line in practice. Rather than call out the entire union in September to win the pay claim which one wing of the Chamber of Mines were refusing to meet, he allowed his weaker-organised mines to strike, and used the subsequent defeat to take the employers to court—successfully, as it turned out. MAWU too has been willing to rely on the state against the employers—for example, joining the state-sponsored Industrial Council for the metal industry after a strike-wave in 1982/3 had been crushed by the bosses.

These tactics reflect the development of an embryonic trade union bureaucracy within the black workers' movement. Conditions in South Africa—the level of state repression (four AAWU leaders are on trial for high treason), the close connections between political and economic struggles, the volatility of the situation—make it very unlikely that this bureaucracy can become a consolidated apparatus comparable to our own dear TUC. Nevertheless, the syndicalism of the COSATU leadership can lead to the

NOTES

of the month

opposite of what they intend.

Black workers can be militant trade unionists and accept all sorts of diverse political views, from the tribalism of Chief Gatsha Buthelezi (highly influential among Durban workers), through the nationalism of the ANC, to class-struggle socialist politics. Given the level of struggle in South Africa, the ANC/UDF, the main political force in the black community, could easily come to dominate the unions as well. The UDF unions, which are to be merged with industrial unions, will be in a strong position to spread ANC/UDF politics within COSATU. The union leaders, who reject the need for a distinct socialist workers' party, will have no alternative to offer.

COSATU is the most powerful workers' organisation on the African continent. It represents 16-18 percent of the active workforce (excluding domestic and farm workers)—a staggering achievement in South African conditions. This enormous potential strength could, however, easily become an appendage of the nationalist class alliance—unless a revolutionary workers' party develops. Socialist political organisation is a necessary condition of independent working-class action in the struggle against apartheid. ■

CND

Disarming action

THE Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament mobilised 100,000 people to its October demonstration in London. Certainly a huge number, but several times smaller than the one in 1983 just before Cruise missiles arrived. The annual demonstration at Greenham Common on 14 December was 3,000 strong, also much smaller than in previous years.

More missiles are on their way. The world still lives under the threat of nuclear war. The reasons for CND's existence are still here. Yet it is a declining organisation. What has gone wrong?

Labour's shift to the right has hurt CND. Although Kinnoch has kept quiet on nuclear issues, Labour conference policy has shifted.

The policy of 'unilateral nuclear disarmament' has given way to the milder 'non-nuclear defence strategy', a policy supported by the soft left Labour Coordinating Committee.

The recent launch of the celebrity-backed Nuclear Freeze Campaign could accelerate this shift. While CND has never accepted the nuclear freeze slogan the Labour Party might well adopt it as a policy for the next election. The policy could be used to create a broad anti-Tory alliance without making any commitment to reducing weapons.

Even mild support for CND is no longer considered a vote-winner. The parties that had an anti-nuclear stance at the last election are now dropping it. The parliamentary road to nuclear disarmament is in disarray.

The 'Star Wars' programme should have caused a huge public outcry because it is a terrifying development in nuclear weapons technology. It is much worse than the first-strike weapons like Cruise whose introduction caused the re-growth of CND in the early eighties. But Star Wars has been carefully marketed as a 'defence initiative' and has evoked little public reaction.

And although the Geneva talks are unlikely to disarm a popgun, the cosy glow surrounding the summit—in contrast to those old speeches about the 'evil empire'—has created a much harder climate for CND to operate in.

Local CND branches have become passive and depressed. The activists have turned increasingly towards direct action. The election of Paul Johns, an outside candidate, as the new CND chairperson indicates the level of support for this strategy within the campaign. He took up his new position clutching a piece of barbed wire recently clipped from the fence of the Molesworth base. Unlike Bruce Kent, his predecessor, he seems prepared to get personally involved with civil disobedience and direct action.



Greenham: symbolic confrontation

This is likely to be the major direction of the campaign.

In addition to the large-scale sit-downs there are a number of groups specialising in particular tactics. 'Cruisewatch' shadows and harasses missile convoys on their periodic nocturnal excursions. 'Operation Snowball' is a fence-cutting group which aims to increase its number of activists at each demonstration and whose members refuse to pay fines, thus getting jail sentences.

The numbers arrested for these various activities have now reached an amazing 9,000. Several hundred more are added each month. Although this must now count as the main activity of many CND members it gets almost no publicity. The authorities are often reluctant to prosecute, sometimes to the annoyance of the protesters.

Direct action tactics face further problems. They require secrecy, spare time and a lot of resources. Cruisewatch supporters, for example, must sit by the phone waiting for a missile alert, then leap into cars equipped with walkie-talkies, and chase around the countryside after the missile convoy. Although spectacular results are sometimes achieved, the participants are likely to run out of money and energy.

Direct action is often seen by its supporters as a means of awakening the public conscience. Sadly, the reverse is often nearer the truth. As public participation in the campaign has declined, direct action has become more popular with the activists.

The CND parliamentarians thought public opinion could stop Cruise and Trident. They won over public opinion but it had no effect. The advocates of non-violent direct action believe that token and symbolic confrontations with the authority of the state will change the mind of government.

Both these arguments misunderstand the nature and power of the state and its dependence on weapons of mass destruction. More crucially, they neglect the working class as the basis on which to build a movement capable of achieving nuclear disarmament.

Many CND members, aware of the impasse the campaign finds itself in, will be asking questions. The direction of the campaign itself is unlikely to provide the answers. ■

STUDENT POLITICS

Respectable face

THE conference of the National Union of Students held last month didn't exactly hit the headlines. That in itself is quite different from some years ago, when any controversial motion could guarantee national prominence. Does it mean that students have all become respectable and forgotten any idea of student struggle or left wing politics?

Not really. Thousands of students this term have, for example, occupied and demonstrated against apartheid.

Some of this feeling and militancy was reflected at the conference. But there is no doubt that the ruling NUS executive (dominated by members of NOLS, the National Organisation of Labour Students) wants to foster the image of students as a respectable pressure group rather than as well organised and fighting back against their grievances. They are prepared to move quite far to the right in order to do so.

In this the conference reflected the priorities of the mainstream Labour Party. President Phil Woolas reserved one of his most vicious attacks for students who demonstrated against Tory minister David Waddington in Manchester recently. And the conference was held against a background of the witch hunt against Liverpool council.

Many of the arguments put by NOLS were accepted. This in part reflects the low level of activity in the colleges recently.

At the same time Woolas and his friends didn't have everything their own way. They seemed to be losing some of their domination at the conference, not over the executive itself, but over many of their members who are dissatisfied with NOLS leadership but see no alternative to them other than the Tories.

In 1982, the Labour Clubs proved an irresistible challenge to the old Left Alliance (dominated by the Communist Party). NOLS members swept the board in those elections, carried along by the heady rise of the Labour left around Benn. Many of their supporters saw the stage set for a leftward move in student politics.

It didn't materialise. There was never a radical break from the longterm shift to the right inside NUS. Although NOLS broke from the CP, they continued to have much in common in policy terms.

Now, less than four years after capturing the machine, NOLS finds itself in trouble. Its strategy was always one of electoralism. Although many Labour Club members were active in miners support groups and in the shortlived grants campaign, the priority was never building the base in the colleges. And there has been little real struggle in the colleges in recent years which could have built such a base regardless. The Bennite left in NOLS rapidly declined to be replaced by a new alignment, the 'democratic left'.

The democratic left are solidly behind Kinnock, and are willing to make any concessions to the right in order to keep hold of the machine. They have created a strategy which concentrates on winning the hearts and minds of the electorate to the 'idea of education'. It is a strategy which Kinnock would be proud of, relying on creating a good image and on influencing the policies of the Labour Party and the SDP.

This was what came across at conference. From the debates on the Fowler cuts, education and grants, the message was the same. Protest, but don't do anything.

The desire for respectability was so great that NOLS' leading members did not even want to commit NUS to campaigning for a Labour vote in the next election. (This obviously came as a surprise to many of their members.) No doubt they were worried that this would damage their image as 'pluralists'.

Yet on certain issues the left was able to



Students: attacked by police, condemned by the leaders

gain a substantial vote. Liverpool council deputy leader Derek Hatton topped the poll in the ballot for guest speakers and received a standing ovation from a good proportion of delegates. And on the question of South Africa an amendment calling for support for the independent trade unions as well as the ANC was only narrowly defeated.

The arguments put by Socialist Worker Student Society members about the power of the black working class being the key to smashing apartheid made sense to many students involved in anti-apartheid work in the colleges. Unfortunately some of the arguments put by left NOLS members who supported the amendment, the 'Socialist Students in NOLS', were moralistic rather than based on class lines. So the argument about solidarity and the black working class

was not put as strongly as it could have been.

These examples and others showed that at times there was quite wide support for socialist ideas on some issues. Yet the overall mood of the conference was one of moving to the right. All the signs are that this general trend will continue. At the same time the fact that NOLS support tended to splinter means that there will be some students around open to socialist ideas. Revolutionaries need to take the opportunity to have the political arguments with those people now, about why the answer to the problems of students does not lie in the Labour Party. ■

Additional notes by Alex Callinicos, Martin Roiser, Sam Strudwick and Elane Heffernan.

NOTES of the month

**Ideas that can win
Buy Socialist Worker
only 25p**



SPECIAL INTRODUCTORY OFFER

10 issues for £2.50, including postage

Normal rates: £10 for six months

£19 for a year

Name

Address

Money with all orders to: Socialist Worker Circulation, PO Box 82, London E3 3LH.
Cheques/POs payable to Larkham Printers and Publishers. (Write for rates for libraries, institutions and overseas subscriptions.)



NIGEL HARRIS

The mobile industry

THERE IS a school of thought which argues that there is not much future for a competitive car industry in developing countries. Even in making car components, they say, the developing countries will remain restricted to the marginal and low value parts (windscreen wipers and so on).

In the late seventies, the idea of the 'world car' became popular in the big car making companies—a car of standard design, sold in all countries. That included many developing countries. The idea is said now to be dead. The industry, in sum, will remain where it is—in North America, Europe and Japan.

The notion must be a great relief to governments in America and Europe. It will not be much relief to the workforce since, even if the 'industry' stays, jobs do not continue. Since 1979, 158,000 jobs have been lost in the British industry, 130,000 in the Italian and 55,000 in the French. Some estimates suggest the European industry as a whole needs to lose another half million jobs to approach Japanese standards of productivity.

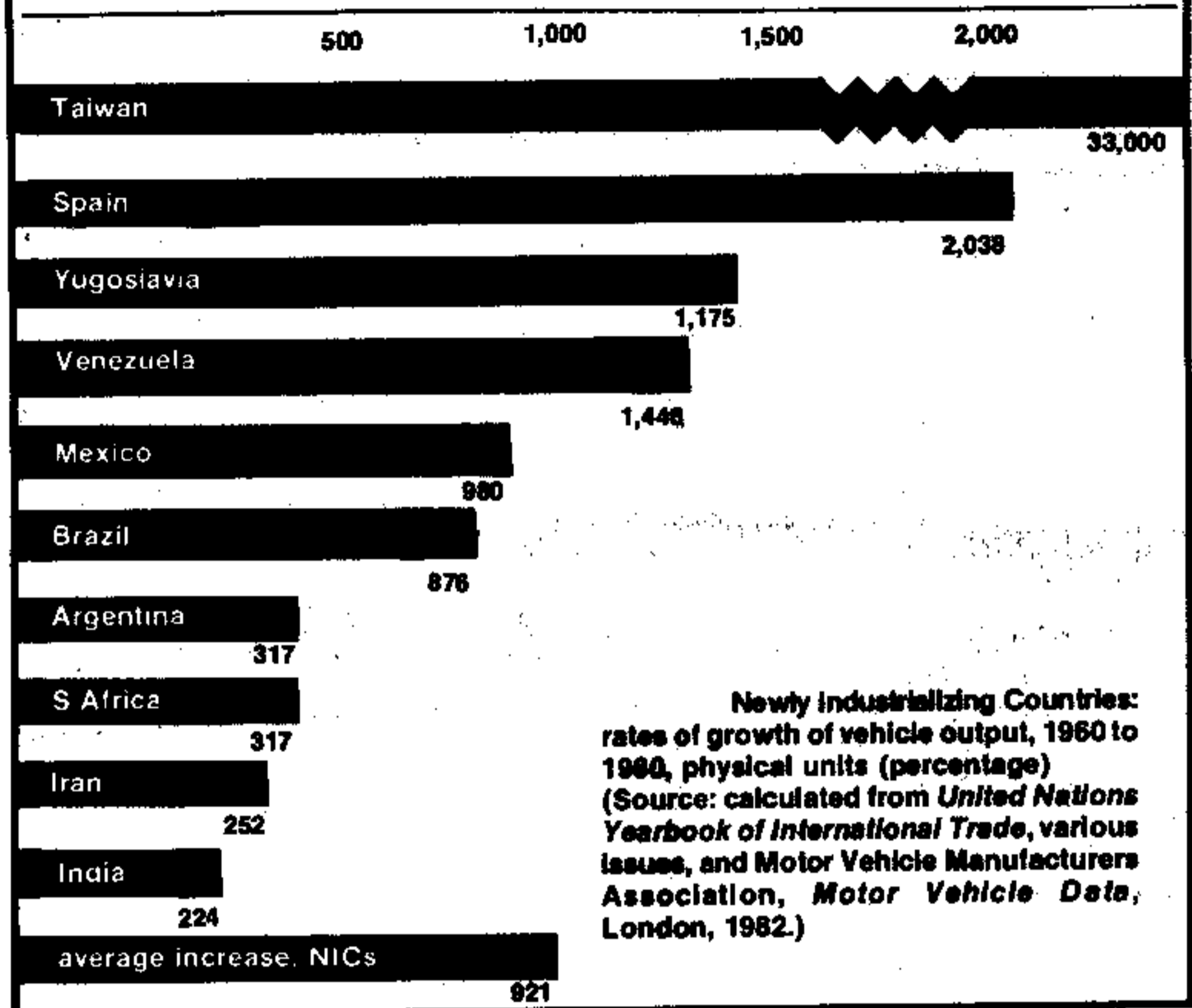
But is it even true that the car industry is marked by immobility? It is an odd idea when you consider how recently Japan emerged as the second largest maker of cars in the world—the process was concentrated only in the last twenty years.

Why is that process of redistribution to stop? The industry has, since the second world war, proved very mobile in terms of the geography of location of capacity. In 1950, companies in the United States produced 76 percent of the world's output; in 1979, 28 percent (and that share included the value of imported components). In 1956, 97 percent of world output came from North America and Europe; in 1979, 65 percent.

In the two decades to 1980—as the bar chart shows—the rates of growth of the leading newcomers to car production (excluding Japan) were generally much higher than the rate of growth of world output—world output increased just under two and a half times over when the output of the newcomers increased over nine times over. The chart does not include countries with a high growth rate that began car manufacture after 1960—for example, South Korea, Malaysia and China. By 1980, the countries represented in the bar chart had pushed up their output to 4½ million vehicles annually, 12 percent of world production (compared to 3 percent in 1970).

In component manufacture, it does not seem third world output is restricted to low value items. In 1983, the United States imported 3.6 million engines, two-thirds of them from Mexico and Brazil. Ford and General Motors have made—and continue

Percentage rates of growth



Newly Industrializing Countries: rates of growth of vehicle output, 1960 to 1980, physical units (percentage) (Source: calculated from *United Nations Yearbook of International Trade*, various issues, and *Motor Vehicle Manufacturers Association, Motor Vehicle Data*, London, 1982.)

to make—major investments in engine manufacture as well as vehicle assembly in the northern states of Mexico. The leading US car companies have become very dependent upon imported components in order to compete with imported vehicles—which is why Ford and General Motors are the leading opponents of import controls in the car trade.

The strategy of survival for the big US companies is both increased imports of cheap components (and whole cars as well), and buying shares in the foreign companies with which they compete. General Motors now owns 34 percent of Isuzu and 5 percent of Suzuki. It has a joint venture with Toyota. Ford owns 25 percent of Mazda, and has a joint venture with Toyo Kogyo in the United States and Mexico. Chrysler is raising its holding in Mitsubishi Motors to 24 percent and operates jointly with it in the US. By 1990, it is reckoned that Japanese companies (or joint ventures) will produce one and a half million cars in the United States.

Japanese companies are already themselves under threat from the newcomers. US controls on imported cars from Japan have pushed Japanese manufacturers into higher value cars (with the same number of cars, the value is much higher)—the \$12-

26,000 bracket. With astonishing speed, newcomers have moved in to fill the cheap car market gap (the \$5-6,000 bracket)—in particular the Yugoslav Zastava and the Korean Hyundai Pony.

In Canada, the Korean Hyundai has had amazingly swift success in pushing back the Japanese. The first Pony cars arrived early in 1984 when the company aimed to sell 5,000; 25,000 were sold. In 1985 it is expected 85,000 Ponies will be sold—double the sale of any Japanese or European imported car. But the threat of import controls remains, and last August, Hyundai announced a \$150 million investment in a Canadian plant to produce, by 1990, 100,000 cars, well placed to supply, duty free, the US market; (meanwhile, Japanese companies have lobbied Washington for restrictions on Korean and Taiwanese car imports!).

Korean output is still small by world standards. In 1981, operating at 50 percent of capacity, Korean companies made 121,000 cars and exported 16,000. The 1986 target was for 492,000 and 2 million in 1991 (with 900,000 exported). The 1991 target for all vehicles made in Korea is 4½ million (although Hyundai have a private estimation of 5 to 6 million, 55 percent of them exported). The Korean performance

Debt: getting in deeper

Debt and Danger
Harold Lever and Christopher Huhne
Penguin Special £2.95

The words 'the debt crisis' are now invariably associated with the money owed by such countries as Brazil, Mexico and Argentina to western bankers.

Even though this book is subtitled 'the world financial crisis', it too is almost exclusively concerned with the issue of the 900 billion dollars or so borrowed by 'Third World' countries, which most of them have no hope of paying back.

But there is more than one debt crisis. When Continental Illinois, the eighth largest bank in the United States, collapsed last year, it paid the price for some dodgy loans to maverick oil operators in Oklahoma made via a little bank called Penn Square. When the oil bubble burst, Penn Square collapsed and Continental lost a billion overnight.

In 1984, 79 small or not so small American banks went bust, the largest number since the 1930s. Most failed not because of loans to Argentina but because they'd gambled in the financial markets on speculative loans and lost—or because they'd lent to farmers in the Midwest who couldn't pay up.

Capitalism in crisis is a system hooked on debt. Governments borrow to avoid putting up taxes. Consumers borrow on HP, or from building societies. Companies borrow to finance multi-billion takeovers, to cover their losses, and sometimes even to build a new factory. Some borrow simply to gamble—on the stock market going up, or on the future price of tin, or simply on

whether the pound will go up or down.

A leading article in the American magazine *Business Week* was recently titled 'The Casino Society'. It voiced their fear that the financial system is out of control. Total debt in the United States is approaching the level of 6 trillion dollars (a staggering 6,000 billion) almost twice the level of the total national product.

Banks have to keep lending money to make a profit. If they dare not risk lending any more to Argentina or the Philippines they'll lend instead to the property speculator in Florida, or the megabuck takeover merchants.

All this can create the illusion of prosperity. The more they borrow the faster a company or a whole country can grow. Stock markets can rise to record levels. Bank lending keeps the money flowing, from those who don't want to spend to those who do.

In the 1970s the banks 'recycled' funds from the oil-rich Middle East to the cash-hungry countries of Latin America and Eastern Europe. But eventually the money had to be paid back. In the midst of a global slump, faced with a collapse of the prices of their commodities on world markets, with the rich smuggling dollars across the border, the coffers of Mexico and Brazil by 1982 were bare.

The ten largest banks in the United States woke up to find that if the Latin American debtors alone failed to pay up it would wipe out their profits and their capital. The whole international banking system would have disintegrated plunging the world economy into chaos.

in shipbuilding—which took the country from 0 percent of the world market in 1970 to 23 percent in 1983 should caution the sceptics against ridiculing these targets.

Meanwhile, other hungry newcomers are on the prowl. The first shipment of the Malaysian Proton car (the result of a joint venture between the Malaysian government and Mitsubishi) arrived in Europe this year; Ford Lio Ho of Taiwan are constructing a new plant, most of the output of which is for export. Further out, General Motors, Volkswagen and Daimler-Benz are planning joint ventures in China to raise output from 1984's 320,000 to one million by the 1990s, while some of the large Japanese companies are now manufacturing in India.

Where does all this leave the giant US car industry? Recent estimates suggest a continued shrinkage in the output of US companies—from 7.8 to 6.4 million in 1988—and a faster decline in their share of 1988's 12.6 million car market, to 57 percent. Japanese plants in the States should supply 7 percent, and imports from Japan 28 percent; imports from Europe 5.5, from South Korea 2.1 (or a quarter of a million) and from other places, 1.2 percent. Of course, US companies is a misleading concept when so much interrelated ownership and joint ventures are involved, and the US output includes a large input of imported components.

It does not seem the automation of car manufacture will change the trends. Already labour costs are down to 20 percent of the total, so that low wages in less developed countries are not necessarily a key matter. The more advanced of the less developed—the newly industrialising countries—are tending to specialise in capital intensive production (leaving to the poorer less developed, labour intensive manufacture), with the more developed concentrating on skill intensive and innovation output. Korea's performance in shipbuilding and steel, like that of Mexico and Brazil, is the prototype; not garment making. The new car manufacturing plants of the less developed will be nearly as capital intensive as those in the more developed countries.

The concept of the world car as a planning target for the big world companies may have taken a knock of late, but the reality of the market constantly pushes the industry piecemeal in the same direction. The Japanese will soon face a host of new Japans. But each time round, the process becomes faster and faster—Japan's dethronement will be much quicker than that of Europe and the United States. But there is no case to assume the dog-eat-dog syndrome can be contained in the Atlantic economy. ■



Advertising hoarding in Bolivia—making megabucks from poverty

Yet that didn't happen. Precisely because the threat was so grave the American government and the International Monetary Fund intervened. A succession of deals were patched together. Debts were postponed, the banks lent a bit more, whilst the debtor governments caved in to demands that they screw their populations for the money to pay off the interest.

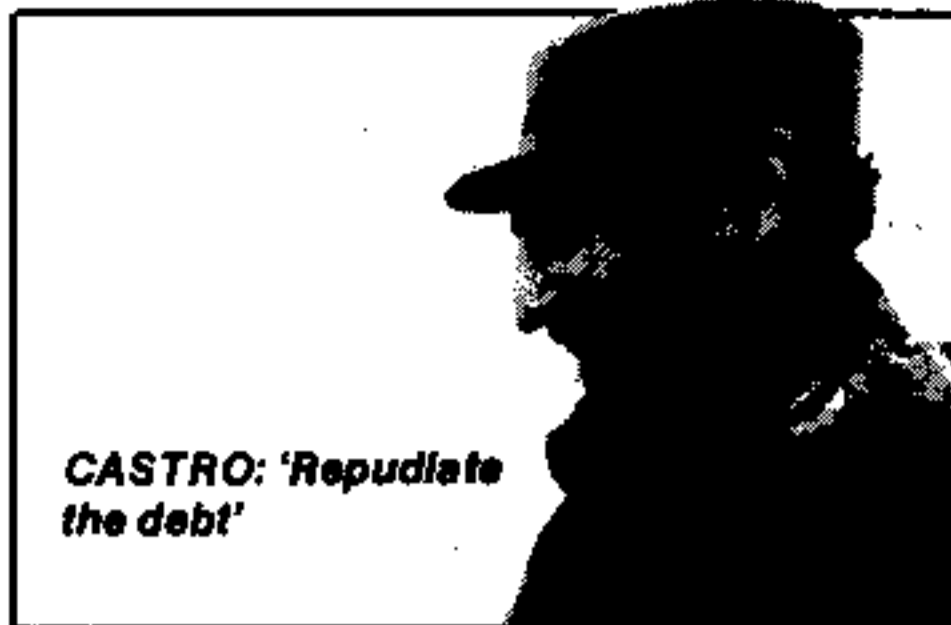
It seems to have worked. Some of the smaller debtor countries, such as Bolivia and Peru, have failed to pay up and have been left to rot. But interest has continued to flow into the banks' coffers from the rest. In Argentina the Alfonsín government has abandoned its rhetoric of 1984 and pushed through massive cuts in living standards at the behest of the IMF. Brazil has run up such a massive trade surplus from exports to the American market that it has been able to turn down another loan.

Some banks were even able to declare record profits again for 1984. Whilst malnutrition and tuberculosis spread through the shanty-towns of the debtor economies, the head of the IMF, former French banker de Larosiere, could declare the problem solved.

The great value of the new book by Lever and Huhne is that they spell out in detail how such 'optimism' is simply ludicrous. Lever is a very wealthy former Labour cabinet minister, turned financial expert. Huhne is a *Guardian* journalist. Both share the same concern as de Larosiere for the protection of the western banking system and the survival of capitalism.

Workers figure here only as a source of instability, as a threat to the success of the IMF programmes and thus to the profits of the bankers.

What they convincingly argue is that even on the most optimistic assumptions about the ability of governments in Argentina or Brazil to control their workers, the crisis is



CASTRO: 'Repudiate the debt'

very unlikely to be resolved.

Firstly, all the elaborate 'rescheduling' agreements painfully stitched together since 1982 have simply postponed the problem. In 1989 countries such as Brazil and Mexico will still owe as much as they did then. Argentina will owe more because it has only paid off its interest arrears by borrowing more money. Even if interest rates do not rise again, the seven major borrowers will be paying out almost \$30 billion a year for the rest of the decade, with no reduction in their overall debt to show for it.

Secondly, that \$30 billion transfer of interest depends upon the debtor countries being able to sell enough exports to the rest of the world to acquire the dollars to pay the banks. But Mexico is already being hurt badly by the fall in oil prices. All are dependent upon the expansion of the American market.

If the American boom finally fizzles out—or if import controls spread to protect American industries—it will be simply impossible for Brazil to go on running a trade surplus. It will then either have to borrow again, or simply refuse to pay. But the banks, understandably, are extremely reluctant to lend more. The International Monetary Fund despite doubling its levies from member states has run out of money.

As Lever and Huhne suggest, outright default by all the major debtors is extremely

unlikely. Nobody important went to Castro's conference in Havana this year which called for repudiation of the debt (Cuba anyway has always kept up to date with its payments). Politically none of the Latin American governments, apart from Garcia in Peru, have been willing to risk an open clash with the United States government.

But as the drain of resources from the debtors to the banks continues, as the world economy slides back into slump, and as Brazilian workers continue to successfully resist cuts in their wages (and even force through a reduction in hours)—the major debtor states will simply become unable to pay.

Lever and Huhne's solution to this situation amounts to global reformism. Major western governments should take responsibility for the debts by providing the banks with guarantees in exchange for more lending. The IMF should ease its policies, but governments in places like Brazil will have to be more cooperative.

It all sounds very sensible—and is in fact about as plausible as Reagan and Gorbachev agreeing to get rid of the Bomb.

The Baker plan (named after the new American Treasury Secretary) launched with a great fanfare at the last IMF conference in October seemed to move in the same direction.

The World Bank will be given another \$9 billion to back up another \$20 billion in loans by the banks over the next three years. But that will only cover a quarter of the interest payments by the debtor economies. The total debt will go on growing.

Either the workers of the debtor countries are made to pay, or the banks go bust, or the western governments will have to come up with far more cash than Baker, or Lever and Huhne are talking about.

Lever is making money for himself as the Cassandra of the international financial community. His fears are certainly justified. But by ignoring debt in the west itself he suggests that the crisis was somehow an unfortunate accident which could have been avoided by governments managing things better back in the 1970s.

He forgets that borrowing and lending, and thus financial crises, are endemic to capitalism. In the past debt crises have only been settled by letting the whole unstable structure come tumbling down as in the 1930s. Propping the system up may stave off the crash but only by prolonging the agony.

Debt and Danger concludes with a note of desperation:

'The volcano of the debt crisis is dormant but far from extinct. The authorities of the advanced countries have little time in which to ensure that it does not once again heave and erupt'.

Meanwhile in Brazil the workers of Sao Paulo and Sao Bernardo are discovering their own power. After years of resistance the multinational companies were forced this autumn to concede a cut in the working week. Should those workers really heave and erupt then the authorities in Brazil and the 'advanced countries' will indeed have little time to save their system. ■

Pete Green

Socialist Worker Review

SUBSCRIBE

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

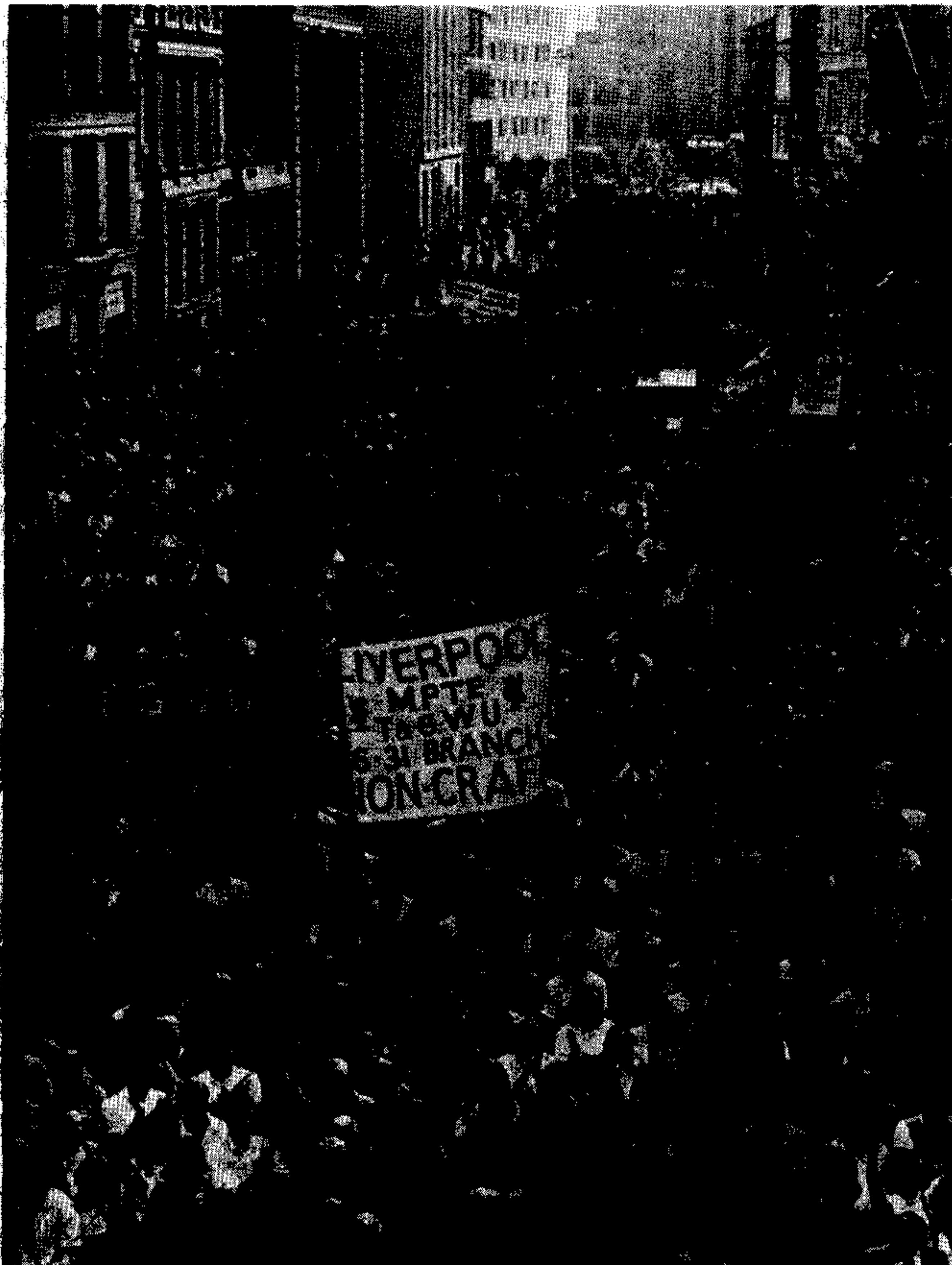
Britain	£8.00	Europe Airmail	£11.00
Overseas Surface	£9.00	Elsewhere Airmail	£14.50
(Institutions add £7.50)			

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

Name

Address

Make cheque/bank draft payable to Larkham Printers and Publishers.
Return to Socialist Worker Review, PO Box 82, London E3 3LH.



The politics of Militant

THE WITCH HUNT against *Militant* and other socialists in the Labour Party continues. While fighting against it, we must also ask how their politics have brought them to the position they are in today. Gareth Jenkins examines *Militant's* strategy, while Ann Rogers looks at the idea of local power on the left in recent years.

THE retreat by Liverpool Council brings into question not only the specific tactics of how to fight Tory ratecapping, but also the general politics of the group most closely identified with Liverpool Labour Party—the Militant tendency.

The mistakes made in Liverpool follow from Militant's view of the world, of how the crisis of capitalism affects workers' consciousness, the evolution of the mass organisations of the working class, the nature of the Labour Party and the role of revolutionary leadership.

Militant's analysis of the economic crisis stresses the 'catastrophic situation of British capitalism' and its 'terminal decline', even 'irreversible terminal decline'. Thus Militant argue that 'there has been a complete collapse of Britain's manufacturing base' (*Militant International Review* 26, June 1984), and go to great lengths to prove that recovery for the British economy, in order to compete with its rivals, 'is absolutely ruled out' (*Militant International Review* 30, Autumn 1985) because British capital cannot provide the level of investment needed.

Now, while the decline of British capitalism relative to other sections of the world economy should not be underplayed, there are dangers in Militant's catastrophist approach. The first is a tendency to see British capital as somehow 'unpatriotic'. The rulers of Britain, say Militant,

'...are ignorant and effete money-grabbers who place their narrow interests before the real needs of the British economy and people. What a contrast with the old ruling class of the period of Britain's world ascendancy.' (*MIR* 26)

Or this, referring to the Libyan Embassy siege:

'From the former workshop of the world, Britain has been reduced to a third-rate power whose importance in the scale of world politics is not much more than a Third World state. The fact that humili-

ation at the hands of Colonel Qaddafi could be paraded as a great moral victory is further confirmation of Britain's impotence in the world.' (*MIR* 26)

The consequence of this approach is to 'prove' that the socialist economic alternative is good for Britain, not just for workers. Thus the Thatcherite attempt to drive down wages is not only anti-working class, it is economic nonsense:

'All history shows that a low wage economy will never compete with one based on advanced technology and machinery. It is a recipe for catastrophe in the future.' (*MIR* 26)

Militant's economic catastrophism, then, leads them to a form of populism. Like the CP or the Bennite version, their case for socialism rests on the need to save the British economy from the irrational folly of Tory misrule, which is not even in the interests of the productive sectors of British capital.

The second danger in Militant's catastrophism follows from the first. Such is the scale of capitalist crisis that the masses can only draw socialist conclusions. Class struggle will heighten, every section of the working class will turn to the left.

The radicalisation will be such that even sections of the middle class will be drawn behind the working class. The move to the left

'...will spread to the broader masses of the working class, young people, women, the unemployed or even sections of the middle class repelled by Thatcherite barbarism.' (*MIR* 26).

Just as the economic decline is 'irreversible', so the resultant advance in socialist ideas and revolutionary consciousness is 'inevitable'.

What's the problem with this? Primarily, it is that in the long term such a view of socialism is not incorrect, but that in the short term it is thoroughly misleading.

Of course, revolutionaries recognise that socialism will benefit humanity as a whole

(even those whose class interests oppose it). They also recognise that in periods of high struggle intermediate classes are dragged behind the working class. But it is quite wrong to believe that those classes whose interests run counter to those of the working class will be won to socialism on the grounds of its rationality or eventual benefit to everyone. Nor are we currently in a period when socialist ideas are going to appeal to the middle classes on a wide scale.

Equally, revolutionaries base their view of the triumph of socialism on the fact that the logic of capitalist development is such that the class it brings into being in order to extract surplus value is also the class that threatens to overthrow it. In that spirit Marx could write in the *Communist Manifesto* that the capitalist class created its own gravediggers and that the fall of the bourgeoisie and the victory of the proletariat were 'equally inevitable'.

But Marx also wrote in the *Communist Manifesto* that the outcome of class struggle could be 'the common ruin of the contending classes'. And that sheds a different light on 'inevitability'. The tendency of capitalism to find its fate sealed in the development of the working class remains an absolute. But the outcome is not a foregone conclusion.

Capitalism is in a state of decline—the crisis that affects it is more profound and prolonged than any preceding one. But a capitalist solution is not ruled out in advance. If, through extreme repression, working class living standards were driven down substantially, or if, through war, the weaker sections of world capital were destroyed, class society could survive. Socialism is not the inevitable alternative to capitalism—there is, as Rosa Luxemburg put it, barbarism.

If the working class 'allows' it, capitalism can always find a way out. So, if the catastrophist perspective is misleading, so too is the inevitabilist perspective about working class consciousness. The crisis of capitalism has radicalised many workers. But the revolutionary answer to the crisis competes with many other 'answers' which are, for the moment at least, much more powerful.

There is nothing 'inevitable' about the growth of working class consciousness. But the consequence of Militant's insistence that crisis inevitably radicalises class consciousness is to downplay the obstacles to the achievement of revolutionary consciousness. Thus the nature of the Labour Party—its incurable reformism—becomes for Militant an irrelevance. Such is the inexorable radicalisation of the working class that it will sweep the Labour Party in directions that its current leadership does not wish to go.

Since, therefore, workers will inevitably look to the Labour Party, the only place for revolutionaries is in the Labour Party in order to provide the kind of bold leadership which this awakening consciousness aspires to.

The argument is a comforting one. It provides a sense of history being on your side, of faith in the working class when all around seem to be despairing of it, and of a ready made path to socialism. But the argument is false in a number of ways.

INTERNATIONAL SOCIALISM ★ 30

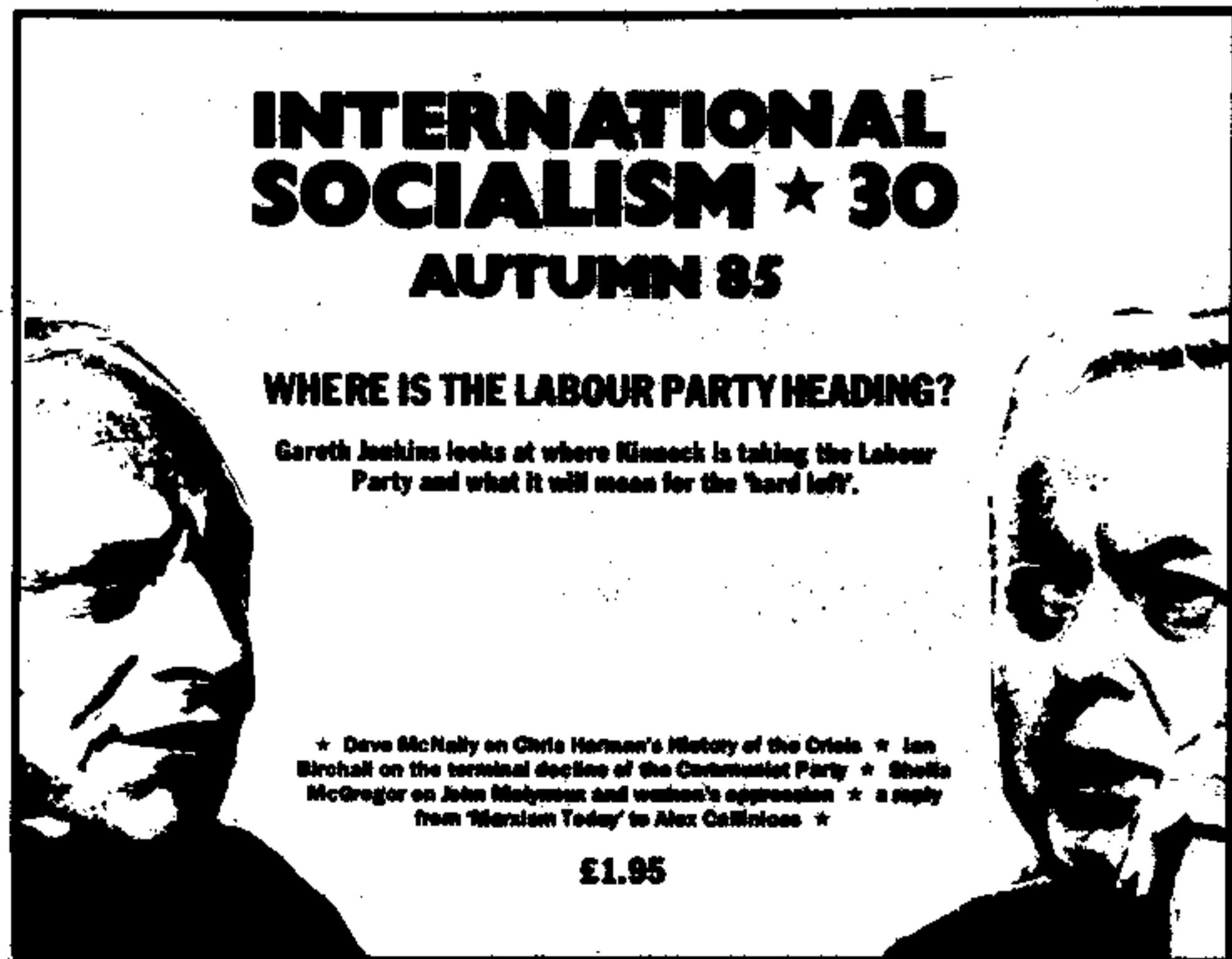
AUTUMN 85

WHERE IS THE LABOUR PARTY HEADING?

Gareth Jenkins looks at where Kinneck is taking the Labour Party and what it will mean for the 'hard left'.

★ Dave McNally on Chris Harman's *History of the Crisis* ★ Ian Birchall on the terminal decline of the Communist Party ★ Sheila McGregor on John Major and women's oppression ★ a reply from 'Marxism Today' to Alex Callinicos ★

£1.95



First, growth in class consciousness seldom proceeds in a simple linear direction. Crisis radicalises some workers; others are driven to reactionary ideas. Nowhere is this truer than in the experience workers have of reformist parties in power. The decline of the CP and of trade union organisation in France under Mitterrand is testimony to that, as is the rapid growth of the fascists.

Secondly, to say that workers 'look' to their traditional organisations (like the Labour Party) covers a complex process that cannot be reduced to the idea, often found in *Militant*, that workers are on the move towards revolutionary solutions. It may be the case, as it was in 1936, that the election of a socialist government in France or Spain is the start of a massive explosion of working class activity: strikes, factory occupations, even revolution.

But the election of Mitterrand in 1981, or Papandreou in Greece in the same year, is not remotely comparable. In France, a decline in class struggle was already evident. The turn away from the right wing parties certainly signalled a desire for change; but the election of Mitterrand testified to the fact that workers had more confidence in reformist solutions to the crisis than they had in their own self-activity.

In other words, to compare 1936 and 1981 is to compare two different processes superficially resembling each other because both saw the election of socialist governments. In 1936 workers 'looked' to the Socialist Party as the first stage in the expression of their aspirations, which they rapidly moved beyond. In 1981 workers 'looked' to the Socialist Party with no such consciousness.

The current recovery in Labour's electoral fortunes makes the point even more sharply. The miners' strike certainly convinced many that the Tories could be fought. Labour began to recover from its 1983 trough of depression. Workers were 'looking' to the Labour Party for radical solutions to the crisis.

But the aftermath of defeat has started a process in the opposite direction. Whereas the left was on the offensive during the strike, the arguments of the right now cut with the grain: maybe industrial struggle is a hindrance to Labour's chances of winning power—and victory at the ballot box is the only alternative to Thatcher. 'Looking' to the Labour Party in these circumstances means moving rightwards rather than leftwards.

Kinnock's popularity—and everything that goes with it, including witch hunts—makes nonsense of *Militant's* view that 'with the return of a Labour government, workers will rapidly press...for the immediate introduction of reforms to reduce the working week, to raise living standards, etc' (*MIR* 30). All the evidence points to the fact that people's aspirations are low. Of course, some workers will be radicalised by the experience of Kinnock in power and will look to a revolutionary alternative. But this will not be a generalised phenomenon.

Thirdly, it is foolish to pretend that reformist parties can be transformed into revolutionary parties because of the pressure of leftward moving workers. The truth is that

MUNICIPAL HOUSE BUILDING PROGRAMME

NEW BUILD SITES

Revision at September 1985

Area	Number of Sites	Number of Units
London	10	10,000
South East	15	15,000
South West	12	12,000
West Midlands	18	18,000
East Midlands	14	14,000
North East	16	16,000
North West	17	17,000
Yorkshire	13	13,000
Wales	11	11,000
Scotland	9	9,000
NI	8	8,000
Other	7	7,000
Total	130	130,000

Militant's road to socialism

reformist parties throw up leftwing leaders, even extreme left leaders, the better to tie workers to reformism when rightwing leaders have been thoroughly discredited. The sorry consequences can be seen in the 'revolutionary' role played by centrists in the German Revolution of 1918/9.

These centrists, though 'bold' leaders of workers disgusted by the treachery of rightwing leaders, did nothing to dispel the illusions these workers still had about parliament and reformist politics in general. Are not *Militant* guilty of the same kind of

deception when they assert that with Marxist leadership the Labour Party can 'carry through its historical task—the socialist transformation of British society' (*Militant*, 12 October 1985)?

These three quite elementary points are important not because socialists enjoy indulging in theoretical argument but because unless we have an accurate assessment of the nature and direction of the real state of working class consciousness (rather than of what we would like it to be) we will not know how to intervene.

Militant's brand of 'inevitablism' substitutes wish fulfilment for accuracy. In the process, it becomes harder to build a revolutionary leadership, not easier. The lack of contact with actuality, and the problems this causes, can be seen if we examine the analysis Militant offered of the state of the class at the outbreak of the miners' strike and the analysis they offered a year and a half later.

In June 1984 the miners' strike seemed incontrovertible proof of the inevitable advance of the working class and the inevitable sweeping aside of the bankrupt leadership of the TUC:

'The position of the right wing...is increasingly untenable. The resignation of Len Murray has...everything to do with the groundswell of revolt provoked by his open betrayal of the NGA and his blatant attempts to do a deal with the Thatcherite government... The "new realism" of the TUC leaders has collapsed and is no more.'

The same sweeping aside of the bankrupt leadership of the right and the soft left in the Labour Party was also predicted:

'Any attempt to carry through a programme of counter-reforms or a new version of the "Social Contract" will inevitably lead to a revolt on the part of the rank and file of the unions and the Labour Party. The workers will come to understand the need for a Marxist alternative based on a complete transformation as the only way to carry society forward.' (MIR 26)

A year and a half later how do Militant account for the defeat of the miners, the re-assertion of the TUC's new realism, the dominance of the right and soft left in the Labour Party, the witch hunt, etc, etc? More importantly, how do they account for the lack of 'a revolt on the part of the rank and file of the unions and the Labour Party', which they had so confidently predicted?

The answer is that they don't. They have explanations, it is true. For example, they blame (quite rightly) 'those Pontius Pilates at the head of the trade union movement who refused to organise in support of the miners'; and they accuse (again, quite rightly) the rightwing of the Labour Party of 'systematically rewriting and watering down the programme to remove any socialist content' (MIR 30).

But these explanations conspicuously fail to tackle the question of how the right in the TUC and the LP managed to get away with it. Of course, Militant can talk about misleadership in the movement being responsible for setbacks, sell-outs, defeats, and so on. But how are the right able to mislead the rank and file if they (the leaders) are as politically weak as Militant suggest?

There is a glaring inconsistency in their argument, nowhere more obvious than in their view of the Labour Party. In June 1984 they said that 'in reality, the base of the right wing is extremely weak. A further swing to the left in the unions and the Labour Party would undermine them completely.' (MIR 26)

Since no swing to the left has materialised, does that mean that the base of the rightwing has been strengthened? Not a bit of it, reply Militant:



Hatton and Benn have much in common

'It is the combination of the correctness of the ideas of Marxism...together with the growth in the material resources of Marxism and the moves towards a more regular paper, which are driving the right wing mad and leading them to resort to organisational methods where they have been defeated politically.' (MIR 30)

This is a curious notion. If Marxist ideas are so powerful in the Labour Party, why hasn't the organisation succumbed to them? Or, to put it the other way round, if the right has the strength to resort to and effectively use the party apparatus to hinder the activities of Marxists, what kind of influence do Militant really have in the party?

Everyone makes mistakes in prediction. The most important thing is to account for them honestly and see whether the overall analysis needs revision. This Militant is unable to do. The same inexorable advance continues even in 'defeat', whether politically or industrially.

This leads to some quite unrealistic estimations of the actual state of class consciousness, in which Marxism is not so much a guide to action as a consoling myth. Militant appear incapable of learning anything about what has happened over the last year. Instead of concrete explanation we get rhetorical abstractions. No sadder example is to be found than in their lengthy editorial comment 'Liverpool Council fights on' (Militant, 29 November 1985).

Militant admit that the package 'represents a setback'. But they also claim that the Tories were prevented from implementing really deep cuts because of Liverpool's struggle. 'Marxists have always argued that reforms are a by-product of militant and socialist struggle. In this case, the marvellous struggle has mitigated the effects of the cuts demanded by big business and the Tories.'

This is thoroughly dishonest. Workers who have been beaten to a standstill have to accept something considerably less than their full demands—only an ultra-left would pretend that you reject such 'reforms' because they are compromises.

But what struggle are we talking about in this instance? Despite the promises for all-out strike action, in reality there have been no more than a couple of demonstrations and the odd day of action since the beginning of 1984.

Looked at soberly, the Liverpool package is not significantly different from the packages agreed by other patently non-revolutionary left councils—and no one would claim that their packages were the by-

products of class struggle.

The lack of struggle in Liverpool is itself curious, given Militant's perspective. They have always claimed that what prevents socialist advance via the Labour Party is the absence of 'bold' leadership. But having achieved 'bold' leadership in Liverpool, what have they done with it?

July 1984, for example, would have been the ideal opportunity. With the miners' strike having, in Militant's own words, 'opened the floodgates, and all other sections of the class...pushing their way through' (MIR 26), Militant choose to back a deal between the council and the government, despite that meaning putting up the rates by a further 8 percent.

Militant reasoned:

'...it is doubtful if there would have been the necessary support among workers for a massive campaign over the relatively small difference of 8 percent.' (13 July 1984)

What confidence does that show in workers, ready, so Militant would have it, to link in with a general offensive spearheaded by the miners against Thatcher?

Again, this September, as the fact of the money running out became clear, the same question could be asked. If political consciousness was at the height claimed by Militant, why suppose that Liverpool workers, under Militant leadership, should allow themselves to be misled by Kinnock or the trade union bureaucracy?

The irony is that when presented with an opportunity to put their confidence in the inevitable advance of the working class to the test, Militant draw back from doing so. This is because they lack a specific analysis of what the real state of working class consciousness is. Consequently their super-optimism translates into extremely cautious practice.

With working class consciousness reduced to an abstraction, bold leadership becomes capturing positions in the Labour Party. Militant have forgotten that leadership can only be built out of concrete intervention in the ebbs and flows of class struggle. Leadership has to relate to class consciousness as it is. It should neither adapt to it nor run too far ahead. Both mistakes (often combined) lead to passivity.

But then Militant have lost sight of the need for a revolutionary party to embody that leadership. The Labour Party has become a short cut, which, as Liverpool has proved in practice, is a dead end. ■

Gareth Jenkins

The end of an era

THE FAILINGS of municipal socialism have been fully illustrated by the recent events in Liverpool.

This makes it an opportune time to look back at the politics behind the new left in the councils and why they promised so much and delivered so little.

The activities of Labour councils in Britain (and incidently in Europe) fall into three distinct phases. First there was the attempt to use councils as bases from which to defy the government in the 1920s and 1930s. The most famous case of which was Poplar council where 21 councillors were jailed in 1921 for defying the law.

Then there was the large public spending and mass housing projects of the 1950s and 1960s where Labour councils played a key, but often unpopular role in the modernisation and restructuring of the inner cities. Finally there was the period from the late seventies when left wingers in the party again thought that by taking over councils they could provide themselves with a base from which to take on the government.

But the left which began to come to power in the early eighties did not see their role as simply challenging Thatcher. Behind their plans lay a belief that the nature of the state had changed. They began to argue that it could no longer be regarded simply as a tool of the bosses whose only function was to

So much of the activity of the councils was at the level of changing ideas rather than providing material improvements for the local people.

Ethnic monitoring committees, police monitoring committees and women's groups were more typical of the new councils than housing programmes. Attempts to use council money to create jobs and services was strictly limited. The GLC for example (which has by far the biggest budget of the left councils) was only able to give grants to 16 percent of the organisations which applied to them in 1984.

Even the most serious of these councils, Liverpool, has only managed to build just over 3,000 houses (less than many Tory councils were building in the boom years of the 1950s).

But these committees were not even successful in their own terms because they tended to reflect the interests of the councillors rather than of ordinary people. Margaret Hodge, the leader of Islington council, remarked on the 'wide divergence between those active in Labour womens sections and those active in tenants associations.'

The new left tended to come overwhelmingly from the higher layers of public service jobs. They were teachers, social workers, town planners and college lecturers

councils against the cuts Kinnock said 'Local Labour groups are autonomous...[they] must take their case one by one.'

As the party began its inexorable shift rightwards after the defeat of the 1983 election the chickens began to come home to roost.

The politics of the new left, with their belief that they could control the local state, meant that it was easy for most to slip into various forms of 'lifestyle politics' in the absence of any mass campaign.

Rather than fighting to bypass the leadership of the Labour Party and launching a mass struggle against rate-capping, the councils became more and more obsessed with how they were perceived by those who had elected them.

Without directly challenging the government they were unable to deliver much in real terms. So more and more the question of the presentation of their politics became central. Volumes were written on the structures of local government and its role in alienating people. Many councillors became convinced that if there was no mass campaign in support of them, it was because they were presenting their ideas in the wrong way.

For most councillors facing up to the reality that controlling the council actually represented very little in real terms was too unpalatable. Slowly the talk that the local state was somehow different and could therefore be a power base for launching socialism was dropped in favour of getting Kinnock elected.

So the one council which didn't go along with the drift to the right now found itself utterly isolated and under attack from all sides, including some of the pioneers of municipal socialism, like David Blunkett.

The supporters of *Militant* who play such an influential role on Liverpool council come from a different political tradition than most of the council left. Because of this they have been willing to resist a sell-out for much longer. But they shared the basic error of the other councils. Like them, they believed that by controlling the council one was in a position to successfully fight.

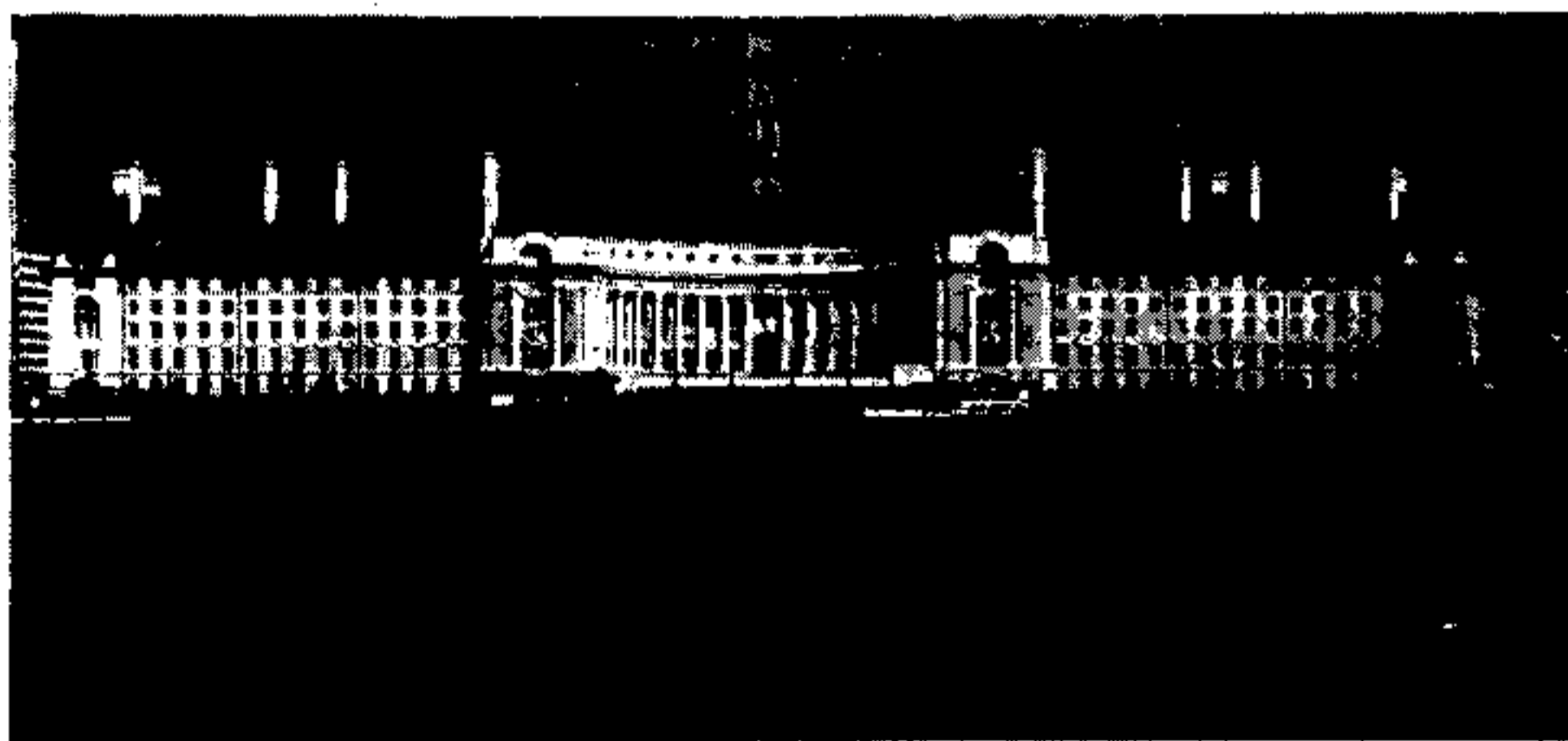
Because they were willing to stand firmer for longer the sadly misplaced nature of this belief can be seen more clearly. No-one, from David Blunkett through Neil Kinnock to Kenneth Baker gives a damn whether or not the council was elected on a platform of no cuts and no rate rises.

The argument that councils were autonomous, which Kinnock put forward to get out of a united fight, was dropped when it came to whipping Liverpool into line.

Derek Hatton is perfectly correct when he points out that Kenneth Baker will see all sorts of unelected spokesmen on Liverpool's behalf but refuses to speak to the elected councillors. He is right, but ineffectual.

The forces mobilising against Liverpool understand that real power does not lie in elections much better than Hatton does. The government picked their time to take on the councils very carefully—they waited until after the miners' defeat to go on the offensive—and their strategy has succeeded.■

Ann Rogers



GLC: what lies behind the facade?

keep working class people in their place. It should also be regarded as an arena of struggle.

Many activists began arguing that the local state, in particular, was more or less independent from the national state. A very influential book, *The Local State* by Cynthia Cockburn, put forward the idea that the local state was more or less independent from the national state, and could therefore be captured and used for left wing ends. Thus a fresh lease of life was given to the idea that if left wingers captured the machine of government then they could wield it for socialist ends.

But the onset of the crisis had deprived councils of money. In addition the power councils possessed had been slowly whittled away since the days of Poplar. ☺

rather than factory workers or clerical staff. This frequently meant they had very little natural links with working class organisations within the areas in which they worked.

If the councils had had deeper roots in the working class it would have been far more difficult for Kinnock and co to betray them. But the writing was on the wall very early on and many on the left wilfully refused to see it.

At the 1980 Labour Party conference an emergency resolution instructing the NEC to 'coordinate a united fight of Labour councils and trade unions on a firm no cuts position' was opposed by the right.

As early as 1979 Kinnock and Hattersley had laid the groundwork for stopping any fight. In response to the demands that the Labour Party lead a united fight of all

Let's be positive

IN A racist and sexist society, the signs of discrimination against women and black people are everywhere. Unemployment is far higher among black workers than white, and highest of all among black school leavers, while most black people who do have jobs are in the worst and lowest paid ones.

Most working class women are found in 'women's work', downgraded and underpaid by comparison with the jobs men do. Few women or blacks hold management posts—even the lowest supervisory ones—or get to train for professional work. Trade unions, too, are run almost exclusively by white men even where the majority of members are women and a substantial proportion of them black.

Positive discrimination aims to correct these inequalities by providing special access to jobs, training, promotion or representative positions for women or for black people. Many of us have had reservations about this strategy, which is currently very popular in certain feminist and left Labour circles, because it seems to have little or nothing to do with the class struggle.

This seems especially true in the case of management positions. Trade unionists should be fighting management in the workplace all the time: opposing every manifestation of management privilege from petty authoritarianism on the part of foremen and supervisors to major decisions made by boards of directors. So why should they care who the managers are?

Positive discrimination sometimes doesn't seem to fit with class struggle, and we cannot believe it is a good strategy in itself in the way that some of its supporters do. We cannot agree, for example, that blacks or women need more 'role models' in bureaucratic or managerial positions in order to feel equal. Black and female workers—like white and male ones—need secure jobs, better wages, more power in the workplace, and the will to fight for the overthrow of capitalism.

Such arguments against positive discrimination would be reasonable if it wasn't for the massive discrimination *against* blacks and women already mentioned. Discrimination in jobs, promotion and even trade union structures is all part of the racism and sexism of capitalist society, and anyone who wants to fight it is standing up for the rights of the oppressed.

The people who oppose discrimination are almost always on the right, and sometimes the extreme right. Racists will always latch on to a good *Sun* story along the lines of 'No Jobs for Whites in Red London Borough'. The men who insist that all jobs are in fact open to women, 'but they hardly ever apply, so it's their own fault they don't get them,' are just reinforcing women's subordination and dependence on men and the view that women are inferior or 'naturally' prefer to be housewives and mothers.

Socialists have to show that they are against these reactionary views and will

always defend the rights of oppressed groups such as blacks and women, even when the measures proposed do not seem to be *directly* assisting the class struggle. Fighting racism and sexism is always important and can never really conflict with class struggle, because socialists are fighting for a world free of all discrimination and inequality, a world of power for *all* workers whatever their sex, colour or age.

As far as access to skilled or better paid jobs is concerned, there are no good arguments against positive discrimination in favour of women and black workers. Exclusion from skilled and better-paid jobs—often by trade unions in collaboration with management—has kept black and women workers segregated in many industries and service jobs, reinforcing racism and sexism.

'When racist and sexist arguments are used against a demand for positive discrimination, there must be no hesitation as to which side we are on'

The recent harassment of black office workers in an Islington Council office, for example, or the horrendous 'initiation' given to a young woman recruit to the London Fire Brigade last year, are the result of years of 'negative' discrimination. Positive discrimination can start to redress the balance and change the position of women and black people as workers and as part of working class struggle.

The only case in which we would fight so-called positive discrimination would be if it meant calling for white or male workers to be sacked in order to make way for black or women workers. We defend the right to work for everyone; we fight redundancies and cuts in public services. We do not agree that for black and women workers to benefit, white or male workers must suffer instead. Nothing pleases the ruling class more than to see workers fighting one another over the crumbs from the table of capitalism instead of fighting as a class.

Just as it is wrong for trade unionists to call for black or women workers to be sacked first when there are redundancies, so it is quite scandalous for councillors, managers or principals who call themselves progressive to argue for cuts in one area in favour of another because 'cuts must be accepted'. Calling this positive discrimination (as has been done, for example, at an adult education centre in Hackney) is just sheer hypocrisy.

But women and black people have every right to demand that vacancies be reserved for them, or new opportunities specially created for them, because they suffer so much more than others from unemployment and exclusion from education and training.

Management positions sometimes seem more of a problem to active socialists. After all, as one East London busworker put it, 'Who would want to be a bleeding inspector anyway?' But the exclusion of black and Asian workers from the inspectorate in cities where they make up a high proportion of busworkers is, quite simply, racist. Black workers have as much *right* to management jobs as white workers, and to say that we are opposed to managers in general does not alter that.

We should, however, understand that managers who are promoted as a result of positive discrimination will go ahead and do all the things that managers normally do: snooping, disciplining and even sacking former fellow-workers. Some workers who support positive discrimination will feel betrayed when this happens. But such behaviour is not individual ingratitude; it shows where the divisions in society really lie.

The question of reserved places on trade union elective bodies is also a complex one. Socialists *within* a black or women's caucus ought to be arguing that the formal composition of the trade union leadership is not the real issue. The unions need to be led from below, not above, and even a good militant black or female candidate elected to office will be under tremendous pressure, especially in the current period, to move to the right along with the rest of the bureaucracy.

One good, hard-fought and well-publicised women's strike—preferably one that wins—would be worth more than half a dozen reserved places on the union executive. Even one election campaign around a good, *political* black or woman candidate, known for his or her militancy and rank-and-file leadership, would be worth several reserved places. One hard anti-racist action, such as the recent Islington council workers' strike, is better than one black bureaucrat becoming ever more remote from the membership.

Nevertheless, it is hard to argue for real, effective trade union action if at the same time you refuse to support the demand for positive discrimination *against the right wing in the union*. When racist and sexist arguments are used against a demand for positive discrimination, there must be no hesitation as to which side we are on.

I became convinced of this myself when, after several years of arguing against women who defended positive discrimination as providing 'a career structure for women' in my union (NATFHE), I heard the reactionary sexist arguments used against it by the right.

We may argue—we *should* argue—about correct and incorrect strategies in the class struggle; but we cannot abandon our principles and appear to be lining up with racists and sexists against oppressed sections of the working class. ■

Norah Carlin

Marx and politics

ABOUT twelve years ago Ralph Miliband wrote a book called *Marxism and Politics* which starts from the proposition that 'what there is of theoretical exploration of politics in what may be called classical Marxism (starting with Marx himself)...is mostly unsystematic and fragmentary, and often part of other work... This absence of systematic political theorisation on the part of Marx, Engels and their most prominent successors means in effect that a Marxist politics has to be constructed or reconstructed from the mass of variegated and fragmentary material which forms the corpus of Marxism.'

It is true, of course, that Marx did not write a book called *Politics*. One reason, as Miliband recognises, is that for Marx 'the history of all hitherto existing societies (and all contemporary ones) is the history of class struggles.' These struggles, like the classes themselves, are rooted in the mode of production of material life and cannot usefully be considered apart from it.

So Marx's main concern, during his long enforced exile from active participation in the class struggle, was the analysis of the capitalist mode of production which appears (unfinished) in *Capital*.

All the same, this valid point can easily be overstressed. It is easy enough to discover what Marx believed about the major political issues of his time (for example, the revolutions of 1848, the regimes of Louis Bonaparte and Bismarck, the American Civil War, the Paris Commune and so on). It is not at all difficult, without much 'construction and reconstruction', to grasp his 'theoretical explorations' of what were, for him, the key political issues—the nature of the state, revolution, colonialism etc.

Not surprisingly, Marx's views—I mean the views of the post-1847 Marx—changed, developed over time, on some of these matters. Also his views at any given time on some questions have been regarded by various critics as inconsistent. Both these points require discussion.

First of all, however, two fundamental ideas must be grasped. One is that, for Marx, political ideas in any class society are mystified. Real conflicts of material interests are presented as con-

flicts about ideas, abstract principles.

Each class, insofar as it has become a coherent self-conscious entity, seeks 'to give its ideas the form of universality and to represent them as the only rational and universally valid ones' as Marx put it. Nor is this, typically, mere hypocrisy and cynicism, even in the case of ruling classes. Ideologies are intellectual constructions, often very complex ones, but they are also rooted in the material conditions of life of the group whose interests they serve. No end of hypocritical claptrap is churned out by the British bourgeois media *but* that does not mean that our ruling class doesn't believe in its own ideology.

It follows that terms like 'democracy', 'national self-determination', 'freedom', 'feminism' and so on, tell us very little in and of themselves. It is necessary to ask, in each case, what is the real content, which class interests are involved and in what way?

The other basic point relates precisely to the notion of a class as a coherent self-conscious entity, a 'class for itself', in Marx's words, as opposed to a 'class in itself'—the mere raw material for a self-conscious class.

The transition from the latter to the former, which may or may not take place in particular cases, depends on material circumstances and specific events—not simply on 'enlightenment', arguments, propaganda and other desirable things.

To illustrate this point, consider Marx's assessment of the French peasantry in the middle of the last century:

'The small-holding peasants form a vast mass, the members of which live in similar conditions but without entering into manifold relations with one another... Insofar as millions of families live under economic conditions of existence that separate their mode of life, their interests and their culture from those of other classes, and put them in hostile opposition to the latter, they form a class. Insofar as there is merely a local intercommunication between these small holding peasants, and the identity of their interests begets no community, no national bond and no political organisation among them, they do not form a class.'

And, as it turned out, they did not. They

In the second of a series of articles taken from talks at Marxism 85 Duncan Hallas looks at the development of Karl Marx's politics, and his response to the major issues of his day.



proved (as Marx had predicted in 1851) incapable of independent political action. They, the big majority of the French people at the time, came to constitute a reservoir for reaction and then (from the 1890s to the 1950s and later) for the 'Radical' and 'Radical-Socialist' parties—parties of small and not so small business, lawyers, freemasons and speculators who grew fat at their expense as well as at the expense of the workers.

But are the post-18th century European peasantries a special case? Yes, of course. The point, however, is of general application. The formation (and decay) of class consciousness is an active, dynamic process which is not only a product of class struggle but which is conditioned by concrete material circumstances.

'The bourgeoisie itself', Marx noted, 'develops only gradually, splits according to the division of labour into various fractions... The separate individuals form a class only insofar as they have to carry on a common battle against another class...'

Four things immediately follow. First, there is a basic difference between a ruling class, which must, necessarily and as a condition of rule, have a high degree of class consciousness and solidarity, and the subordinate classes which typically and most of the time do not. Second, that this (ruling class) consciousness and solidarity requires not merely a near-monopoly of brute force, but also a set of institutions, be they special schools, army officer corps, clubs, parties etc but, above all, control of what Marx called 'the means of mental production'.

Third, all these things rest upon the actual mode of production at a given time and that, since techniques of production are always in a process of change—once imperceptible, then slow, now very rapid—the mode of production comes into conflict with present needs and potentialities, the class system is unstable.

Finally, the progressive class, at each stage, labours under enormous difficulties, not so much in overthrowing the existing ruling class but, above all, in constituting itself as a self-conscious force—the necessary preliminary.

FOR Marx, the modern working class was the agency for the overthrow of class society, 'human emancipation', made possible by capitalism because of the development of the productive forces. Politics, therefore is concerned with the growth and consciousness of the working class. What serves that end is progressive, what hinders it is reactionary.

The judgement obviously depends on circumstances, and therefore cannot be reduced to a set of slogans. The attitude of Marx and Engels to the national question is an excellent illustration of their method.

In 1848-49, as participants in the German revolution, they strongly supported the establishment of a united German bourgeois-democratic republic which would, they believed, facilitate industrialisation and the rapid growth of a class-conscious working class. German unity, on this basis, involved the destruction of

the Austrian Empire (as well as the Prussian Kingdom and a large number of petty states).

The Austrian Empire, occupying a huge block of central Europe, contained Germans, Hungarians, Czechs, Croats, Poles, Slovenes, Italians, Romanians, Ukrainians and Slovaks.

Marx (and Engels) supported Italian, Polish and, above all, Hungarian national movements against Vienna. They opposed Slav nationalism (except Polish nationalism). So they were simultaneously supporting and opposing the right of national self-determination. For those who think in terms of abstract formal principles this seems a scandalous position and Marx has often been accused of German chauvinism and anti-Slav prejudice.

In fact Marx's position was entirely consistent from a working class point of view. Self-determination is a pot that can contain many different brews. In the actual circumstances the emergence of an independent Hungary in 1848 was the biggest obstacle to the re-establishment of Hapsburg power after the dynasty had managed to regain power in Vienna. Therefore it was progressive.

It is as well to look at the argument critically. Hungary was not supported on social grounds, still less on sentimental ones. The national movement was not even bourgeois. It was the nobility that constituted the national movement, admittedly an exceptionally large nobility (8-10 percent of the population). Moreover 'the lands of the crown of St Steven'—the territories claimed by the revolutionaries—were not even all ethnically Hungarian; less than half their population spoke Magyar.

The criterion was simply that the Austrian Emperor and the King of Prussia were twin pillars of reaction and behind them stood the Tsar—'the gendarme of Europe'. Movements which weakened these were to be supported.

Now Slav nationalism—Croat nationalism most importantly—was directed against Budapest, not Vienna. It was, objectively, a tool of Hapsburg reaction. Croat soldiers fought the Hungarian revolution at a time when the Emperor could not rely on German Austrian troops.

To summarise, the fate of the European (French, German) revolutions was the decisive consideration.

The fact that reaction—in desperate crisis—could use the language of rebellion and even appeal to genuine national (or quasi-national) feelings was not decisive. Nor were considerations of whether this or that group had, or had not, some formal 'national' characteristics. Marx would have had no difficulty in dismissing the 'national' claims of the Orange Order in Ireland.

On this point, it should be noted that Marx's unwavering support for Irish nationalism was not at all due to sentimental consideration. It was because this nationalism was directed against the English ruling class and because that class used the Irish issue to divide its own workers and subordinate them to reactionary national prejudices. His famous statement 'No nation which oppresses another can itself be free' was



The German leader
Bismarck

made with Ireland and the British workers in mind.

WHY have I spent a good deal of space on an issue which may be regarded as less than central? The point is to stress that Marx was never the prisoner of abstract principles. The working class and the workers' movement, the cause of proletarian revolution, were always the central and decisive consideration for him. Which is not to say that his tactical assessments were always correct. It is the method that is important. Nowhere is this more clear than on the question of workers' power itself and Marx's changing perception of the means of realising it.

He had, from an early stage, been enormously impressed by the Chartist movement in Britain. Why? Because it was the first example of mass working class political action on a national scale—and in the most advanced capitalist country at that.

It was not, of course, the actual demands of Chartism (they were purely political, without any *explicit* social demands) that excited him. It was the fact of big-scale working class self-activity and organisation; and the first much more than the second. For Marx undoubtedly underestimated both the importance and the built-in problems of working class organisation. Not surprisingly so. Large and stable workers' organisations scarcely existed anywhere during most of his lifetime. Yet there is more to it than that.

Marx had a deep contempt for what he called 'utopian schemes', for attempts to force workers' struggles into pre-determined moulds. He once wrote (quite late in life); 'One step forward of the real movement is worth a hundred perfect programmes.'

This was not, it need hardly be said, contempt for theory. It is a question of what theory is. 'Man must prove the truth, ie the reality and power...of his thinking in practice,' he had written in 1845. There is, to use a much abused term, a dialectical relationship between theory and practice. Theory develops on the basis of practice; practice is shaped by theory, both are modified, sometimes profoundly, by events, by experiences.

Now there was very little real experience of the formation of working class consciousness in struggle when Marx became a Marxist. Innumerable struggles, yes. Generalisation, no. Therefore Marx was open minded about the problem. Some things he was certain of. Neither the utopian 'communities' of Owen, Fourier etc, nor the Jacobin conspiratorial voluntarism of Blanqui, were the way forward. They were, to borrow a phrase from Lenin, 'infantile disorders' (which, however, recur quite frequently during capitalism's senility). But the course of 'the real movement' was far from predictable from general theory (historical materialism). Marx's approach was, to a degree, experimental.

He thought (and indeed wrote) that in the specific conditions of Britain in the 1850s universal suffrage, if achieved, must lead to worker's power. Therefore, out of a Chartist type

movement (notwithstanding its limitations) the mainstream of revolutionary development would come. This was not parliamentary cretinism (a term which either he or Engels—the priority is disputed—had invented in 1848). Rather a confidence that a mass workers' movement which could overthrow the political establishment of the day (based on property qualifications) would not, could not, stop short of the social transformation.

Possibly he was right. The matter was not tested. The ruling classes kept control and then conceded extension of the vote by dribs and drabs. Indeed *their* analysis of the situation was not so different (from the opposite standpoint) from that of Marx.



Mass Chartist demonstration on Kennington Common, South London, in 1848

THE experience, although actual universal suffrage was not conceded till long after his death, caused a shift in Marx's approach (the famous 'labour aristocracy' theory of the conservatism of the British working class). The method remained.

In the 1860's the emergence of the First International, a 'real movement', albeit with all manner of defects, drew Marx away from the British Museum and *Capital*. Yet the twin problem of formal 'democracy' and conservative workers' organisation were not solved theoretically, and *could not have been* by Marx, given his essentially scientific method.

Lenin's solutions could only arise on the basis of the experience of the 'real movement', which grew enormously after Marx's death in 1883. Those solutions too are conditioned by time and place. They represent a significant advance on Marx—on the basis of Marx's own method.

That method remains indispensable. For Lenin's formulae, no less than Marx's, are specific responses to concrete circumstances, not timeless truths. Of course some things are much more permanent. Marx's early grasp of the indispensability of *revolution*, not only to overthrow the bourgeoisie but to make the working class fit to rule, to complete its transformation to a 'class for itself', Lenin's emphasis on the necessity for a revolutionary party, a 'party of a new type' as the means through which the working class can rise to the level of self-rule and so on.

Yet there can be no substitute for concrete, materialist, analysis of each new phase of development. That understanding is the greatest single debt we owe to Marx. A Marxist *politics* in Miliband's sense of a systematic formal treatise will be possible only in retrospect, *after* the victory of the proletarian revolution internationally.

Lost in the blackboard jungle

The dispute between teachers and the local authority in Manchester over Poundswick School has made national headlines. It has led to strike action and widescale support for the teachers. But the issue is not straightforward. It arose from the actions of a number of school students who wrote abusive graffiti about their teachers. Five of those involved were kicked out of the school by the head, but the local Labour council refused to endorse the action and suspended teachers who refused to teach the students.

The major demand of the teachers' campaign has been 'Save Our Standards' and the issue has become one of discipline. Where should socialists stand in all this, and what are the wider implications for socialists who also happen to be teachers?

Pat Stack from Socialist Worker Review organised a discussion on the issues. Present were two teachers from Manchester, Irene Davies and Jim Gillen, an A level student from Leeds, Dave Dickens, a college lecturer, Geoff Brown, and Mick Brightman, who was formerly an engineering shop steward and is currently a student at Manchester Polytechnic.

The discussion began with some specific questions about the Poundswick dispute.

PAT: Was the graffiti itself racist and sexist?

IRENE: It was racist but it was the sexual part of it that really got people.

PAT: Was race ever an issue?

IRENE: It was brought up very early on by us and other people on the left—the argument about how on earth can a council be going in on this issue when the graffiti was racist. But it was not overtly racist. It's not saying kick out blacks or anything. It is really peripheral to the whole issue.

There was an element of the teachers being anti working class. The teachers tended to hate all the kids in the school. It seems to be the prevalent attitude coming out of the dispute from the teachers and the governors and even the parents as well. That working class kids who fight back, or working class kids who don't obey law and order, or who have problems are scum. That's the reactionary element in the dispute.

But that's not how it seemed at the beginning. Poundswick was raised at a union meeting the day it happened. It struck a chord with teachers across the whole of Manchester. The first argument was about conditions. It was mostly the left who got up and argued that at the first meeting.

JIM: Just to add to that. It was the first time I was able to win unofficial action in the school. It was amazing. We called a mass meeting at school and people voted for all-out strike action. I had never actually before met this in my life. You didn't stop to think that the right wing were voting with you.

PAT: Jim, you said that for the first time you could get unofficial action. When did it

become clear that the campaign was changing or that we were not really leading it?

JIM: Looking back now very early on—with the benefit of hindsight, of course. At the union meeting a man who throughout the whole pay dispute had argued against strike action and had actually scabbed in the pay dispute, came up to me afterwards and said I never thought I'd agree with you on anything in my life but I'm a hundred percent behind you on this issue. That was the first indication.



Detention. Sometimes there's no alternative

The second one was on the march itself. The 'Save Our Standards' slogan was, as far as I was concerned, an argument for corporal punishment. Somehow, if these kids were beaten more, punished more at school, then this sort of thing would not happen. One of the slogans was 'Dirtys Out, Teachers In'—meaning the Dirty Five—another was 'Dregs out, teachers in'.

The forces ranged against us were very large. But we could have put the arguments a lot earlier on and so pulled a few people towards us. It's hard for me at school now because I was the one who argued for all-out strike action. Now when I criticise the involvement of the right, people say what are you talking about, you argued for all-out strike.

GEOFF: My knowledge of the dispute has come mainly from a teacher in North Manchester. He said that initially there was a problem of right wing elements supporting the dispute, but he had at least got the initiative at first. It was unofficial action inside his school which had pledged to support the Poundswick teachers. Then the NUT officials came down to the school and very cleverly brought Poundswick teachers with them who they got to call off the unofficial action. It was at that point that the leadership of the dispute went out of

unofficial hands into the hands of the officials.

JIM: Exactly the same thing happened in my school. We had a meeting and we were coming out on unofficial strike. And then, out of nowhere, the Poundswick staff arrived and they actually said, 'We're begging you on our bended knees not to come out on strike.'

IRENE: It's perfectly true that the Poundswick staff were used by the NUT executive to knock the whole thing on the head, but it was very easy for them to do that because the coalition that we created didn't actually support our position at all. We had accepted a lot of the dubious stuff.

There had been a few arguments, mostly about teachers' conditions—not about 'standards'—but we still hadn't taken on the horrible thorny bit, which was what the kids had done, and whether the Poundswick staff were going over the top. The whole question of the rights of the kids wasn't raised at all, not until well after we'd put in a reasonably good leaflet.

We had raised the question of working in school becoming more difficult because of the cuts, but we hadn't seen that as central. **GEOFF:** This dispute was triggered by a management offensive. We got out and organised support for the suspended teachers although we failed to get to grips with all the complexities of the issue. Our initial reaction was basically correct and we shouldn't lose sight of that fact.

MICK: Right from the beginning we should have divorced the two issues: that of the teachers' suspensions, and that of the disciplinary action against the kids. Of course we had to support the suspended teachers but there were wider questions about the kids. I'm critical of our teachers because they know how headmasters operate. Kids appear before them in kangaroo courts, they have no rights. Each kid is interviewed on his own in the presence of the head and deputy head threatening the kids with police action. This seems to be what happened in this case. When you know that this is the way the kids were dealt with, it's very difficult to see them as guilty.

I can't help feeling the council was right when it said that if NUT members had been dealt with in this way they would have been up in arms. Quite rightly we fight to have representation and rights. These kids had no rights.

JIM: Mick's right to say they were treated disgracefully in the way evidence was got from them, but at the end of the day that's up to a school students' union. That's where organisation must lie.

DAVE: We defend the school students against the expulsions, and the way in which those expulsions were carried out. Of course, we've got to be critical of the sexism and racism, but we have to give unconditional



Caged In

support to the students. In a school setting, they are the victims.

MICK: It seems to me there were grounds for a settlement recently when the proposal was put forward that the kids be let back in the school but taught separately. Unfortunately the union rejected this deal.

DAVE: But even this amounts to appalling victimisation. It means the kids are totally cut off from the rest of the school and I don't see how we could support such a solution.

GEOFF: I take the view that they should be expelled. They can't get an education at that school.

MICK: That's a cop-out.

GEOFF: It's not a cop-out. It's saying 'that's what has to happen'. I don't think those kids are going to get any good out of staying inside that school. If those teachers are defeated on this issue, I see really awful consequences—not just in terms of the demoralisation that will follow amongst the teachers themselves, but also in the way the authority—the employer—will use that to increase their control.

We've got a pretty insidious employer at the moment—they talk left and act right. They talk about kids' rights, school councils, and kids' participation in school, but in reality what they're trying to do is to increase the control from the top over schools.

IRENE: Was the graffiti sufficient reason for teachers to refuse to teach someone? As socialists in that situation, I think we'd say we wouldn't demand the expulsion of kids over that issue. There was a question for me as to whether I should teach a child who whacked me. In that position you do have to say that there are two groups of people who are oppressed in this situation.

Teachers are oppressed and exploited. By saying that they are refusing to teach a kid they are in fact fighting back over their exploitation. At the same time they are the people who are oppressing the kids. You have to be very careful over which issue it is and we weren't careful over this issue. We should have seen the issue was a difficult one.

What happened then? If kids are violent towards a members of staff, there should be resources for actually coping with that. We

should support teachers who refuse to teach violent kids. In the Poundswick case the kids in the normal course of things would simply have been transferred. Because the process was stopped and the sub committee and the parents organised against it, it became an expulsion as opposed to a quiet transfer to another school—which happens all the time in all schools.

But what is the solution now? I still think transfer is the best thing because I think Dave is dead right—putting the kids in a unit on site is actually victimisation. But the transfer won't be accepted by the parents.

DAVE: Expulsion is a defeat, a total victory for the reactionaries around 'Save Our Standards'. I disagree entirely with the idea of separate tuition. It is a form of victimisation, cutting them off from the rest of the school students. The transfer is also a defeat.

PAT: Let's suppose the transfer goes ahead and the demands of the Poundswick teachers are met. Who benefits? Somebody said the teachers mustn't lose, I want to know who wins?

JIM: If the transfer goes through, the right will be seen, to a certain extent, as winning. Head teachers will be seen to have the right to manage. The breakdown of recent talks was very much portrayed as the head teachers—not the NUT—against the council.

MICK: What I find a bit difficult is this argument that the transfer is for the kids' own good. Is it? That's the point—either you defend the bloody teachers or you defend the kids. You can't have it both ways. It's serious if the teachers are defeated, but I think it's serious if the kids get transferred. The way to solve the dispute is an honourable compromise. I know that's difficult for revolutionaries.

The only compromise is that the kids go back in the same school. I'd look for a compromise if I were a steward in that situation.

IRENE: Whatever happens in this dispute, no one can win out of it apart from the right. Whatever happens, the victory will be for those who want better behaviour and stricter punishments.

JIM: The problem is that some of the

Poundswick teachers are asking for Keith Joseph to intervene in the dispute.

MICK: It's interesting that the government hasn't intervened.

JIM: Well, they want the Labour council to be hammered.

PAT: What are the contradictions of being a revolutionary socialist and a teacher?

DAVE: I'm not a teacher, but it seems that although you're oppressed and exploited, you are also oppressing and exploiting as well. Teachers have to discipline.

JIM: The biggest oppressor of working class kids isn't the teachers—who I consider to be part of the working class—but the system itself. Teachers don't have to be oppressive to kids. True, some things like filling in the register you have to do. But there's a lot of room to manoeuvre. You don't have to give detention.

IRENE: I think there should be a tension between being a socialist and being a teacher. All the time you oppress the kids. You walk into a classroom and demand that everybody shuts up. I don't normally do that when I walk into a pub. You have to be constantly pushing against that oppression, otherwise you fall into the trap we've fallen into. It's hard. Partly because of the pay dispute, sectionalism and looking towards the union structure has grown. People see that as a way to defend ever-worsening working conditions. They just look to that, whereas there are things you can do in the classroom.

If I have someone playing up in a lesson so no one can get any work done, then I have to say I'll keep somebody behind. I ask myself why am I doing it—because I was tired and bad tempered. You fight against it. I try not to give detentions. But you can't get away from it. Social workers have the same problem.

MICK: Are we saying that our teachers can't win the socialists arguments with any of the kids they teach? If you're saying that's impossible, then how can you operate as a teacher and a revolutionary?

GEOFF: Of course there are teachers who influence kids. But how many foremen influence their workforce?

DAVE: A few teachers from the SWP can't

solve the basic problems. Teachers have got to force students to turn up to school.

FAT: At the moment there's a certain logic to what Mick says. If we're not careful all we get is that teachers are cops. And if that's true our members shouldn't be teachers. There must be something other than the cop aspect to teaching.

IRENE: There is, but we're not in the sixties. There's no strong movement coming from the kids. Teachers could afford to be a lot more progressive then. There weren't the constraints on teachers and pupils that there are now. It is the case that the teacher's job is more and more policing. If you raise socialist politics in the school you can lose your job. It's very small, the things you can do. With older kids you may have some room to raise politics. But you can't take it beyond that. The only thing you can do is raise with the teachers the rights of the kids. That's the cutting edge where you sort out the teachers who will support the kids and those who are anti working class.

DAVE: What did the teachers at your school do about the YTUC day of action? One of our SWP teachers refused in advance to give the head names of people who were absent on the day.

IRENE: We can raise that kind of issue.

PAT: We fight to defend education, we don't fight to defend law and order or the police force. In other words, there is a certain service provided by teachers at the same time as they're slapping people over the head.

JIM: We are becoming more cops these days. We have 'sin bin' classes where kids are just thrown in. That means there's no hope for them. No education in those classes at all. Most kids don't stand a chance of getting a job anyway. Last year, out of 250 pupils at my school only one or two got a job. The rest were YTS or further education. It's easier for teachers to have a quiet class—easier to be the hard cop.

IRENE: That's exactly what's supposed to happen. That's how the reproduction of the workforce works. It teaches them discipline. The problem is the kids that rebel and won't wear uniform are the same ones that won't do any work either. The kids who work hard at least get an individual solution. It's really hard to square the circle.

GEOFF: The way things seem to be going is for kids reacting against the system rather than organising. I don't believe there's any



The kids are oppressed by the teachers

way round the fact that if the kids don't organise they're going to get worse and worse treatment—more hard cops.

PAT: My flatmate is a teacher in a rough school in London. He says he just couldn't begin to keep control unless he occasionally used detention, sending kids out of the class and things like that. He just wouldn't be able to teach. Should teachers use these measures?

DAVE: It depends on how far they're pushed. If they're pushed to such an extent they've got to. But it would be better to sit down and talk to the kids. That's what some of my teachers used to do.

PAT: But if that fails—if the kid isn't interested—what then?

DAVE: Then I think you've got to resort to things like detention.

JIM: I never get the time for one to one discussion with the kids. So even if I want it or they want it, it's not a viable alternative. If I did that with every pupil in my class who annoyed me, I'd be there till six every night.

The second thing is, faced with a choice, if a pupil gets up and tells you to fuck off—which happens in my class—what do you do? You can say it's not my problem and refer it to management. If you do that, two things happen—you get yourself in a lot of shit because they say you can't control your class, and it gets the kid into a lot more trouble. You're upping the stakes for you and the kid. It's terrible for socialists to have to do it, but you do have to implement some sort of control in your own class. It's a lot easier if it's just between you and the pupil.

PAT: Would you be in favour of corporal punishment?

IRENE: I've hit kids—cuffed them—when I lose my temper. But on the argument about whether smacking them or not is right—none of it is. All it does is degenerate into an appalling bloody mess. The thing is, how can we turn the way we cope with the crap into something positive? How do we turn it outwards so that instead of just cuffing the kids you complain about the fact you've got too many kids? It's how you change from the coping techniques to actually arguing for more resources. It's not happening at the moment.

If the salaries dispute had been really going hard and fast, then I'm sure the Poundswick dispute would not have happened like it did. The pay dispute was at such a low level, people were involved in a little bit of action, they looked to the union. When this happened—a little push on making things worse at school—everybody looked to the union at official level for a solution. They should have said, all right, we can slam the bastards on salaries.

If that combativity had been there in the first place, we wouldn't have the coping techniques that go on in the classroom. Things could have been very different. ■

A diary for 1986 that celebrates the year 1936, the year of workers' revolution in Spain and mass strikes in France, a year of courage and hope in the midst of a decade dominated by the rise of fascism, the year of the Popular Front and of betrayal by those who claimed the leadership of the workers' movement — all in a diary with plenty of space for the socialist events of your year, 1986.



The Socialist Worker 1986 Diary
Fifty years after the Popular Front

SPECIAL PRICE FOR READERS OF SOCIALIST WORKER: £2.60 from SWP branch bookstalls (Usual price £3.25) or by post from BOOKMARKS, 265 Seven Sisters Road, London N4



Fat cats hit trouble

WATCH out for Egypt in 1986. This crisis-ridden country is again on the brink of a political upheaval which could see mass protests against the government of President Mubarak.

The statistics tell a mind-boggling story. Egypt's population has now reached almost 50 million and is increasing at a million every year. Yet only 4 percent of land is cultivable and almost the whole population is concentrated along the narrow strip of the river Nile or in the cities of the Nile delta. Cairo—a city of three million in the 1960s—now has at least 10 million in its slums and shanties.

The housing crisis in the cities is so profound that even the government has admitted that it needs to build 3.6 million new housing units over the next 15 years. Meanwhile the urban poor squat in rubbish dumps or Cairo's infamous City of the Dead—a huge cemetery. Unemployment is rising fast, with 400,000 coming onto the job market each year and hundreds of thousands of emigrant workers due to return from the countries of North Africa and the Gulf, where the recession is now taking its toll.

But it is the question of food that has the government looking nervously over its shoulder. The level of food production is falling—this year production per capita will be 85 percent of the 1970 level. The government can only guarantee supplies by operating a massive subsidy programme based on imports. Currently \$2 billion is being spent on subsidies just keeping millions of poor above the breadline. Now Egypt's international creditors—owed \$32 billion by the Cairo government—are exhorting Mubarak to reduce the subsidy programme and introduce 'realistic' prices for bread, rice and fuel. Bodies like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), to which Mubarak has recently turned for a \$1.5 billion emergency loan, have warned that unless they get some satisfaction, the loans will dry up.

Mubarak is in a dilemma familiar to his predecessor Anwar Sadat. As one Egyptian economist put it last year, 'He is caught between the IMF and the spectre of the masses in the streets.' When Sadat tried to reduce the size of the one-piastre (penny) loaf in January 1977 the country erupted into mass strikes, furious demonstrations and riots. For four days, until the army was able to crush the movement, Egypt was in turmoil—and Sadat was forced to withdraw the cuts. In 1984 Mubarak faced the same problem. Subsidy cuts were withdrawn after just one walk-out at the huge Kafr al-Dawa textile mill near Alexandria.

Now many Egyptians are even worse off. A recent survey showed that raising the price of the loaf from one piastre to an 'economic' four or five piastres, would mean additional expenditure of almost £35 a year for each adult—more than many Egyptians earn in a month. (Average income is £490 a year but millions earn only a fraction of this sum.) Any announcement of new cuts would be seen by many workers as an invitation to stop the factories and take to the streets.

Like Sadat, Mubarak has a narrow political base and survives because of the absence of any coherent alternative. The two presidents have both represented the layer of capitalists and petit bourgeoisie that has prospered under the *infitah* strategy introduced by Sadat in 1973. This was designed to break up the public ownership of large sectors of the economy which had been favoured by Nasser in the 1950s and 1960s. It attempted to re-integrate Egypt fully into the world system by offering *infitah* (the 'opening' or 'open door') to western capitalists, who were invited to use cheap Egyptian labour and the promise of tax-free holidays, cheap rents and other benefits if they would invest in industry.

The policy has failed miserably. By 1984 the government had approved £9 billion in *infitah* investment, but only a fraction had

been implemented while only 16 percent of the total was foreign capital and almost none at all had gone into industry. Instead, foreign businessmen, often using Egyptian partners, have taken advantage of the concessions to establish import-export businesses, banks and service companies. These have been the source of huge profits, as imports have replaced the goods once produced by Nasser's domestic industry, much of which has been driven to the wall.

There is tremendous hostility to 'the fat cats', as Egyptians call the nouveau riche of the *infitah* period. But not surprisingly Mubarak is wedded to a policy which has produced his most ardent admirers. He insists: 'Egypt's policy is that of *infitah*; we will never change course.' In a recent package of economic 'reforms', announced with a fanfare as the government's answer to the crisis, Mubarak offered only more incentives for the private sector, a threat of cuts in food subsidies, and a laughable attempt to create a national fund to pay off the foreign debt, to which Mubarak asked every Egyptian to contribute.

Mubarak is now popularly viewed as the millionaires' man, and as Egypt's representative of foreign capital. There has long been strong anti-imperialist sentiment (Egyptians look back with great pride to the expulsion of the British in the early 1950s), and this is now being expressed in denunciation of Mubarak as America's poodle. Following the American seizure of an Egyptian jet after the *Achille Lauro* hijacking, student demonstrations in three cities—involving 30,000 in Cairo—raised slogans against Israel, the US and Mubarak, notably 'No to colonisation'.

But so far there is little sign of worker resistance. Struggles like that at Kafr al-Dawa are the exception. Most are isolated and controlled by official unions in which the bureaucrats are Mubarak's men. The lack of activity reflects years of repression by Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak—but also the inadequacy of the left.

Apart from the bourgeois Wafd party, which was recently legalised, open opposition has been conducted by three tame organisations.

These were introduced by Sadat in the



Anti Mubarak students demonstration

mid-1960s as 'platforms' within the monolithic Arab Socialist Union created by Nasser. One, the National Democratic Group, is Mubarak's official electoral base. The Socialist Labour Party, led by Ibrahim Shukri, is a bourgeois party many of whose members have a right-wing nationalist background. The National Progressive Unionist Rally or *Tagammu*, led by Khaled Muheiddin, is the 'official' left.

The *Tagammu* combines Nasserists, liberals, members of the Egyptian Communist Party and a handful of Trotskyists. The main political influence is that of the communists, who see the organisation as a broad front of 'progressive' elements. Its conference in July last year affirmed a strategy of drawing in elements of the 'national bourgeoisie' that it regards as 'productive' as opposed to the 'unproductive' elements of 'parasitical capitalism' or *infitah*. It also asserted the need to attract 'enlightened' Muslims and radical nationalists.

In this the *Tagammu* is continuing the long and disastrous tradition of Egyptian Stalinism which has abjectly followed the Moscow line and advocated popular frontism for almost 30 years. This strategy reached its logical conclusion in 1964 when the Communist Party dissolved itself in recognition of the 'progressive' character of Nasser's state capitalism. (Ten years before Nasser had been busy butchering the best working class militants.) All through the waves of workers' activity in the 1970s the reconstructed party was unable to orient on the struggle in the factories, and despite today's deep crisis remains a prisoner of an analysis that has proved pathetically inadequate.

This is also one reason for the rapid growth of the only dynamic force in Egyptian politics—the fundamentalist movement. Organisations like Al Jihad (responsible for the assassination of Sadat in 1981), Takfir w'al-Higra, and the Muslim Brotherhood, have maintained effective underground organisations and often appear to be the only alternative to the government. While Mubarak has somewhat reduced their influence by selective repression (effectively encouraging less intransigent elements), there remains a possibility that they could exert real influence on a mass protest movement.

As in the past, such a movement could erupt with great speed. As in the 1977 events, workers could again play a key role, abandoning the factories to lead giant demonstrations through the cities. If such a movement is prolonged, there is the possibility of a new layer of worker militants emerging, looking for a political alternative that the fundamentalists with their puritanism and obsessive self-denial will not be able to satisfy (Egypt is not Iran). If the fundamentalists are unable to capitalise on popular opposition, the result could well be a move by the army, with military chief Abu Ghazala the man to look out for.

Meanwhile in Sudan, where the country's version of Mubarak—President Jaafar Numeiri—was overthrown last April, a wave of workers' struggles has been paralysing the military government. The April events



Women washing clothes in stream near Cairo

involved a huge protest movement in which workers played an increasingly important role. Army officers under General Swar al-Dhahab took control in a transparent attempt to head off the movement.

Since then trade unions have mushroomed and there has been a spate of strikes as workers have attempted to extend the freedoms that the military have been forced to grant.

From September to November, 20 national strikes were launched—an average of one every three days. They involved workers in textiles, telecommunications,

print, local government, education, and distribution. The fundamentalists were marginalised, while the Sudanese Communist Party—a key element in the secular National Alliance for Salvation—has attempted to control the movement.

The Sudanese events offer the hope that in neighbouring Egypt, with its far larger and more powerful working class, a resurgent workers' movement can also produce new leadership at the rank and file level—and re-emphasise the need for a Marxist current at the centre of Arab politics. ■

Phil Marshall

GREECE

'Struggle will continue'

YANNIS PAPAMIKHAIL, is the 'illegal' president of the Greek TUC.

When the ruling Socialist Party, PASOK, introduced their austerity measures in October this year, some leading PASOK members were expelled for their defiance of the government.

Yannis Papamikhail was among them. As the railway workers' union leader he voted for strike action on the TUC against PASOK's policies.

Greece has recently seen a wave of strikes against these measures. Now the TUC is being dragged through the courts over its legality. Socialist Worker Review spoke to the Greek TUC president.

How was the TUC executive elected?

I was one of 45 members elected at the first democratic conference in 1983.

The conference was not accused of irregularities by any organisation. Out of the

45 members, 26 were from the PASOK trade union organisation, 17 from the Communist Party and two from the Eurocommunist organisations.

When the measures were announced seven PASOK members stuck to their principles and rejected them.

The president, a PASOK man, saw that we would have had the majority of the executive so he refused to convene a meeting. In the end we bypassed him, held a meeting and sacked both the president and the treasurer.

We decided to seek a dialogue with the government. I was elected the new president for the time being.

Why do you think PASOK has introduced the measures and how are the TUC facing up to them?

These measures are monetarist and we must reject them and ask the government to reconsider.

Collective bargaining cannot be suspended and so we proposed a 24 hour general strike to get the dialogue going.

The measures are going to fail as the cut in workers' incomes will not allow the domestic market to expand. Greek production will accordingly shrink and small businesses will close.

The suspension of collective bargaining means that small workshops with few workers will not be allowed to pay their workers any extra money. The result will be no incentives and lower quality production.

Big business will grab their market share. Neither production nor productivity can improve in this way. The only beneficiaries will be big capital and the multinationals.

We believe that a solution to the country's problems has to involve the natural supporters of PASOK. The perspective must be social transformation working with public employees and the peasants.

We want a dialogue to propose our own solutions.

Why has PASOK come down so hard on workers and why have they expelled the trade unionists who have defied their policies? Personally, I found out from the TV that I was no longer part of the movement.

The need for a loan to cover the balance of payments deficit and the terms of the EEC loan were such that they brought PASOK in opposition with the mass movement.

PASOK could have negotiated better terms or got a loan from elsewhere.

PASOK has rejected dialogue and proved that it does not believe, as it used to say, that the trade union movement is a crucial support of democracy.

They are using the courts to impose their own executive on the TUC.

What has happened is that the government has cut itself from the party. The party has not at all changed its positions taken at conference and in the founding declaration. As a result the party members who stuck to their principles are now being expelled.

How will ordinary PASOK members control the government and what do you think the future holds for the party?

What is happening here is the opposite of what should have happened.

Instead of the party giving direction to the government, the government is giving direction to the party. The role of the party has been reduced.

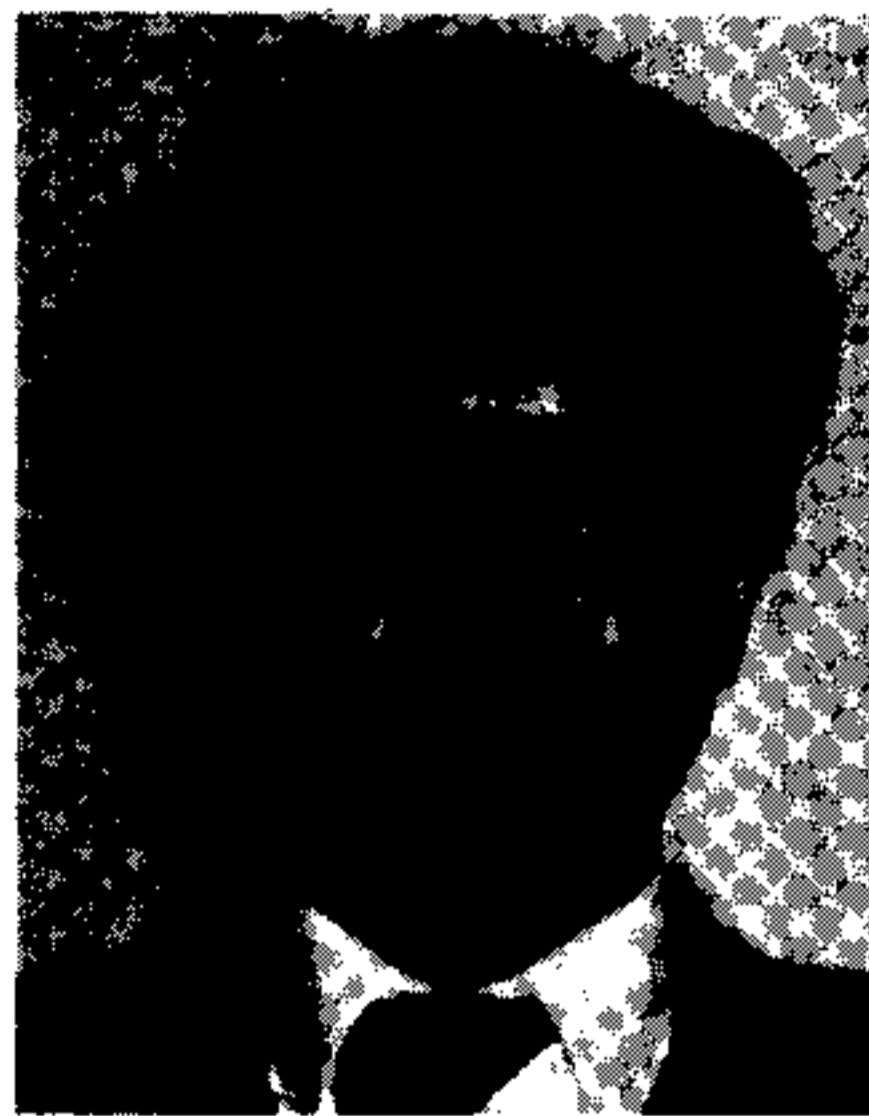
How will the working class fight back?

At the moment there is a lot of support in the class for proposals that the expelled PASOK members are putting forth.

We had a great strike, unprecedented for Greece, on 14 November and we also had a massive demonstration to parliament.

We want to 'socialise' the banking system, and develop the agricultural cooperatives. These are realistic proposals which aim at maintaining—not increasing—the living standards of the working class.

The majority of the class supports our proposals as the strikes have shown. This is particularly the case in public utilities and the large companies where workers have struck in large numbers and were very disciplined.



Yannis Papamikhail

'THE BATTLE' was the verdict of the general strike of 14 November given by Free Press, a pro-PASOK daily national newspaper.

Workers massively supported the strike call and 'The Battle' took place when railworkers, garbage drivers and tramworkers were attacked by police.

For the first time since the mid-70s, when there was a high level of class struggle following the collapse of the ruling military Junta, workers attempted to stop scabbing by setting up picket lines.

PASOK were clearly shaken by the strikes.

How do you see them reacting now?

Class struggle will continue and the strikes will not end. The trade union movement is optimistic that through struggle it will achieve both dialogue and results.

What needs clarifying is that we don't want to overthrow the government, as the right-wing have been saying. We want to persuade them to change the measures they have taken against workers.

Papandreou has taken a very tough stance and it looks as if PASOK will not budge.

What will you do in this instance?

The government must discuss policy. We are not convinced that they will not talk. They have no option but to talk if the struggle continues. Otherwise they will have to resort to autocratic measures which go against democracy.

When the legal wrangles about the TUC are over the government will talk.

If there are sectional struggles, even under the circumstances of Papandreou agreeing to

talk, will you support them?

The organisations of the working class have a degree of autonomy and they might decide to push for their own case.

We cannot say beforehand whether we will support such struggles or not but have to examine each particular case.

All the demands which fall within our political proposals we will certainly support. Other demands we will not support.

Will you join PASOK again?

It was not my choice to leave. I was thrown out.

If it was up to me I would still be in the party and struggling in the same way. But my principles are not negotiable. I will not return if I have to ditch my principles.

What are the immediate plans of the TUC?

We are waiting at the moment for the government decision on the TUC executive. This legal problem is stopping the TUC operating as a body.

If the courts continue to stall we will push with further action anyway. ■



What do we mean by?

The tribune of the people

THE PHRASE 'tribune of the people' seems an odd one for socialists to use. Yet it is a term which they may often hear bandied about in meetings, usually when the speaker is calling for socialists to take up the causes of oppressed groups, or to raise general revolutionary politics to widen a particular struggle.

We take the modern idea of the tribune from the Russian revolutionary, Lenin. In *What is to be Done?*, written in 1903, he says that the ideal of the revolutionary should not be the trade union secretary, but the tribune of the people.

Lenin used the phrase to attack the Economists—people who wanted to concentrate narrowly and exclusively on the industrial struggle. He argued that under the Tsarist autocracy at the time, people from all classes would come into conflict with the state. Revolutionaries had to show the links between these struggles and the fight to overthrow the regime. They also had to involve themselves in those struggles.

What point was Lenin trying to make when he argued for revolutionaries being 'tribunes' in this way?

Firstly, he wanted to make clear that revolutionary socialists are opposed to all oppression, and that they should try to take a lead in fighting against it.

Secondly, he wanted to stress that a revolutionary has to rise above the particular interests of a section of the working class or oppressed in order to raise general political answers to the problems of the exploited and oppressed.

Here Lenin was touching on issues which have often caused much difficulty to revolutionaries in the present day. Often it is hard enough to convince people around us that the working class is the revolutionary class in society. All too often this central premise of Marx's thought can turn into a belief that the fight against oppression is not relevant to workers' struggles, or to a belief that any struggle by workers must be a good thing.

Yet both arguments are mistaken and can lead on the one hand to abstaining from struggle, on the other to a passive tailing of workers by revolutionaries, even when the actions of those workers are far from revolutionary.

The working class is the only class which has the power and organisation to achieve socialism. Yet it is also obvious that the working class is not a united class most of the time.

There are many quite major divisions inside the working class—on grounds of race, of sex, divisions between workers of different religions, divisions on the ground of skill. We shouldn't be surprised that these divisions give rise to oppressed groups—women, racial minorities, people

from certain nations—who suffer real grievances, and who sometimes organise against those grievances.

The existence of different sorts of oppression stems from the existence of class society itself. In capitalist society the necessities of life and a surplus are produced under oppressive conditions. People do not choose to produce, they are forced of necessity to do so. They are alienated from the products of their labour. This engenders a whole system of oppressions which stem from the fundamental class contradiction of society.

The final ending of that oppression will come with the ending of class society. But that doesn't mean that all the exploited or oppressed move towards a recognition of this at the same time. Nor is it sufficient to rely on a far-off revolutionary process to solve the problems of the oppressed. To do so only leads to a crude mechanical Marxism which bypasses the need to fight oppression.

What Lenin was arguing was that the revolutionary party has to recognise that struggles may arise among groups who are very far from the working class. It is the duty of socialists to support those struggles against the capitalist system and to try to lead them towards the party itself, and towards understanding the central revolutionary role of the working class.

'The urban and industrial proletariat will inevitably be the nucleus of our Social Democratic Labour Party, but we must attract to it, enlighten, and organise all who labour and are exploited, as stated in our programme—all without exception: handicraftsmen, paupers, beggars, servants, tramps, prostitutes—of course, subject to the necessary and obligatory condition that they join the Social Democratic movement and not that the Social Democratic movement join them, that they adopt the standpoint of the proletariat, and not that the proletariat adopt theirs.'

This last phrase is the key. A revolutionary party welcomes and wants to win all those fighting their oppression—whether national, racial or sexual. But the party has to build on the understanding that organisation of the oppressed is not the central road to revolution.

There is a limit to the struggle against oppression unless it is tied to the struggles of the working class. Oppressed groups can rail against the system—they cannot destroy it or build a new socialist society. The working class is the only class in society which both has the power to end capitalism and the interests as a class in ending all oppression.

The point of Lenin praising the tribune of the people was not only to locate all forms of oppression within the capitalist system. It



also guarded against two dangers. One was to dismiss all struggles that ~~are~~ not rooted in the workplace as irrelevant. The other was to believe that all struggles by groups of workers should win the automatic support of socialists.

This is not necessarily the case. There are strikes of a reactionary nature—against blacks or against women having the right to work—of which socialists are very critical.

They have to rise above what a particular group of workers hold to be in their interests. For in the long term such struggles not only weaken the position of those under attack but also the position of these workers making the attacks. Every time workers make a scapegoat out of another section of the working class, every time the colour of skin or religious beliefs or gender are held up as the fundamental dividing line in society, the bosses gain strength to control the working class as a whole.

The idea of the revolutionary party as a tribune of the people should not, however, be confused with the notion of a coalition of oppressed groups. Jesse Jackson's 'rainbow coalition' in the United States sought to enlist the support of organisations who proclaimed themselves as the representatives of oppressed blacks, women or hispanics. The Communist Party in this country argues that what is needed is unity between the different autonomous movements—women, blacks and gays.

Our idea is different. It is not to unite different organisations but to intervene directly in any clash by groups against the authorities or their oppressors.

The idea of the revolutionary minority being tribunes of the people is rooted in the fact that workers' power is the only way to end oppression.

Our job today is to be the best, clearest-headed fighters against oppression and at the same time to explain the revolutionary road to ending it. ■

Andy Zebrowski

A rich seam

In the wake of the miners' strike, the Tories and Kinnock argue workers' power is a thing of the past. Here *Jonathan Neale* demonstrates how across the Atlantic miners have fought back and rebuilt union organisation again and again.

THE United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) have never had a wide seam to work. The American working class has always been divided by racism and weakened by right-wing ideas. Unionising the mines has always meant violence. Both sides have shot to kill. The difference was that the UMWA did not own the US Army, and the miners did not kill children.

But by 1919 the UMWA had half a million members, a long history of strikes, an aggressive stance and a union wage in most coal-fields. The 1920s were a period of retreat for the American working class. The market for coal collapsed. In the 1920s there were five national miners' strikes against wage reductions. All were defeated.

By 1932 union membership had shrunk from 500,000 to 80,000. Two thirds of them were in one coalfield: Illinois. Elsewhere the union was a shell. The mines were almost all non-union. Men kept their union cards a secret. The basic wage had been seven and a half dollars a day. Now it was two to four dollars. Miners averaged two or three days work a week. So take home pay was a quarter or a third of what it had been.

It was as if the NUM survived only in some pits in Yorkshire. Most miners were taking home twenty to thirty pounds a month, and there was no dole or social security.

The weaker a union gets on the ground, the stronger the bureaucrats get. During the twenties John L Lewis built an iron grip on the United Mine Workers of America. Lewis played poker with businessmen and drank with mine owners. He was president of a bank and played the stock market. He was a loyal, active Republican.

Lewis loved red-baiting. He drove prominent socialists and communists out of the union and the mines. He also broke every militant, moderate and corrupt conservative who didn't kiss his feet. In 1932 he *bassed* the remnants of the UMWA.

One year later the union signed up 200,000 miners in a month. Wildcat strikes won union recognition everywhere. Thirteen years before the US Army and 2000 company thugs had defeated 6000 armed miners in southern West Virginia. Now all West Virginia was in the union. The UMWA struck again and again throughout the thirties. In 1943, at the height of the war, they came out solidly and won.

What turned the miners round? Politics.

Franklin D Roosevelt became President of the USA in 1933. Roosevelt's politics would have seemed right-wing in the SDP. But his rhetoric talked of a 'New Deal'. Employers were confused. Workers scented change. They added a bit of confidence to their stored hate.

Who led the miners' upsurge? John L Lewis, that cigar-smoking, poker-playing,

red-baiting, evil old man. He faced the total destruction of his union. If the miners didn't fight, he lost not only his hotel suites and his Cadillac but his job. Facing that, even the most reactionary union leader *may* fight.

The UMWA stayed strong until the 1950s. Then Lewis made a deal with management. The miners got basic pensions and good wages. The owners got to run the mine. There would be no official local strikes. Everything would be negotiated.

The union began to die at the roots. But the smell came from the top. By 1964 it was a 'business union'. The union bought a bank in Washington, a major coal shipping company and a major coal mining company. All without telling the members. Tony Boyle was the new union president. He spent 100,000 dollars on pictures of Tony Boyle for union offices. At one union convention every delegate got a clock radio engraved with Boyle's face, a Tony Boyle watch and a pen with Boyle's name on it.

No local strikes meant no safety. In 1968 a mine explosion in Farmington, West Virginia burnt and suffocated seventy-eight men. President Tony Boyle came to Farmington. He called a press conference to express his sympathy for the bereaved relatives and praise the company's safety record. (You read that sentence right the first time).

The worms turned into snakes. The government and the mine owners refused to recognise Black Lung disease. They said the miners smoked too much. West Virginia miners closed the mines in a 'wildcat' against union orders. They surrounded the state congress. The state congress passed the best Black Lung compensation law in the country.

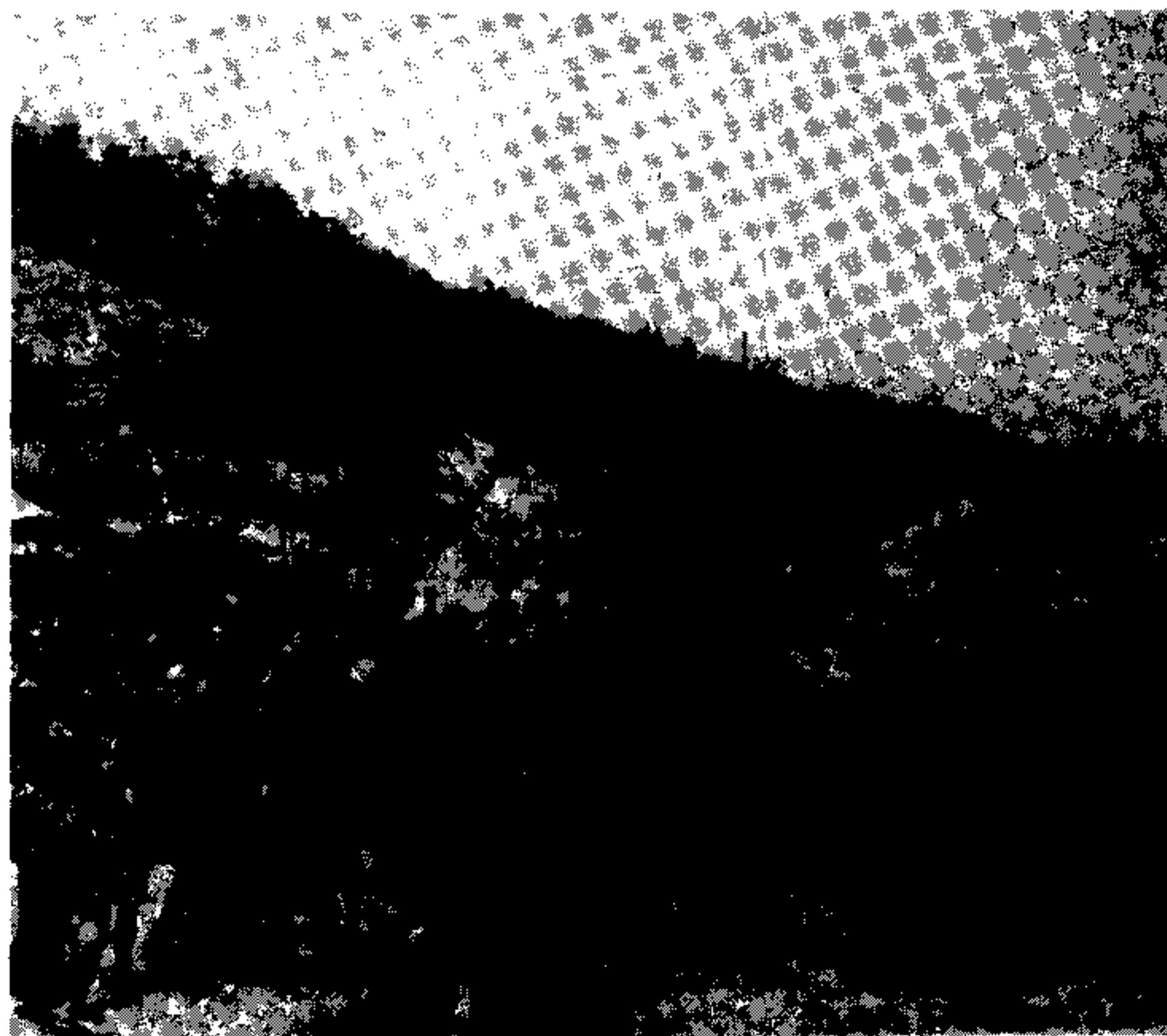
The rank and file was moving. Boyle was too far gone and too stupid to move left like Lewis. Instead, the bureaucracy split. Jack Yablonski, an old Lewis man, ran for President on a rank and file ticket. Boyle stole the election. Yablonski threatened to tell everything in court. Boyle put out a contract on him. One night they killed Yablonski, his wife and his grown daughter.

Yablonski's son Chip went looking for honest miners to carry on the fight. Militants were scared, very scared. But this wasn't just crooks running the union; it looked like the mob. And it was their union. They built a rank and file movement.

They threw Boyle out of office and into jail. They called a hundred wildcats over safety and a national strike. They cleaned up the union.

It looks like the UMWA is on the slide again. But they'll be back. Capital can win a battle. They can't win the war. On the morrow of every victory they need us to mine the coal, patch up the sick, empty the dustbins.

Working together under capitalism builds unions. Capital's never-satisfied greed is always pushing on wages; pushing on safety; pushing down through the foreman. Eventually workers push back together. We win battles. Unlike management in the end we can win the war. They need workers. It's not hard to imagine how we could live without management. ■



American miners confront the National Guard



MARXISM & CULTURE

Low life

BANNED BY Mussolini and Hitler, censored by Churchill and his employer the press magnate Lord Beaverbrook, the subject of official protest by Franco's Government, David Low was and remains the most famous and controversial of cartoonists.

It was his capacity for ridiculing the stupidity of authority which gave his work its cutting edge and its most famous character Colonel Blimp:

'Colonel Blimp was created in the thirties to symbolise the stupidity and confusion then prevalent in ruling circles concerning the threat of Hitler.'

But it was the whole social situation which fired Low's work:

'In the thirties, however, the most noteworthy feature of what remained of the privileged classes was certainly neither culture art nor philosophy. Here and there I encountered an arrogance which was almost ferocious...not very far under the skin was a brutal stupidity that...could regard human beings as property...and identified the public interest with their...purely private interest—those disagreeing being, *prima facie*, treasonable dogs.'

Low was anti-nazi and a prophet of Hitler's expansionist military policy. He opposed increased arms spending but later ridiculed prime minister Neville Chamberlain's appeasement policy.

His ridicule of the upper-class was particularly sharp but his solutions were those of left-reformism: the soft left in today's terminology. Low felt his critical freedom would be compromised by membership of any party but he contributed to Labour Party funds and sat on the board of the *New Statesman*.

The *Economist* described him as 'the favourite cartoonist of the left-centre intelligentsia of England.' He shared the prejudices of the intellectuals of the inter-war period. Not until the Hitler-Stalin pact in 1939 did

the scales really drop from Low's eyes concerning Russia. After a visit there in 1932 he returned with a set of drawings of cherubic Russian workers, tinged with the mildest of mild satire.

There was only one occasion when the starry-eyed view of Russia faltered. The crushing of the 1936 revolution in Catalonia, and the refusal of the British government to let Trotsky into the country were both events supported by the Stalinists. Low attacked the Communist Party's attitude with a cartoon captioned: 'But, officer—the man's a dangerous red!'

Low's attitude to Churchill was one of almost unremitting hostility. Before the war Churchill was seen as an archetypal Blimp, a view repeated during the war when Low campaigned for an early opening of the second front to help relieve the Russians while Churchill delayed, and in the 1945 election he is depicted as out-moded, a 'childmind' and a 'dead-duck'.

The feeling was mutual. Churchill thought that Low 'never drew a single line in praise of England' and that he attacked 'everything important to our self-preservation.'

Nevertheless, objectively Low and Churchill agreed on the spinelessness of the National government's foreign policy and, in the later thirties, on the need for rearmament.

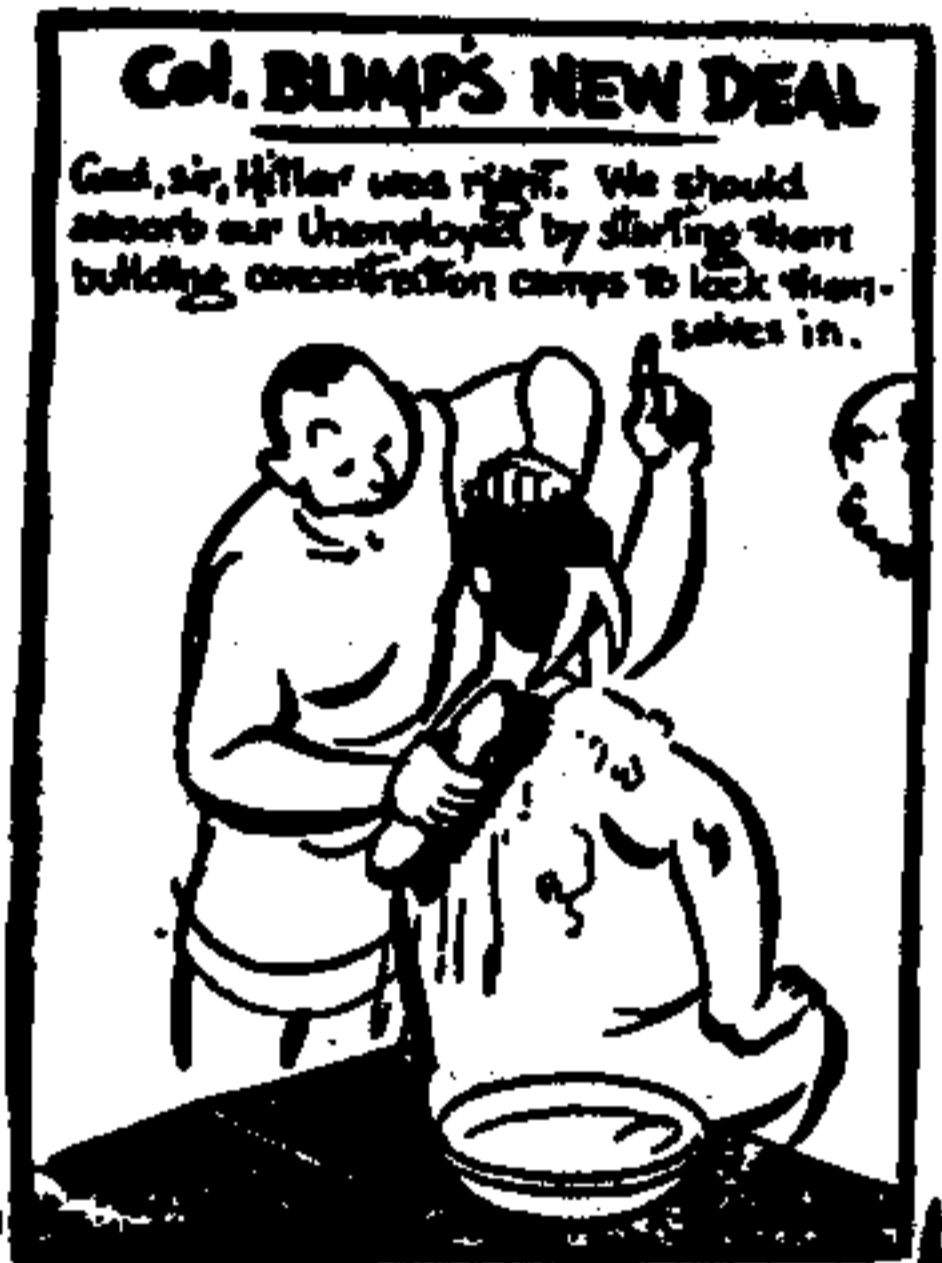
But for Low, opposition to Churchill was one thing—workers taking things into their own hands was quite beyond the pale. His cartoon in response to the General Strike was a model of Fabian propriety.

For the most part, however, Low pilloried the establishment, simply because if your aim in life is to puncture pomposity and deflate authority then nine times out of ten your target will be the ruling class.

Colonel Blimp, often accompanied by a cartoon figure of Low himself, and usually dressed for a Turkish bath, where Low claimed to have discovered his prototype, was mercilessly funny at exposing the common (non)sense of the period.

Usually set in a single frame, the colonel fearlessly renounced logic in such gems as: 'The Tory party must save the empire if it has to strangle it in the attempt', 'If we want to keep our place in the sun we must darken our sky with our airplanes,' 'Bayonets bring out the best in a man—and it stays out'.

Low's Fabian politics meant however, that as an alternative current within the British ruling class came to the fore he was absorbed by it. Chamberlain's appeasement of the dictator was discredited. There was a need to modernise the country in order to fight the war—to do away with Blimpishness. This became a strong strand of opinion



RENDEZVOUS

within the ruling class.

And as the war ended the Beveridge report and Attlee's government provided just the sort of politics Low had wished for. Although Low reflected popular impatience with the speed of reform under Attlee his basic agreement with its course diminished him as a satirist. His post-war cartoons lack bite.

Low became increasingly cynical, unable to grapple with the soulless prosperity and 'sick of all this obsolete rot about "class war".'

So, is that all there is to Low? A humourous de-bunker of the establishment who stood in the mainstream of Labourism? I think there is a little more.

Compare Low with Steve Bell, probably the best-known contemporary cartoonist. Certainly Bell's 'If' cartoon in the *Guardian* ridicules Thatcher, Reagan and their cohorts. Bell is unmistakably on the left, probably further left than Low ever was. And yet Bell often makes his targets ridiculous not by virtue of their politics or policies but by caricaturing real or imagined personal features: Reagan's hair escapes, Fowler becomes Norman Foulpest.

Successful as this is in reducing Tory Britain to a fantastic lunatic asylum, it is not a method which often produces a crystal-clear, one-frame summary of a political situation. Time and again Low does this. Low's 'Rendezvous' gives you the essence of the double-dealing, hypocritical Hitler-Stalin Pact.

Low chooses as they happen the key aspects of events and their ramifications.

Low's formal political position was mediocre; his ability to capture the significant, and significance of, events was unparalleled. It is this which makes him special. It led him to make a distinction between cartooning, which is what he engaged in, and mere caricature:

'The aim of the caricaturist is to discover, analyse and select essentials of personality, and by exercise of wit to reduce them to appropriate forms' but a cartoon is

'an illustration of a political or social idea, served up sometimes in caricatural draughtsmanship; sometimes not.'

You can see the distinction by thinking back to the television satire *Spitting Images*. In sketches involving film stars or royalty, it was often the grossness of the puppets on which humour depended. In the political sketches it was different: when Denis Healey is pictured digging a grave with Roy Hattersley holding the grave-digger's lamp and they greet Scargill with a cheery 'At least we'll keep one pit open for you Arthur,' it is the duplicity and treachery of the Labour Party which provides the laugh. It summarises a whole political situation.

Blimp is funny for the same reason. He doesn't just say stupid things. He characterises, as much as he caricatures, a whole class of opinion—in fact a whole class of people. This is what lifts Low above being a mere reformist with a pen.

His ability to catch the essence of a dynamic political situation and to present it in a single frame, with humour, is a rare skill. ■
John Rees

The rising tide of soap

SOAP operas now totally dominate TV. In recent rating figures, five out of the top ten programmes are soaps including the top four. The form has spilled over into other types of programmes. Documentaries are no longer examples of investigative journalism, but fly-on-the-wall efforts where real life is edited to imitate art. Programmes such as *The Money Programme* have shifted from economic analysis to describing the inner workings of take-over battles in the style of *Dallas* or *Dynasty*—the fight of one mister big—a Murdoch or Conran—to corner the market.

In TV-land if the sixties was the decade of radical drama and the seventies was the decade of situation comedy, then in the eighties soap rules.

Of course it has always been part of the telly's offering. *Coronation Street* has—till this year—been number one in the ratings for over twenty years.

Soap stands in the tradition of the serialised novel of the nineteenth century best expressed by Dickens, the penny dreadfuls of the early twentieth century through to the radio serials of the forties and fifties.

Probably the over-riding appeal of soap in these days of uncertainty and defeats for the working class is their cosiness. The plots weave and change dramatically (for some anyway) yet they remain the same. They can question and touch on emotive and controversial subjects, but they always end in a restatement of the status quo.

All the soaps dealing with working class folk have the underlying theme of the goodness of family life. Essentially then they reassure, they may sometimes excite but always they return to the familiarity of the Rovers Return. They are the valium of the people.

But soap is not just brain-washing to dull the senses.

For soaps to retain and extend their appeal they have to deal in an indirect way with real life and its contradictions. In fact you could say that one of their main functions, is to take real problems and resolve them in a domestic, domesticated and safe setting.

Baldwin may be a bastard but he chats and drinks in the Rovers' afterwards. Dirty Den is a cad but he has helped rid the square of Nick Cotton. And both the Street and the Square go on endlessly—never changing.

Coronation Street has recently found itself outflanked by *East Enders*. It had become too unchanging and out of touch, ignoring too many of the problems of inner cities (mass unemployment, racism, poverty) where it is supposed to be based.

The smugness of *Coronation Street* has been shattered by the new rivals, *Brookside*

and *East Enders*, both giving a dash of gritty realism and taking on controversial subjects. Even *Crossroads* has had a major overhaul to give it more bite.

Brookside which was launched, with a great deal of noise, as the alternative soap, was set to challenge the old format. In fact the series is not unlike an old BBC soap of the sixties *The Newcomers*.

But the series has never lived up to its claim to deal with serious problems. More often, it avoids them.

Much better in challenging the old format is *East Enders*. An argument every ten minutes, a trauma every other episode. At times, the crises come so quick it can be a bit like reading the *News of the World*—all personal crises are here in one small square.

But it has blacks, Asians, one parent families and deals with problems almost honestly, avoiding the slowness of *Brookside* or the unreality of *Coronation Street*.

It has its limitations, though. It's all centred on family life once again and as usual there seems to be an incredibly high percentage of small businessmen—cafe owners, stall holders—no one seems to work at Ford's or in the mass office blocks of the city, which is unrealistic even for the East End.

The problems dealt with are all personal ones or ones of the community of the square. *Brookside* may be slow and laborious but at least it mentioned the miners' strike and things that happen outside of the close. The strength of the square is that it deals with sexual politics and the problems of family life. Its weakness is that this is all that it deals with.

Finally there are the up-market variety, particularly the American imports. These are really a different type of soap to the British programmes, a sub-species altogether. British soaps want the viewer to identify with the characters and owe a lot to drama. *Dallas*, *Dynasty* and their off-shoots have little to do with plays and an awful lot to do with the Hollywood system of stars. *Dynasty* is made like a film, awash with location shots and background music to tie the scenes together.

The crises of these characters are real life problems projected onto a dream world of upper class life—clothes are more important than acting skills, plots unimportant.

With *Coronation Street* you can miss a year's episodes and catch up in one week, it is so unchanging. With *Dynasty* you can tune in halfway through and pick it up, the plot is so unimportant and the stars' characters so well-known—taken from Mills and Boon romances with the added spice of sex and scandal.

But the need to have continuous secrets revealed means that the shows have run out of conventional problems and have to tackle controversial subjects (in an upper class never-never world setting of course), but still dealing with gayness, racism and the like.

But what of the future? If creaking capitalism continues with its mass of contradictions of interlocking oppression and daily alienation then soap will continue to hold a sway on the minds of workers. Life's problems will be trivialised, domesticated or glorified in the soaps. In a world where the

vast majority have no power or control then the need for escapism is not just a product of false consciousness but a real need. When workers begin to move and change society they will no longer feel the need to live their lives through the traumas of a Joan Collins or the love life of a dirty Den. ■
Noel Halifax

Director of the struggle

THE BBC recently provided a rare treat by showing the four Francesco Rosi films *Salvatore Giuliano*, *The Mattei Affair*, *Illustrious Corpses* and *Lucky Luciano*.

Rosi is one of many Italian directors who produced some fine political films in the post-war decades. He came from the Communist Party tradition and his films reflect the artistic and political developments of the Italian left during the last thirty years.

The four films were made between 1961 and 1975. It was an exciting period in Italian politics during which mass struggle threw up countless opportunities for social change. It was an environment in which artists thrived. The Italian Communist Party (PCI) exercised enormous influence on the political front and carried with it increasing numbers of artists.

In the early seventies, it moved towards the 'historic compromise' with the Christian Democrats. It drew into its orbit artists and intellectuals from an increasingly wide political spectrum. The effects of this and the shift rightwards towards liberalism were reflected by Rosi in his films.

The first film, made in 1961, tells the true story of a right-wing populist bandit, Salvatore Giuliano, and his band. They were used first by Sicilian nationalists and the Mafia in the nationalist struggle, and then against Communists and workers.

It was the film that established Rosi's distinctive method. Flashbacks, flashforwards and fragments reconstruct journalistically an episode of Italian history:

'This confusion in the film—of the facts, of the actions, of the different interpretations—is the same irritation that one feels in life when you realise the absolute impossibility of getting at the truth.'

The style is intended to provoke critical analysis in the audience. In many of his films the conclusion is left ambiguous.

This is creatively and successfully achieved by Rosi. The parameters, however, within which he provokes critical analysis are those set by the current PCI perspective and are therefore limited.

An example of this is in *Salvatore Giuliano*. One of the final scenes shows a demonstration of Communists and workers at Portella Della Ginestra in Sicily to celebrate May Day and the victory of the Peoples' Bloc which had just won the largest vote of any single party. Giuliano's band fire

on the gathering, killing ten and wounding thirty.

The size of the gathering reflected the high level of workers' and peasants' struggles at the time—1947. In cities such as Rome and Naples there were many strikes, in the south and in Sicily tens of thousands of agricultural labourers and peasants were involved in land occupations, fighting for the land they expected with 'liberation'.

In Sicily the landowners and the Mafia responded with Giuliano. The response to the killings around Italy was instantaneous. Tens of thousands of workers went on strike. The Italian Communist Party (PCI) as it had done throughout the land occupations, tried to dampen the activity.

Five days after the massacre it said: 'The occupation of the workers of the power stations was only avoided by the efforts of the three mass workers' parties'. Eight days later the PCI were forced out of government.

In *Salvatore Giuliano* the Communists' sole appearance presents them as a mass organisation bravely organising the workers and then cruelly attacked.

By the 1970s Rosi shifted to concentrating solely on the figures and organisations of power. In the *Mattei Affair* (1971) the story of Mattei, head of Italy's national oil company, is traced. Rosi attempts to show that:

'The same institutions Mattei created to bring about social reform, even if a populist one, changed completely into its opposite. It came to be a corporation, a state capitalism stronger than the state itself.'

Mattei is presented as an honest soul who is leading a nationalist struggle against the multinationals and America.

For people like Rosi brought up in the south of Italy, the Mafia is an emotional and political reality. He openly admits his obsession with the Mafia which, he believes, provides a model for understanding power relationships.

This is reflected in his *Lucky Luciano* (1973) which he saw as the background story for the *Mattei Affair*. American imperialism hands power over to the Mafia. Through an investigation into the Mafia gangster's repatriation after the war, it exposes the means by which:

'The Mafia went from Sicily to the US and came back from the US with another face, an industrial face. That's the importance of Lucky Luciano—it's the passage from the old Godfather to the modern conception of the Mafia, as a corporation.'

Illustrious Corpses, made in 1975, brilliantly reflects the political period in which it was made. It is a surrealistic thriller which exposes the violence of the state and the political choices facing the left.

Superb visual and special effects are used. It opens with the decaying mummies of powerful men of the past in the catacombs. It then moves overground to show the monumental institutional architecture dwarfing the people. When the camera moves away from the characters they seem to be swallowed up by the stone, by the institutions, by the state.

Judges are bumped off. It's an enjoyable

sight and there are some wonderful funeral orations, explaining the virtues of these corrupt old men of justice. The honest cop, charged with solving the murders, begins deciphering the political complexities of Italy. A judge explains to him the parallel between catholicism and the law. Each time a service or judgement is performed, the faith is re-established. A Christian Democrat leader explains why they are moving towards the 'historic compromise' (coalition between them and PCI). They have misgoverned on their own for long enough. It is time to misgovern with the Communists.

Finally the honest cop discovers a planned coup by the extreme right. He warns a friend, a Communist journalist, who then arranges a meeting with the secretary of the Communist Party. At the meeting both are shot.

The media announces that the inspector's mind was unbalanced so he'd killed the secretary and then himself. The journalist asks the deputy leader why the party hasn't exposed the lie. He is answered. 'We couldn't run the risk of provoking a revolution'. The final words of the film are, 'The truth isn't always revolutionary.'

The film was made at the time when the wave of industrial militancy of the late sixties and early seventies was beginning to fade. The new political climate brought two responses from the left. The PCI moved towards the historic compromise, and those to the left joined the Red Brigades the automists, or other small movements.

Rosi clearly understands the problems of power-sharing and seeking by the communists, yet is either unable or unwilling to break from their orbit.

The experience of the Red Brigades combined with the shift to the right of the PCI and decline of workers' struggles had its impact on Rosi.

In a recent interview he stressed that it was crucial to keep alive the possibility of intervention by the left in existing structures, to reform and improve them democratically:

'It is important that the European Communist Parties have chosen a democratic path to power. We must keep them functioning democratically. It is all too easy to embrace the Communist Party in hope, in emotion. Overnight revolution—the old romantic, marvellous revolution—is finished.'

In the sixties and early seventies, when much of the European left looked towards Italy for the marvellous revolution to begin, artists like Rosi could flourish, experiment, innovate with the confidence and creativity that struggle brings. Out of that period came some truly fine films which came from and were connected with struggle, and made an important contribution both to politics and art.

At the time of making *Illustrious Corpses*, Rosi said:

'The cinema offers this great advantage and privilege—it allows one to liberate oneself from all one's anguishes and to tell stories at the same time. But it carries with it an immense responsibility. In liberating yourself, one must help others to liberate themselves. And we can't do that and bore them at the same time.' ■

Nic Cicutti and Clare Fermont

Road to workers' power

The Western Soviets: Workers' Councils versus Parliament 1915-1920
Donny Gluckstein
Bookmarks £5.95 (Bookmarx Club offer £4.90)

THE IDEA of the self-emancipation of the working class is the most important single Marxist concept. What makes it more than an idea is above all the experience of the Russian revolution of 1917. Workers, organised in *soviets*—councils of factory delegates—took power for themselves in the first and only successful socialist revolution.

In the years that followed, the notion of soviet power underlay the main dividing line within the international working class movement. The supporters of the Communist International argued that workers in the western capitalist countries should follow the Russian example, smashing the existing state apparatus and replacing it with one based on their own democratic self-organisation. The champions of social democracy argued that change could only come through parliament.

This division is still with us. It is involved, for example, in the arguments over whether Labour councils should defy Tory rate-capping legislation, and in the debate over the use of strike ballots. The proponents of Kinnockism argue that socialists should accept, and operate within, existing bourgeois democracy, resting as it does on a passive and atomised electorate which allows capital to continue ruling. The only principled basis of opposition to this trend lies in the notion of socialist democracy centred on mass activity and participation in the workplaces.

The clarity of this division between capitalist and proletarian democracy is obscured for many on the left. In part this is a consequence of Stalinism, whose terrible betrayal of October 1917 has provided the defenders of parliamentary institutions with their most powerful argument. But it also springs from the confusions of many socialists. They believe that it is somehow possible to *combine* parliamentary democracy and mass activity.

This error is often justified by claiming that the Russian revolution was something unique, the product of the historically unique conditions of a backward peasant society ruled by the Tsarist autocracy.

Donny Gluckstein's meticulous comparative history of workers' struggles in Britain, Germany and Italy in the epoch of the First World War and the Russian revolution gives the lie to this claim. It does so by demonstrating the truth of two crucial propositions.

First, these struggles gave rise to a 'council process'. They tended to break out of the narrow confines of trade unionism, and to become generalised political battles raising the question of state power. This process was

bound up with the development of new forms of rank and file workplace organisation—in Britain the shop stewards' movement, in Germany the revolutionary *Obleute*, in Italy the *commissioni interni*.

All found themselves in conflict with the state, while in Germany in November 1918 the struggle culminated in the overthrow of the monarchy and the formation of workers' and soldiers' councils. The tendency towards soviet power was thus not confined to backward Russia. It could be found in the most advanced capitalist countries.

Secondly, Donny shows that this tendency reflected the presence of a common pattern of capital accumulation. The great 'revolutionary capitals'—Petrograd, Berlin, Turin, Glasgow—had much in common. All had experienced massive growth in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This process of urbanisation, which transformed Europe, was inseparable from the spread of industrial capitalism.

Far from the October 1917 revolution being unique, it arose from processes general to capitalism.

This phase of capitalist development was bound up with the expansion of certain sectors, especially metal working industry (what in Britain is still called engineering). Along with metal working's growth came its transformation, under the pressure of internal competition— attempts at 'de-skilling' by capital in order to break the hold over the production process exercised by the traditional elite of craftsmen, the 'labour aristocracy'.

These processes, well under way before 1914, were greatly accelerated by the outbreak of war. Sweeping state controls were introduced to maximise production. Work was intensified, and the labour force 'diluted' by a huge influx of unskilled and low-paid women and peasants. These changes, the shortages created by war and economic blockade, the slaughter in the trenches, the chaos on the home front, the agitation of socialist militants—all combined to produce a series of social and political explosions of which October 1917 in Russia was only the greatest.

Donny analyses these struggles carefully. He isolates the similarities between them—for example, the enormously important role played by metalworkers:

'Factories such as the 36,000-strong Putilov works in Petrograd, the DWM in Berlin with 10,000 and Fiat Centro with 15,000 were the birthplaces of the workers' councils.'

Thus, far from the October 1917 revolution being unique, it arose from

processes general to capitalism, clearly present in the advanced European economies.

However, Donny is equally sensitive to the differences between the struggles in the west and the Russian Revolution. Most obviously, the soviets took power in Petrograd, but not in Berlin or Turin, let alone in Glasgow. Two factors are central to understanding why this was so.

First, the conditions of advanced capitalism allowed the development of legal workers' movements, and, within them, of a specific social layer, the trade union bureaucracy. This bureaucracy's material basis was provided by the relative prosperity of imperialist powers such as Britain and Germany which made reforms possible.

The result was the development of mass reformist parties, such as German Social Democracy, which secured the loyalty of the majority of workers even in revolutionary situations such as November 1918, and which used this influence to restore stable capitalist rule.

The conditions of absolutist Russia did not favour the emergence of an entrenched labour bureaucracy. In this respect the Bolsheviks enjoyed a major advantage over their western counterparts. Nevertheless, in February 1917 the mass of workers supported the reformist left—the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries. Only possession of a revolutionary organisation with a strong political tradition and deep workplace roots built over many years allowed the Bolsheviks eventually to win a majority in the soviets.

Here lies the decisive difference with the west. Nothing comparable to the Bolshevik party existed elsewhere in Europe. Donny shows that small groups of militant workers, usually influenced by revolutionary ideas, played a vanguard role in Britain, Germany and Italy during the period 1915-20. Often their leadership of small-scale industrial struggles helped to create the sort of workplace organisation which could, under certain conditions, flower into soviets. But none grasped the need for a revolutionary *political* organisation which systematically linked up the daily economic battle between capital and labour with the struggle for state power. In the absence of such organisations, social democracy was able to save European capitalism at the end of the First World War from the greatest challenge it has ever faced.

The moral is plain enough. In the right conditions soviets will begin to emerge from workers' struggles. There have been many examples since the period Donny analyses—Spain 1936-7, Hungary 1956, France 1968, Portugal 1974-5, Iran 1978-9, Poland 1980-1. But whether capital or labour triumphs in the ensuing situation of dual power depends on the existence of a revolutionary party capable of giving direction to workers' struggles. The basis of such a party can and must be built in non-revolutionary periods such as the present.

Those who read Donny Gluckstein's excellent book will find the analysis carefully developed and fleshed out in inspiring detail drawn from the experience of some of the greatest of all working class struggles. ■

Alex Callinicos

War and peace

British Labour, European Socialism and the Struggle for Peace 1889-1914
Douglas J Newton
OUP

DOUGLAS NEWTON is no radical. His judgements and assessments are of the right. His book is a slanted and edited account of British socialism and especially the European scene.

He claims that the after-effect of the failed peace campaigns in pre-1914 Britain was the creation of an internationalist perspective inside the Labour Party. Evidence cited for this is Labour's support for the League of Nations in the 1920s and CND today. Newton ignores the strikes by engineers in Glasgow, Sheffield and Birmingham towards the end of the war. This is quite an oversight for a historian of the period.

Nevertheless, the book does have its uses. It shows how from its beginning the Labour Party was never socialist.

Indeed, the book unwittingly shows the impossibility of transforming Labour into a fighting socialist party capable of leading action against war, or any fundamental challenge to capitalism.

It also shows the sordid history of British socialists towards imperialism.

The party split on voting for a larger navy with Labour MPs speaking in defence of 'our empire'. The left was powerless to get a

united anti-imperialist voice.

An interesting side-line to the book is that it shows up many of the early heroes of the movement. Keir Hardie is one such example. He campaigned from 1912 to 1914 for a general strike against war, but the campaign was always seen as a propaganda exercise a thousand miles away from organising action.

Hardie was one of the key left wingers to argue against forming a socialist party in the early years of this century so as not to alienate the right, and to shape the structure of the Labour Party so that party policy had no binding effect on MPs of the right.

To those with illusions about the history of British labourism the book could be an eye opener. But packaged and edited as it is, the over-riding theme is that the peace campaigns were doomed to failure. The message is that the labour movement always has been and always will be moderate if it seeks 'practical' solutions.

The First World War shattered the socialist movement. It is typical of the book that two of the key people who fought for socialism in the period that the book covers, and who shaped subsequent history, are only mentioned in one line remarks—Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg.

Overall a pretty awful book, but full of useful facts for arguing against those with illusions in the Labour Party. ■
Noel Halifax

That said, he falls into line with other writers in failing to indicate the practical implications of his position. Or perhaps he doesn't want to embarrass his British supporters.

Few of the writers see their theories as a guide to action. Where they recognise the need for action, they are unwilling to discuss its implementation. Andre Gunder Frank is a case in point. His paper, 'The Political Challenges to Socialism and Social Movements', is among the best written and the closest to the mark in terms of its political conclusions and is refreshingly honest in his examination of the nature and direction of post-colonial regimes in the Third World. He puts his finger on the problem in the west:

'The real problem is that socialists and communists have no programme today other than to make a crisis-ridden capitalism work better. The real challenge facing us is to offer a plausible and effective alternative...'

Then he stops, saying as his parting shot that socialists have to be

realistic and begging a whole lot of questions.

All this said, several of the chapters are interesting. There are pieces on China's experience and lessons and perspectives for socialism in Latin America.

Pietro Ingrao argues for a 'new internationalism'—an emergent theme of the Eurocommunists and their soft left allies.

It centres on the none-too-new ideas of a new economic relationship between the developed and under-developed world. It also smacks fairly heavily of the none-too-socialist strategy of alliances with those whose class interests are irreconcilably different from those of the workers. But would a new internationalism be so necessary or so innovative had some on the left not abandoned the internationalism that has always been essential to the communist tradition?

In short, a disappointing book, but one likely to appear on a good few college reading lists because of its diversity. A bit of a struggle to read, and very expensive at £16.50. ■

Andy Brown

Prison notebooks

This Place
Andrea Freud Lowenstein
Pandora £3.95

IN THIS novel Lowenstein creates four characters who either work in a women's prison, or who are inmates there. The action spans a period of four eventful months in these women's lives, and concentrates on themes such as sexuality, race and the stultifying effects of imprisonment.

It could easily have been a tedious or moralistic novel. It is an indication of the strength of the author that it is not. Lowenstein manages to portray the characters vividly and in the process effortlessly carries across a message of anger at the prison system. Her own

experience teaching in a women's prison for three years obviously played a large role in this.

The reader is left at the end of the novel pondering the future of the three women. For example, whether Candy, imprisoned for prostitution and drugs dealing, will be able to survive in the hostile environment outside the prison gates. Lowenstein manages to show how the prison system is self-perpetuating, but again without lecturing on it.

All in all, this is a novel it is possible to get completely immersed in. The characters are realistic, the plot is plausible and the issues raised provoking. ■
Lesley Hoggart

Future shock

Socialism on the Threshold of the 21st Century
ed Milos Nikolic
Verso £16.50

FOR SOME years, Yugoslavia has hosted an annual forum at Cavtat to discuss various issues in socialist thought. For their tenth anniversary they chose the theme 'Socialism on the threshold of the 21st century—which way forward for socialists?'

Contributions to this collection of papers are very varied, both in their political analysis and their presentation. The contributors' list is impressive if you know anything about political theorists, and vaguely awe-inspiring if you don't.

There are some interesting issues covered: the world crisis, the nature of the USSR and its allies, the centrality of the working class, national liberation movements in the Third World and much more get a look in.

The nature of the USSR and other countries that call themselves socialist comes up again and again as writers discuss the aims of the

workers' movement and the situation in which it is operating at present.

A surprisingly large proportion are highly critical of the Soviet Union. Rather less take a serious look at why the USSR is as it is, what its class nature is, or for whose benefit its economy is run. Samir Amin does, and talks about a new exploiter class there. He looks at the economic crisis in the eastern bloc in some detail. What he doesn't go on to discuss, and indeed what no one in the book talks about, is the need for a workers' movement, east and west, organised to overthrow the ruling class.

Although this is meant to be a collection of Marxist thought, workers—the gravediggers of capitalism—are excluded from the arena. A partial exception is the piece by Ernest Mandel of the Fourth International, who talks of socialism as the result of workers' action. Mandel affirms that socialism is still both desirable and possible, and that the working class is not dead.

Bankrupt ideas

The Tyranny of the Status Quo
Milton and Rose Friedman
Pelican £2.95

THE Friedmans' prescription for a cure to the crisis of western capitalism has apparently never been followed by any of their former admirers in government.

The Tories are now emphasising their record on public spending and the Reagan mini-boom of 1981-83 was led by the American budget deficits accounted for by arms expenditure.

Take away the veneer of monetarist economics and we have

simplistic arguments to justify the ruling class's attacks on wages and living conditions—which is what the book contains in simple English. It now seems remarkable to remember how five years back, the media and academic pundits were presenting monetarism as a set of economic policies which would cure all the world's ills.

The bankruptcy of capitalism (Johnson Matthey, Pan-Electrics in Singapore etc) is reflected in the bankruptcy of their ideas. Do not buy the book. ■
Lawrence Wong

Poor showing

The Star-Spangled Screen: The American World War II Film
B F Dick
Harper and Row £21.50

ONE OF the major characteristics of the imperialist rivalries which culminated in the two world wars of this century was, and still is, that each imperialist power needs to mobilise both the physical and intellectual energies of their whole population. Earlier wars could be fought out by professional soldiers, or even by conscript armies, and their focus was very much on the battlefield.

The wars of modern imperialism changed all that: not only did bombings from the air mean that civilians came increasingly under fire, but the impact of industrial capitalism on war production meant that the war worker, and indeed all workers, became central to victory and defeat.

In this mobilisation of the entire population the mass media played a central role. For the second world war, that meant newspapers, radio and the cinema. Going to the movies was then a mass activity and cinema audiences reached their all-time highs, both in Britain and the USA, in the 1940s.

The question of how the cinema adapted to the changed conditions of war is a subject of considerable interest and fascination. In Britain, for example, the government took the movies very seriously indeed. Churchill tried, and failed, to get *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* banned. The Ministry of Information produced *The Way Ahead*, in which David Niven played a garage mechanic who became the officer of a unit.

The contradictions of the second world war, with the rulers of the largest empire on earth waging a war in the name of freedom and democracy, encouraging women to become welders and promising

workers a better future once the Nazis were beaten, makes a fascinating and important subject.

The US experience is less well documented and I grabbed this book with real enthusiasm. Unfortunately it is the sort of film book that I enjoy reading and then end up asking myself why I bothered. It is a collection of titles, plot summaries, fascinating little anecdotes about production, and very little else. In place of ideas the author makes a few literary references, often obscurely and sometimes mistakenly. The sad truth is that the author does not seem to know what he is doing.

When an interesting point does surface, Dick does not seem to be capable of arguing it through. Thus he has a chapter on war films written by members of the Hollywood CP branch, in particular the famous 'Hollywood Ten'. He claims that their films were distinctively different. This is a big claim, particularly since the congressional committee that carried out the witch hunt was never able to prove that CP members influenced film content, which is why they resorted to *membership* of the CP as grounds for the witch hunt. The same view has been held by other investigators.

Dick actually cites, approvingly, a famous study that showed that the films written by CP members followed exactly the twists and turns of US government foreign policy rather than any supposed Moscow plot. Even *Mission to Moscow*, with its approving portrait of the Moscow trials, fitted nicely with the interests of the US government in the war years. Dick, sadly, is not good enough to show why everybody else was wrong.

This book is a missed opportunity to shed light on a fascinating subject. ■

Colin Sparks

Faded memories

Truth, Dare or Promise—Girls Growing up in the Fifties
Ed Liz Heron
Virago £4.95

THIS collection of reminiscences range from the daughter of a Jewish doctor, to a black girl brought up in West London who encountered a mixture of sexism and racism from the time she was born.

There are memories of post-war innovations like the New Look in fashion, diesel trains changing the atmosphere so that women could hang out their washing without getting black speckles on it, ration

books—you would have to have lived then to appreciate what they really meant—and the National Health Service starting, when it was free and provided everyone with the possibility of better health.

A major revolution in daily life was caused by other things—the advent of washing up liquid, plastic bags, ball point pens, jeans, nylon and above all, the most important of all, tissues (toilet and handkerchief). Everything was becoming disposable. Some of this doesn't seem to be understood by the authors.

The collection combines an intro-

verted combing back through the years to try and understand what made these women feel the way they did, with a sort of hideous optimism and voluntarism which can only lead to despair.

There are some gripping and touching episodes. One such is when Sheila Rowbotham's childhood friend from downtown Leeds comes to see Sheila in her new upwardly mobile area of the town and is turned away by her father, without Sheila knowing she has been to see her. There's Carolyn Steedman's moralising mother, whose martyred act dominated her children's lives to such an extent that Carolyn says she still puts herself to sleep thinking about *not* lying on a cold pavement covered with newspapers like other poor benighted children whose mothers were feckless and didn't care.

I would have liked to read a detailed account of Gail Lewis's childhood, with her white mother and black father and the conflicts within the family and outside. When she moved in with her nan, her mother's brother made such a fuss that she had to leave again. After all, what would his girlfriends say if they realised he had a black niece living in the house? And the whole different culture she was also part of, with chocolate tea, cane and bun—why couldn't we just have her story and the possibility of learning something from it?

There is very little hope for future organisation in the book. It is no

good saying, as some contributors do, that we are the women of the future and the post-war years meant that feminists and educated thinking people will change the world for the better. All the signs are that this is not enough. As Sheila Rowbotham herself says, rather wanly:

'The clarity of vision in those early years of women's liberation has gone. It seemed possible then to order the past through the focus of feminism. It is less one-dimensional for me now. Feminism is a given—but I want more than the political outline. I want a culture which you can tug and shape with complexity.'

It makes her want to catch memories. Well, it would, after all the hopes that seem to have come to nothing.

The mothers and grandmothers and fathers and grandfathers of the women who wrote this book hold out promise. If they are ever written about in depth with some purpose other than pure reminiscence, it will be well worthwhile.

Don't be put off reading the book altogether. If you were born and brought up during that time, late forties and early fifties, there are moments and scenes that will make you think, yes, I remember those things. As the editor says, 'The past too has to be claimed.' If you must claim the past, claim it in your local library. ■

Mary Philips

Donny Gluckstein

THE WESTERN SOVIETS

WORKERS' COUNCILS

VERSUS

PARLIAMENT

1915-1920

Parliamentary channels have proved incapable of defending workers against mass unemployment and falling living standards—but what is the alternative? East European-style dictatorship certainly has nothing to offer. But history provides another way. In the years 1915-20 workers all over Europe set up their own alternative, their own mass democracy. In Germany, Britain, Italy and Russia worker's councils—or *soviets*, to use their Russian name—challenged the existing order. This book brings together a wealth of information which is more relevant today than ever.

SPECIAL PRE-XMAS OFFER:
£5.00 from SWP branch bookstalls
or by post from
BOOKMARKS,
265 Seven Sisters Road,
London N4 2DE.
(Usual price £5.95)

Stalin's legacy

MONTY Johnstone repeats an argument he has made a number of times elsewhere in his contribution to the debate (December *SWR*) on Trotsky's relevance. He accepts that Trotsky was basically correct in opposing the ultra-sectarian line of the Third Period by which Stalin lumped the socialist parties in with Hitler's Nazis. He goes on to accept Trotsky's argument that this divided the working class and paved the way for Hitler taking power. Elsewhere he has pointed to the damage done to the Communist Parties by their acceptance of the Third Period.

But Johnstone then expresses regret that Trotsky could not advance from this to grasp the Popular Front line which followed—the broadest possible unity against fascism.

Trotsky's position towards events in Germany in 1933 and his criticism of the ruling French and Spanish Popular Fronts in 1936 rest on the same basis.

In Germany he argued that the sectarian refusal of the Communist Party to enter united action with the reformists against the Nazis blocked the mobilisation of the working class.

In France and Spain three years later he argued the Popular Front's insistence that socialism was off the agenda, that strikes, demonstrations and workers' demands had to be limited in order not to upset the broad class alliance by scaring off sections of the middle and ruling class, similarly blocked the independent mobilisation of the working class.

The idea that Trotsky opposed alliances between the working class and sections of other classes is nonsense. Trotsky pointed again and again to the experience of the Russian revolution where the working class led an alliance of peasants and oppressed nationalities. But again and again he insisted that the working class had to preserve its independence, its own organisation and demands.

Further in France during the Popular Front's rise he pointed out that 'unity' with sections of the middle class who opposed fascism could not be achieved by snuggling up to the leaders of the discredited bourgeois parties they'd traditionally looked to.

Instead Trotsky argued that sections of the middle class and the peasantry could only be won to unity with the working class through turning full fire on the ruling class and the political parties who defended its interests.

His other objection to the Popular Front was that it was limited to simple electoral agreements between leaders of assorted parties. It was not based

on mobilising workers or anyone else on the streets or in the factories.

Monty Johnstone claims: 'the simple fact is that you would have had a right wing government in France or Spain in 1936 had there not been a Popular Front ...'

The simple truth is that in France the working class had regained its confidence. By the summer of 1935 labour unrest was on the rise. Even before the immense general strike in the summer of 1936 those sections of the French ruling class who had championed the fascist bands had dropped the idea of a fascist takeover faced with a newly combative working class.

In Spain from the beginning the Popular Front had tried to hold back the working class uprising of 1936 which blocked Franco seizing most industrial centres. That government first suppressed news of the coup and then attempted to destroy the independent organisations of the working class.

Far from blocking right wing governments the same French chamber of deputies—elected in 1936 with a majority belonging to the Popular Front—voted approval of Petain's surrender to Hitler in 1940. In Spain the suppression of workers' power in Barcelona ensured Catalonia's fall and the demoralisation of the workers who had led the opposition to Franco.

One final point must be made. On a number of occasions Monty has claimed that the Popular Front was the child not of Stalin but the Bulgarian Dimitrov and the French CP leader Thorez. In order to ensure that Eurocommunism is freed of its Stalinist legacy, these two are pictured as independent Marxist thinkers ready to oppose Stalin's sectarian Third Period.

Throughout their careers both Thorez and Dimitrov jumped through any hoop at Stalin's command. The Popular Front was the product of Stalin's search for an alliance with Britain and France against Germany—not some victory for 1930s Eurocommunism. ■

Chris Bambery
North London

Off centre

GARETH Jenkins spoils his otherwise useful article on centrism (December *SWR*) by concluding that:

'However, it would be foolish to see Militant as a fully blown centrist organisation. A better assessment of Militant would be to say that they are a group of revolutionaries who are submitting to centrist pressures that are making them lose their way.'

I believe that Gareth is being too generous to Militant here. It would be more accurate to say that while they might have been revolutionaries at one time, Militant are now *centrists* who are submitting to *reformist* pressures.

Of course, Militant are different from the other centrist organisation that Gareth refers to in his article, such as the post-World War One German USPD. But Gareth himself quotes Trotsky as saying that there are many different types of centrism. And most of the differences between Militant and these other groups arise from the fact that most other centrist groups arrived at their centrist positions by moving from straightforward reformism, whereas Militant have arrived at centrism from a revolutionary direction.

Militant supporters sometimes use revolutionary language, and some of them (though not all) see themselves as revolutionaries. But we judge people by their actions, not by what they say about themselves. It is a characteristic of centrism to use Marxist language while behaving in a reformist manner. And while Militant supporters use revolutionary language when talking to SWP members, for example, in other circumstances they don't. (Witness Derek Hatton on television, refusing to say whether or not he favours the abolition of the monarchy!)

Militant believe that socialism can be achieved through the Labour Party and through parliament, backed up by the working class being used to apply pressure as a stage army.

Revolutionaries on the other hand argue *against* the parliamentary road and *for* the need for an independent revolutionary party, workers' councils and the destruction of the capitalist state.

Centrists waver between reform and revolution and collapse into reformism unless there is an independent revolutionary pole of attraction strong enough to win them over.

Perhaps Gareth was tempted into implying that Militant are just misguided revolutionaries by the fact that we in the SWP have recently been calling on Militant and its supporters to leave the Labour Party, and join us in building a sizeable revolutionary alternative to Kinnockism outside the Labour Party.

But the fact that we define Militant as centrists doesn't mean that we adopt a sectarian attitude towards them.

We are quite right to appeal to Militant supporters to join with us outside the Labour Party, and the current onslaught against them by the right in the Labour Party makes our arguments all the more convincing.

But we should understand that if

Militant supporters do respond to our appeals to leave the Labour Party and build a revolutionary alternative, then they will be breaking with their present centrist politics. ■

Phil Webster
Blackburn

Are left to blame?

RECENTLY within the letters page of *Socialist Worker* there has been a debate as to whether socialists can offer support to the strike of the Poundswick teachers. There have been warnings of syndicalist tendencies within the SWP, and of the problems of reactionary strikes. There are real problems for the left with this strike, but I am not entirely convinced they are not largely of our own making. Can we be surprised the left lose the ear of the strikers if we refuse to countenance any of their demands to resolve what they perceive to be legitimate grievances?

The key question for socialists must be, was the teachers' original demand that the five boys involved in the graffiti incident should be expelled an unacceptably reactionary demand? I don't think it was.

With hindsight we should agree that we played into the hands of the right by refusing to take the side of the teachers. Perhaps our members in or around the school, knowing the circumstances better than myself, feel the boys' expulsion was too harsh a punishment. But it was clear from an early stage the graffiti incident was, as far as the teachers were concerned, the straw that broke the camel's back. They felt they needed a safeguard against disruptive pupils, and surely we cannot deny their right to organise against the employers to force them to remove pupils they feel they cannot teach.

If we consider the consequences of our failure to support the teachers' demand we may agree we made a mistake. Apart from the fact that a defeat for the teachers will make it more difficult for all teachers to organise in the future against racist teachers or pupils, or even over wages, was the demand that the pupils be expelled so unacceptable? No one is suggesting the pupils don't have a right to education or that socialists need not defend this right. But the local authority has a statutory duty to provide alternative educational facilities should they be unable to break the Poundswick teachers' resistance to having to teach these particular boys. Within the context of supporting the teachers' original demands, we could have raised among the teachers the issue of the boys' rights.

In such circumstances the left could not have been isolated by the right with their calls for a return of corporal punishment.

If it was unacceptably reactionary for us to support the teachers' right to protection from the pupils without their acceptance of the pupils' right to alternative education from the local authority (which they would have received anyway), then why is it not equally reactionary to support wage increases without demands that the extra costs of the wages' bill is not passed onto the working class consumer?

The teachers' grievances are a material force which, unless we are more understanding of the pressures the teachers are under, will be used by the right for their own ends.

There may be strikes whose central demands are so reactionary that it is next to impossible for socialists to offer any support, but the Poundswick strike was surely not one of them. If the pupils were being organised against because they were revolutionary socialists, black, Catholic, gay etc, we could not support the teachers in the way I propose. But given the particular circumstances of this strike, support for the teachers' original demands was surely not some capitulation to apolitical syndicalism.

Is the dominance of the right in this strike not the most sobering possible warning of the dangers of abstract propagandism? If the right have managed to shift the demands of this strike from the right of teachers to collectively organise against the employers to the return of corporal punishment, we have no one to blame but ourselves. ■

Tom Delargy
Paisley

Still the workers'?

IN THE November *SWR* Derek Howl usefully shows revolutionary Marxists reject the 'socialist states' as genuine 'workers' states'. State ownership of the means of production is not a sufficient criterion.

However, Howl forgets that revolutionary Marxists who disagree with 'state capitalism' still do not believe Russia, etc, are socialist. He missed out the decisive term used:

'bureaucratically degenerated workers' state'.

If one agrees with 'state-capitalism' perhaps it implies the defeat of international socialism in the inter-war period was total, rather than partial. Mandel, for example, argues that Russia can't escape the world system, but its internal economic organisation is influenced by, not determined by,

the law of value. So being unable to escape the world system doesn't automatically mean 'state capitalism'. There seems a certain fatalism in the logic of Howl's article in that regard.

Despite differences in the international Marxist movement, it seems Trotsky in *The Revolution Betrayed* was correct to say both arguments over Russia enable united work: return socialist democracy to the soviets, get rid of the bureaucracy (it can't be reformed away), a 'return' to socialist norms of production and distribution, and internationalism. Both Mandel and Howl would presumably agree with that. Perhaps only practice can resolve the theoretical dilemma, as *Solidarnosc* began to.

But the common ground is broader than Howl allows. Let us work towards a united international socialist movement, rejecting the Stalinist idea that Russia is socialist, and also rejecting sectarianism which prevents identification of common ground and unity of purpose. ■

Chris Maddox
St Albans

Santa shouts back

AS MARX said, 'There ain't no Santa Claus.' But as it was Chico and not Karl, I beg to differ. I like Xmas: the decorations, buying presents, sending cards; even the carols and the Sally Army band that nicks our *SW* spot on the high street.

Xmas is the one time of year when we are encouraged to act in a spirit of fellowship and generosity by the same media hype that spends the rest of the year telling us we are stuck with this rotten grab-all system because fellowship and generosity go against human nature.

OK, the system still operates at Xmas and sours it for us in the way Rick Hay describes (December *SWR*). But we manage to stay cheerful fighting the damn system 51 weeks of the year. Why be so miserable about the one week we get off? We know about the hypocrisy and the commercial crap. But Xmas gives us a glimpse, a broken promise of what, deep down, everyone knows to be a better way to order our lives.

Why do we make a special effort with the Xmas *Socialist Worker* on the streets? If it is just the extra crowds why not send a team of sellers to Majorca in August? We try to connect our politics to people's sentiments about Xmas. Last year's headline was not 'Xmas Humbug!' but 'A turkey on every table, A toy for every child'. The miners' strike made it a real class

struggle Xmas and all the more enjoyable for that.

My fondest memory of last Xmas was walking to the Labour Club in my Santa outfit after a morning collecting for the miners. So many kids came up to me it was

ages before I could slip away to change and get back to the bar. I enjoyed that and I look forward to enjoying Xmas after the revolution. ■

Mike Stanton
Barrow-in-Furness

Chauvinist...

REGARDING Ian Birchall's article on France (October *SWR*), is he a scientific socialist, a social scientist, or what?

He claims there is a lot of anti-British feeling in France, but quotes no source to prove his point. We are also not told whether this 'anti-British' feeling is endemic to any particular class or not.

Furthermore he claims that the

French are unable to distinguish between Canadians, British and New Zealanders.

To fill space you have a nauseous cartoon depicting the archetypal Frenchman. I suggest that Birchall is neither scientific socialist, social scientist but chauvinist. ■

Martin Driscoll
South Ruislip



...or internationalist?

THE article on the *Internationale* (December *SWR*) prompted me to write about something that has annoyed me for many years. Whenever I hear the song I am struck by the awfulness of the English words. The French is poetic and forceful, but 'Arise ye starvelings from your slumbers, Arise ye criminals of want' is embarrassing, inaccurate and incomprehensible.

There is a much better American translation by Charles H Kerr, the American translator of *Capital*. It still leaves much room for improvement. The full text is published in the *IWW* (Wobblies) song book. This is the first verse:

'Arise ye prisoners of starvation,
Arise ye wretched of the earth,
For justice thunders condemnation,
A better world's in birth.

No more tradition's chains shall bind us,
Arise ye slaves no more in thrall,
The earth shall rise on new foundations,
We have been naught we shall be all.

Refrain

'Tis the final conflict
Let each stand in his place
The Internationale shall be the human race.

It is high time that the *SWP* took this matter in hand, by commissioning a decent modern translation of the words of the *Internationale*. Perhaps we could run a competition. Having done so, we might find popularising the new words a joint activity with Militant, that even the most sectarian of their leaders would endorse wholeheartedly. ■

Chris Stephenson
North London

Legion lynch mob

TO MOST people, the name of Peekskill means nothing, unless they have come across a book by the American author Howard Fast, called *Peekskill USA*. Fast was a leading figure in what became known as the Peekskill affair—a major outbreak of police and fascist violence during a week in 1949.

It all started innocently enough with a group of singers around Paul Robeson and Pete Seeger called the 'People's singers'. As the name implies these singers were mainly left leaning folk singers. Generally their audiences were made up of trade unionists and 'progressives'.

Paul Robeson was scheduled to appear at the Peekskill picnic site in New York State with other artists on Saturday evening, 27 August 1949. The reaction of the local establishment to the visit showed dangerous warning signs of the coming McCarthyite reign. The local *Peekskill Evening Star* stated that Paul Robeson's visit was a doubtful honour to 'most folks who put America first' and that 'The time for tolerant silence that signifies approval is running out.'

The American Legion—who today provide a loyal following for President Reagan—organised a protest march to intimidate those who wished to attend the concert.

Fast, as compere of the concert, took the precaution of arriving early to check that everything was OK. His was the last vehicle to get into the park as hundreds of Legion thugs blocked off the entrance leaving 200 early comers stuck in the grounds. There were less than 50 adult men amongst the concert goers. Most of the remainder were children. Quite obviously the Legion mob were using physical force to end any possibility of the concert going ahead. Cars and buses heading to the concert were stopped and smashed up.

Fortunately, the picnic ground was only accessible from one narrow lane, which lessened the massive numerical advantage of the Legionnaires. Although the crowd outnumbered them by twenty to one, 50 men were able to hold the road.

The police avoided the area most of the night. Stones, knuckledusters, broken bottles and knives were used to try and smash through the concert-goers' defensive line. The injuries Fast describes are horrific: fractured skulls, and everybody covered in blood. He obviously believed that the aim of the mob was a mass lynching.

The politics of the Legionnaires was obvious from the slogans they were shouting: 'We're Hitler's Boys, Hitler's Boys', 'Lynch Robeson', 'We'll kill every commie bastard in America!' and from the burning cross that was lit during the night.

The defensive line held, against several murderous attacks, though it was forced back through sheer weight of numbers. The defenders drew their strength and courage from the belief that help must be on its way. Early on one of the besieged had slipped out

to ring the police, state troopers and the papers. He returned several hours later to report that the various agencies had known for some time what was going on, and didn't appear to be doing anything about it.

At this the hearts of the defenders dropped. As Fast put it they realised 'that the police and troopers had been in easy reach, but had been deliberately withheld so that the tragedy might run its course, and only when it became fully evident that the carefully planned mass lynching would be frustrated did they decide to enter the picture.'

The police when they did arrive proved their 'impartial' nature by letting the lynch mob go and holding the besieged concert-goers on suspicion of stabbing William Secor (who was actually stabbed by one of his fellow 'patriotic' demonstrators). Eventually they were released, but only when it was found that Secor was only slightly hurt.

In the week after this horrible episode Fast, Robeson and others were involved in a campaign which culminated in another concert in Peekskill the following Sunday.

The campaign went under the name of the Westchester Committee for Law and Order, a very 'respectable' campaign which reflected the weak politics of the American Communist Party. Even so the issue was raised in the trade unions and through the Civil Rights Congress in black areas such as Harlem in New York. This and the huge publicity surrounding the affair resulted in a meeting of 5,000 in the Golden Gate Ballroom, Harlem on the Tuesday night, and widespread union involvement. For example, Leon Straus, of the International Fur and Leather Workers Union was able to coordinate a large scale union based security cordon for the Sunday concert.

A counter demo was again called by the American Legion and a sniper threatened to kill Robeson if he appeared. The response

was magnificent. Over 10,000 attended the concert and the entire ground was surrounded by a union cordon.

The counter demo—despite enthusiastic support for it in the media—was down at about a tenth of the concert size. The difference this time lay in the role of the police. On the previous Saturday they had passively supported the smashing of the concert by not intervening. This time they played a more active role. They tried to force the cordon in a further hundred yards, which would have made the concert-goers a more vulnerable target. This was refused. But the police really showed their true colours on the approach roads after the concert had started.

There were still plenty of right wing demonstrators, full of hate and looking for anyone they could attack. The police cooperated with them.

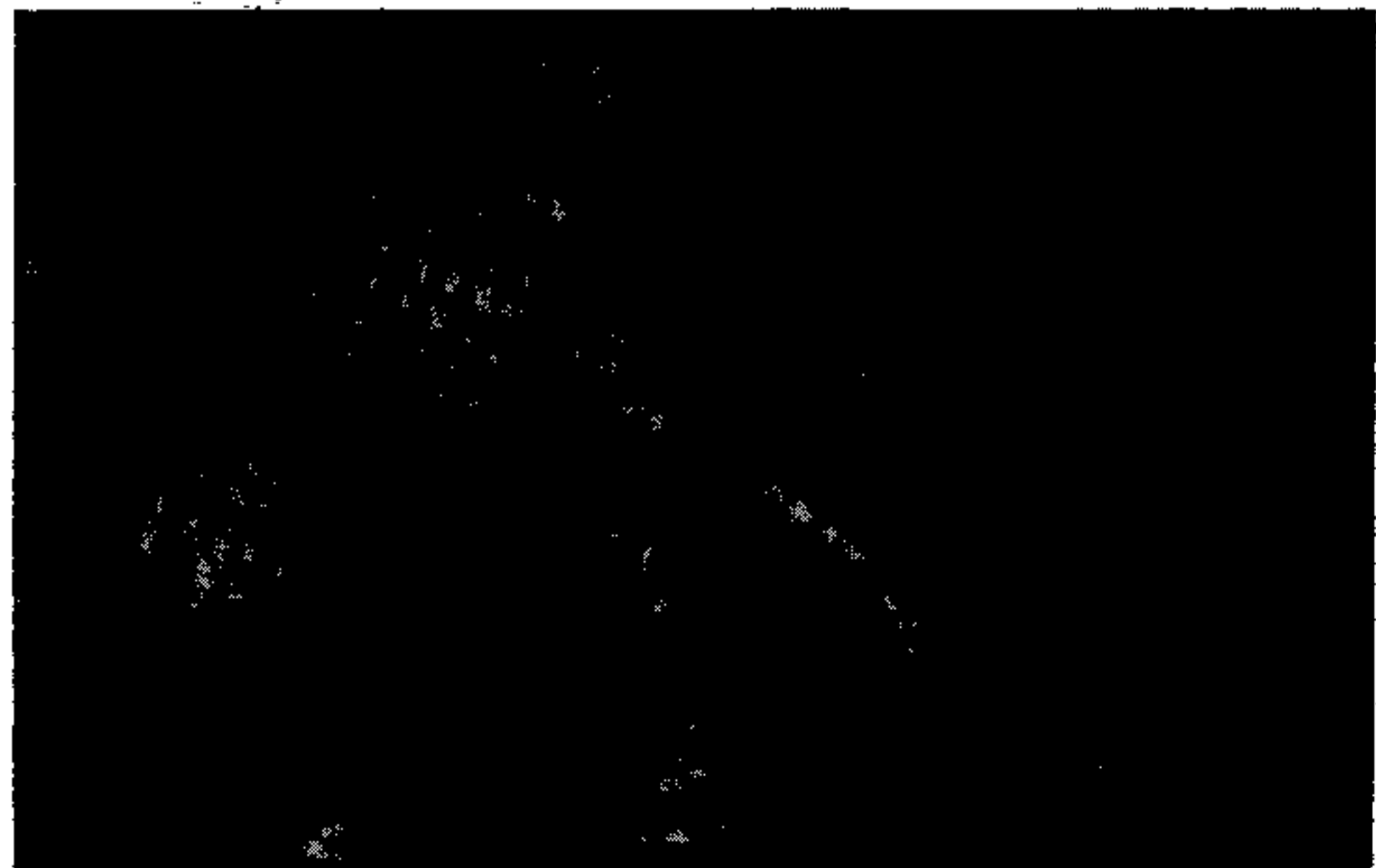
Armed police stood protecting stone throwing thugs who made every departing car run a gauntlet of bricks, rocks, bottles and even bullets. Latecomers' cars were smashed to prevent the news of what was happening outside the concert getting through to the elaborate security around the concert.

Peekskill took place at the same time as the McCarran Act made the Communist Party illegal. CP leaders were held as political prisoners, as was Fast between the events described above and the book being written.

Unfortunately the CP's response to such witch hunts suffered from exactly the same weaknesses as their response to the attacks on the concerts. No longer seeing the working class as central to the struggle they now looked to all 'progressive' forces of which the working class was only one.

All this came at a time when the cold war was reaching its heights. This meant that even those 'progressives' who had shown some sympathy for the left in the past were now running for cover. Just as a respectable law and order campaign had failed to prevent the brutality at Peekskill, so too the respectable opposition to witch hunts crumbled in the face of McCarthyism. ■

Mike Thompson



Fascist thugs and their handiwork