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Tony Benn's Army 24

Up against the
recession

Inside H-Block

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Poland: Birth of their Power?



2,001,208 -and going up...

Headline Evening Standard August 27th

The world on the dole

The surge of the unemployment figures above the two million mark has been the major political event in this country in the last month. But it is not only in Britain that the number of jobless has started soaring upwards in the last half year.

The inter-governmental agency, the OECD, told in its most recent *Economic Outlook* how the world was entering a new economic crisis as serious as that of the mid-70s.

'The recession has been delayed... But industrial production in the US has declined sharply since February... In April the flow of new orders fell in six of the seven major countries...'

Unemployment world wide

	1964/73 av.	1979	1980
UK	3.1	5.6	8.3 (Aug)
US	4.4	5.7	7.8 (July)
Germany	0.7	3.1	3.3 (July)
France	2.2	5.6	5.9 (July)
Italy	5.5	7.2	7.8 (July)
Japan	1.2	2.0	1.9 (May)

Youth unemployment

'The forecasts suggest a sharp rise in youth unemployment everywhere over the next year or so, except in Canada and Japan. The most severe deterioration is forecast for Britain where the youth unemployment rate by 1981 is expected to be 75 per cent above the level in 1979.'

(*Economic Outlook*)

More than one young person in seven will be unemployed in Britain, France and the US next year. And in particular localities in each country the picture can be three or four times as bad as that.

And things do not get all that much better as the former school leavers grow older. In most countries the unemployment rates for 'young adults' (20-26 year olds) is still twice the average adult figure. In Britain last year, for both men and women eight per cent of 'young adults' were unemployed, as against only four per cent of 'adults'.

Women's unemployment

The figures for women's unemployment are even more inaccurate than the general figures. This is because where

married women are not entitled to unemployment benefits they do not bother to register at dole offices. This phenomenon is particularly marked in Britain.

Nevertheless, certain trends seem visible.

In Britain and the US women's unemployment seems to be about the same level as men's. In Britain the official average women's figure is about 60 per cent of the men's, but this will underestimate the real level. In the age groups where unemployed women are most likely to register at dole offices among youth and 'young adults' the female and male figures are more or less the same.

In most other countries the female unemployment rate is between 60 and 80 per cent *higher* than the male rate. In France and Italy the situation is especially desperate for women teenagers, two out of every five being unemployed in both countries. The discrepancy may be due to a greater level of service employment — until this year a growth area — in the US and Britain.

In all countries too, the effect of the crisis on women has been masked by a tendency for the total number of part-time jobs to grow, as employers take on in short lived booms the sort of workers they think it will be easiest to get rid of in a slump. In this they are aided by the talk of 'the woman's place is in the home', which undercuts the confidence of women workers and makes them accept insecure jobs and bad pay.

The gap in the figures

The official figures for Britain underestimate the real extent of unemployment and the rate at which it is rising. Every year the population of working age increases by 200,000. Yet over the last year the number of those officially registered as either working or seeking work has *fallen* by 150,000. 350,000 who are unemployed have disappeared from the official figures in a single year!

As the *Financial Times* has noted (28 August), 'On the basis of past trends, unemployment should be much higher than it is.'

Who are the missing jobless?

The Department of Employment suggests that much of the gap is due to 'earlier retirement, particularly among men'. Another possible cause is the

growing number of married women not bothering to register when their benefit has run out: for the first time in ten years the number of married women officially registered as working or unemployed has stopped rising.

The long-term unemployed

One important difference between unemployment now and in the 1930s has been that so far the numbers of long-term unemployed have been relatively low. In the 1930s, there were cases of whole areas where people had been unemployed for 10 or 15 years (in Britain, the unemployment level did not fall below 10 per cent between 1921 and 1940). By contrast, in the last two years the number of those who have been registered unemployed for more than a year has been only about a quarter of the total unemployed.

Two things are going to change this picture over the next 18 months. The present great wave of redundancies and factory closures means that many of the people on the dole now are going to be stuck there for a long time. And the phasing out of wage related benefit over the next 18 months is going to remove that cushion from those newly unemployed.

Finally, it should not be forgotten that in certain areas, the long-term unemployment picture is worse than this: while in London in mid-April, only one worker in 250 had been unemployed for more than a year, in Liverpool, one worker in 20 had.

Political implications

1. For three years, as official unemployment stabilised at about 1.4 million in this country after the great rise of 1975-76, the fight against it became very much a token fight. The rise of the last few months has made it into a live political issue again.

2. At the same time, the relatively low level of long-term unemployment compared to the 1930s makes it difficult to copy the forms local unemployed organisations used at that time (and even then, the National Unemployed Workers Movement could only permanently organise a very small percentage of the unemployed).

3. The issue of youth unemployment is absolutely central.

It is in the light of these considerations that the initiatives of the Right to Work Campaign and the calls for local and national demonstrations against the Tories (such as the one to the Tory party conference on 10 October) make sense. Permanent organisation of the unemployed is difficult. But attempts to involve some at least of them in demonstrations and protests is crucial if their bitterness is to have an impact on employed workers and if the young unemployed are not to become prey to right wing, racist and anti-trade union ideas.

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Unfortunately we are not immune to inflation. Rising costs have forced us to put up the price of *Socialist Review* to 50p. But since sales are steadily rising, with luck this will be the last time in a long while that we shall have to increase the price.

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Brixton dole office: defending trade unionism

Up against the recession

This summer has not been a happy one for the working class movement in Britain. The onset of the recession has found workers' organisations from top to bottom unable to respond to conditions that are suddenly much more favourable to the employers than before. While the first few months of the year saw record strike figures, July saw the lowest figure for some years. Whereas a couple of months ago relatively weak groups of workers like the postal workers were still getting wage rises of 18 odd per cent out of the government, now traditionally strong groups of car workers are bowing before the onset of short time working and wholesale redundancies and settling for single figures.

A recession on the present scale is an unfamiliar experience for workers and their organisations. We had a little foretaste of it in 1971 and a bigger one in 1975-6. But the toll of sackings has never since the thirties hit virtually every industry at once with the intensity of the last few months. People just don't know how to respond. Bitter anger when the redundancies are announced very rapidly turns into a feeling of impotence and demoralisation.

The government and the media are exploiting the confusion for all they are worth. The publicity surrounding the lower wage settlements in Talbot, the carefully propagated stories of factories accepting wage cuts in order to save jobs, opinion poll claims that most workers would settle for 10 per cent or less—all are meant to create a climate in which workers chase the phantom of job security through acceding to management demands.

A deliberate cultivation of gloom is the

other side of the government's 'monetarist' strategy. Behind the hysteria over 'money supply' and 'public sector borrowing requirements', over the 'corset' and 'M3', lies a rational core: deliberately speed up and deepen the impact of the recession in Britain so as to frighten people into accepting cuts in real wages. This also explains the high level of interest rates and the high exchange rate of the pound, about which the less competitive sections of big business are complaining: the government is deliberately holding up firms' costs and holding down their export earnings in order to force them to cut into wages and increase productivity.

It is still too early to see for certain whether the Tories will achieve success with this approach. They carefully avoided premature confrontation by allowing most groups of workers settling in the last 'pay round' (before the holidays) to get something approaching the rate of inflation. So, for example, the threat of industrial action in Postal Telecommunications was bought off, and as a by-product even the relatively weak postal workers got 18 per cent. Since then many press accounts of the pattern of wage settlements in private industry reflect government wishes—which might come true—rather than accomplished facts.

However, it needs to be said that the Tories will quite likely enjoy some success in cutting real wages—for a time at least.

Under pressure workers have accepted such cuts before—for instance under the Labour government between 1975 and 1978. They can do so under different pressures this time.

But that in itself will not be the same thing as the government winning its long term

goals. To do that it has to inflict so much damage on the morale of trade unionists that it does not recover when the recession passes.

The point is worth spelling out. Even the hardest of the hard faced Tory ministers do not want the recession to last for ever. They want to use the recession to 'shake out' labour, increase productivity, cut real wages and rationalise the structure of industry now, so as to enable, in a year or 18 months, British capitalism to expand at the expense of its international rivals. They hope it can be 'first into' the world recession in order to be 'first out'.

It is when such expansion does take place that the real success or failure of what they are doing now will be measurable.

For, it is then that industrialists will hope to reap gains in terms of increased productivity, forcing increased output out of a workforce that was cut when output fell. But it is also then, that on past experiences, quite sharp changes are possible in the mood of workers at present demoralised.

The number of workers taken on in the

factories in any such boomlet will only be a small proportion of those sacked in the present recession. But, as Trotsky pointed out many years ago, from the point of view of the morale inside the factory, the total number need not be the most important thing. Even if the firm only takes on a handful of new workers, the mood can change from one of insecurity, of being prepared to accept anything in order to hang on to a job, to one of confidence. And then, all the resentments and frustrations built up during the recession itself can explode into action.

Such, for instance, was the experience in France and the US in the mid 1930s, after the greatest slump ever. Such too was the mood in parts of British industry in 1924-5, after the recession and defeat of 1921-2. We are not prophesying anything so dramatic for the end of this recession. But some rise in morale and some fight back is likely.

Socialists in the workplaces have a fantastically important job to do at present. There are an awful lot of people who are hostile to the Tories, fed up with what is happening, and looking for ways to express their discon-

tent. Those prepared to take action are a minority—but as 14 May showed, they are a minority of many hundreds of thousands.

If socialists can draw them around us in joint work, articulating the anger against the Tories and developing defensive tactics, then we can be in a very strong position to take advantage of changes in the popular mood at some point in the not-too-distant future.

This is not a policy of merely waiting for something to happen. The struggle against the sackings in the Brixton dole office was an example of how quite small struggles can be important in helping to ward off attacks on rank and file trade unionism in important sectors. October 10th will be the first of many chances for socialists to see how much of the widespread anger at the Tories can be channelled into purposeful action.

Finally, as the steel and print strike showed in the first half of this year, the very scale of the employers' offensive can provoke widespread and militant resistance in the most unexpected quarters. We need to be on our lookout for every sign of this.

Inside the system

'Greedy British workers ...'. 'Pricing ourselves out of jobs ...'. 'Just look at Germany/Japan/USA/France ...'. Well, let's just look at these places. According to the *Institute of the German Economy*, total wage costs per hour in manufacturing industry in 1979 were:

West Germany.....	21.14 DM.
Japan.....	11.77DM.
USA.....	16.96DM.
France.....	15.05DM

And in greedy Britain? A staggering 10.20DM per hour. The only other major economies with lower costs were Spain (10.16DM), Ireland (8.98 DM) and Greece (6.25DM). (£1 = 4.300DM)

The call for import controls is one of the centrepieces of the economic strategy of the TUC, the Labour Lefts and the Communist Party. But now they are winning new and even more powerful allies eager to help them wage the class war.

A recent report by the London Chamber of Commerce states that nearly sixty per cent of manufacturing firms in London and the South East now believe that selective import controls are 'vital'. The same proportion also wants a statutory incomes policy. No problem, since there are those on the left who have always thought that, given a Labour government and selective import controls, an incomes policy would be a fair trade-off. They

should think carefully about the old proverb which runs: 'With friends like that, who needs enemies?'

The impact of the world crisis on what are called the 'developing' countries is catastrophic. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development the debts of these countries will rise a further 15 per cent this year, to a staggering total of 451 billion dollars. Out of this, 88 billion dollars will go just on interest payments on existing loans.

The major cause of this ever-escalating burden is that, in an economic crisis, the developed capitalist countries import much less from the poorer countries. The purchasing power of the non-oil exporting countries will increase this year by less than one per cent because of a sharp drop in their exports.

But, to see the world just in these global terms is very misleading. There are very wide differences between different 'developing' nations. While the OPEC countries carry 23 per cent of the debt repayment burden, the least developed countries have around two per cent. The 'low incomes countries', who are the largest number in population terms, have only about twenty-two per cent of the total debt.

What has in fact happened is that a small number of states have attracted enormous amounts of investment—which is what 'debt' is all about—while the majority of the world's population remain in the deepest and most intrac-

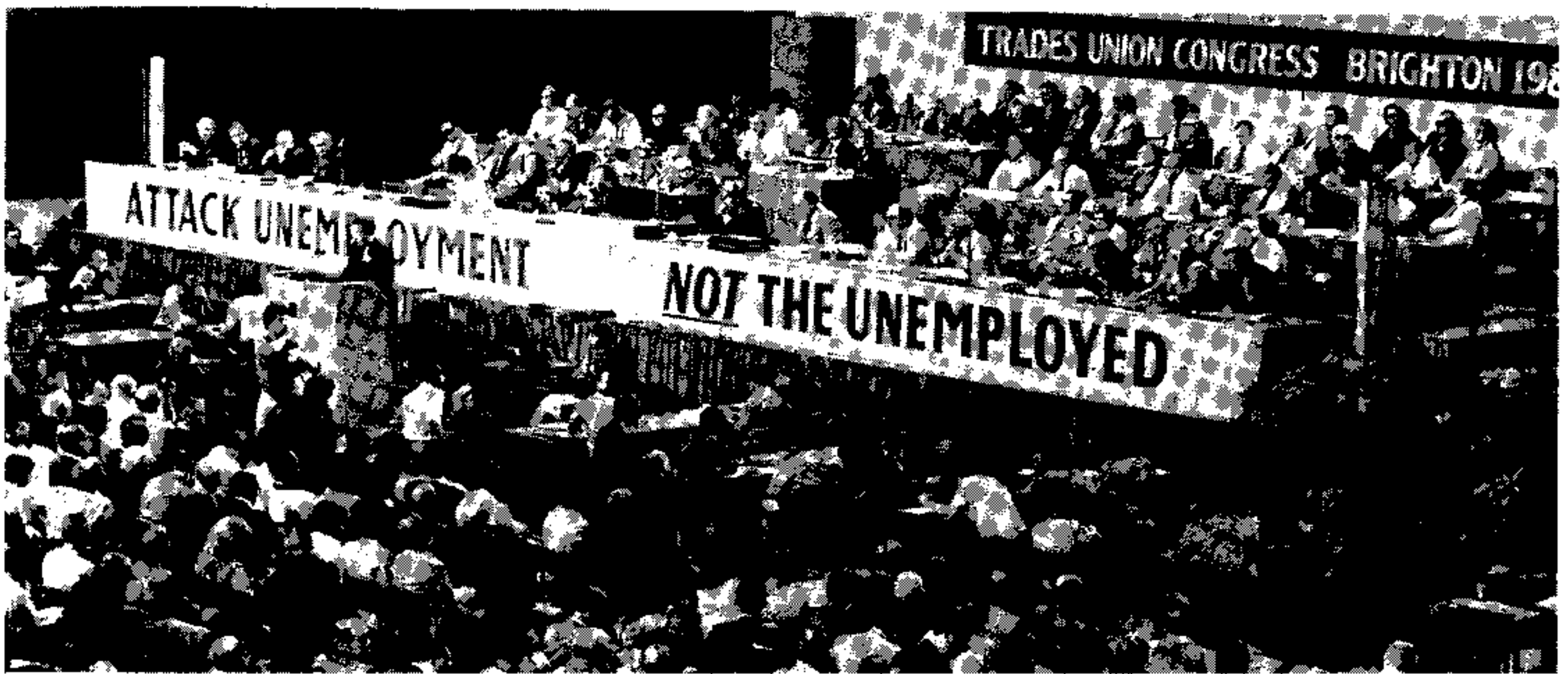
table poverty.

If we look at who pays the most in interest charges, just ten debtor countries account for more than half the total. And just three—Brazil, Mexico and Spain—account for 32 per cent.

More detailed figures for loans from a rising imperialist power like West Germany, provide an even starker picture. In 1979 foreign investment from West Germany rose by 29 per cent—up to a total of 7.8 billion DM. Of this, only 1.1 billion DM, or 14 per cent, went to developing countries. In 1976, the proportion was 38 per cent.

About 80 per cent of accumulated German foreign investment has been in just ten countries. More than half went to Brazil and Spain. Other leading targets include Greece, Turkey and Yugoslavia. The countries of Southern Europe had 40DM per head of population of German investments. Industrialising countries like Brazil had 23DM per head. The poorest countries of the Third World had only 1.30DM per head.

The conclusion is inescapable. Imperialism does not 'develop the world'. Foreign 'aid' does nothing to alter the condition of the vast mass of the world's population. Outside of Europe and North America a handful of countries have begun to develop their industrial base but only at the price of complete subordination to the banks and industries of the advanced capitalist world. Outside of that circle, there is nothing but the continual grind of the most appalling poverty.



Saving Britain but not the workers

From the first day of the Trades Union Congress in Brighton to the last speech calling for the defence of this 'Great Movement of Ours', a desperate unreality overwhelmed those present. For, the TUC came nowhere near understanding that the Tories are much more coldly rational about what they are doing than almost anyone takes them for.

Silly editorials in papers like the *Morning Star* or the *New Statesman* that say that Thatcher is destroying British industry are worth less than the paper they are printed on. How can it be that the City of London, reflected in the Stock Exchange, remains extremely buoyant if British industry is under attack? The confusion, reflected in the TUC debates, is between industry and capital. Capital is not under attack, the offensive is against the workers. When members of the General Council of the TUC, in particular Ken Gill, the Communist general secretary of AUEW/TASS, talk about the deindustrialisation of Britain, they talk more of Britain than workers and more of industry than capital.

There are three great dangers in this approach. First, it leads to workers being led to believe—as some of the Bowaters workers on Merseyside seem to believe—that they can fight the effects of the recession by going on deputations alongside the very industrialists who want to sack them. Hence, for instance, the obscene spectacle of the senior stewards in the Leyland Longbridge plant from which Derek Robinson was sacked as convenor only 10 months ago, urging workers to cooperate fully with management in production of the new Mini Metro.

Second, it leads straight to the notion that if only there were a 'rational', Labour government, monetarist nonsense could be forgotten and everyone—employers, the state, the trade unions—could collaborate together in planning industry and, in particular, planning wages. Hence the only significant thing to emerge from the TUC was the first draft of a new social contract to save British capitalism if the Tories make a mess

of it.

Finally, it means that attention is completely shifted away from the problem of

countering the present employers' offensive. About this problem, hardly a word was said at the TUC.

Depressing wages

For some months now the CBI and the EEF have been mounting a campaign to bring down wage settlements this autumn to single figures.

For eighteen months pay deals were running between fifteen per cent to twenty per cent or more following a long period of wage restraint. The deepening of the recession during the summer has given employers an impetus to take a very tough line on settlements that are half the rate of current inflation.

Talbot's 13,000 manual workers have agreed a pay deal, that runs from July 1st, for an eight per cent increase on grade rates. They will get a further seven per cent from April 1st in return for an extension of their agreement to the end of December next year. All this has happened while the Talbot workforce are on one, two and three day working. And further to the pay deal the company has achieved an aim it has been trying to get for the last ten years. It persuaded the unions to end plant by plant bargaining and run all negotiations through a Joint National Council, a centralised body with two permanent members being full time officials.

As we go to press the 30,000 hourly-paid workers in Vauxhall's plants look set to accept an eight per cent deal to run from September 15th. Negotiations are now starting for this year's annual pay deal at BL and Fords. Lucas is currently attempting to impose a ten per cent pay norm on all its bargaining groups, not just its electrical side which is badly hit by the recession in automotive products but also its aerospace side where profits are booming.

This reflects what the CBI has been saying

to its member firms. In order to keep all settlements low the more profitable companies must toe the class line even though they could afford to pay more. We don't yet know how class conscious the employers will be, though BP has opened negotiations with its refinery workers with an offer of ten per cent. The oil companies, not short of money, could upset the employers' strategy on pay—especially if the tanker drivers, due to settle in November, show their recent militancy and power.

In the state sector the Tories are determined to smash the one million local authority manual workers with a very low settlement in preparation for letting the miners through with a deal above the norm.

But the offensive is not just on wages. At the same time as settling low, the employers are out to erode substantially trade union power and organisation in the workplaces, increase flexibility of labour, speed up lines and generally get workplace control shifted back into the hands of senior and line management. Companies that said they would never give into the pressure for a shorter working week are now saying that they will concede one hour off, sometime next year, but expect enormous concessions in return. Ford management are looking for a deal that will give extra holidays in return for major changes in shift patterns and workplace organisation. ICI and Pilkingtons want shift changes, flexibility and manning changes and more in return for a shorter working week. An attempt is under way to shift the whole frontier of control in the workplace in management's favour.

Stuart Axe.

The cry of the people

In 1980, as so often before, the developing struggle of the Bolivian workers, with the miners at their head, has brought a response of repression and violence from the state. We do not know how much resistance there still is to the new military regime in Bolivia; but we do know that the resistance will grow again, as it has done time and time again.

In the London Metal Exchange, a bell rings at 12 o'clock. When it does, a group of well-dressed brokers rush to the centre of the room and shout figures at each other. Later, another bell rings, the session ends, and the gentlemen depart for the Club.

That is how the world price of tin is fixed. Each time the price falls, hundreds of Bolivian miners are thrown out of work, forced to take wage cuts or are killed in the attempt to resist. Since the 16th century that is how life and death has been determined in Bolivia.

The miners have always fought back, obstinately and with great courage. Today the mines are state-owned, yet miners still die in the course of strikes, and the army still occupies the mines. They were nationalised in 1952, after a spontaneous rising of the Bolivian working class; yet their conditions have barely changed, and their struggle has lost none of its intensity.

White Gold

In the 16th Century, Spain discovered the great silver mine of Potosi in what is today Bolivia. The mine spawned a town bigger than London, and for three centuries produced enough wealth to keep the Spanish nobility and pay the manufacturing bills of Northern Europe. The silver was produced by the labour of Indians who rarely survived more than a few months in the inhuman conditions of the mine. The Spaniards justified this by transferring to themselves the obligation to communal labour that had existed under the Incas. In any case, the theological experts had already decided that Indians were less than human—so it was not unchristian to exploit them.

Bolivia, of course, remained impoverished and undeveloped; by the end of the 19th century the silver was exhausted—but the surveyors of Europe had found a new 'white gold' in the high Andes—tin.

In 1894, a man called Simon Patiño, a clerk, bought 4 square metres of mountain-side and began to mine it. It proved to be the richest vein of tin in the world—'La Salvadora'—the basis of the monster mine called Siglo Veinte. From then on, the name of Patiño dominated Bolivia. His mine had 700 kilometres of inner galleries and its own generators produced more electricity than was available to the whole of the Bolivian national grid. By 1930, Patiño owned 50% of the country's tin; in 50 years, his mines produced over 500,000 tonnes of pure tin and earned 11,000 million dollars for their owner. Patiño manipulated governments,

bought and sold politicians and generals, and instructed bankers and financiers. He had gone further, and bought mines in the Far East as well as a controlling interest in the Liverpool tin foundry of Williams Harvey. He controlled, together with the two other mineral magnates of Bolivia (Aramayo and Hochschild) over 85% of Bolivia's mineral production. And the state took 4%(!) in tax.

By 1930, Patiño had stopped investing; he simply reaped his profits and pumped them into more profitable ventures in Europe and North America.

Out of a population of 5 million, about 100,000 Bolivians are industrial workers. 70% of the population are peasants, working on the margins of the huge private estates that dominate Bolivia's economy. They live on the edges of starvation, in the deserted North or the empty high plateaus. It was they who exchanged one misery for another, and went to the mines to work. In a real sense, they were starved into going there.

It was not until a generation of peasants had gone to the mines, and remained there, in the early 1930s, that union organisation began. Since then, the history of miners' organisation in Bolivia has been one of extraordinary sacrifice, of a will to struggle that defies explanation—until their conditions of life are understood.

The mines lie at 15,000 feet above sea level in a barren and inhospitable region of bare mountains. The villages are camps owned by the mining companies; the houses are never more than one room and kitchen—since there are never enough houses, new workers are billeted on miners' families, and the beds used on a rota system. All supplies come from a company store (*the pulperia*), which has always kept the miners and their families in permanent debt. The companies had their own private armies, supplemented from time to time by the national police and the Bolivian military.

In such conditions the life expectancy of the miners is 35; after 10 years work, every miner has silicosis in some form, and in the overcrowded houses the silicosis spreads to wives and kids. The irony is that the underground workers are the privileged sector in the ruthless world of the mines. Beneath them are the *veneristas* and the *locatarios*, who work as subcontractors in the used shafts or surface workings; the *lamos* pan the sludge coming out of the mine for the grains of ore that might have escaped the filters. The widows, the kids and the old men occupy the base of this pyramid of abuse, scrabbling at the slag heaps, sorting the ore and selling what they find to the company.

These, then, are the proletarians who in 1980 still 'have nothing to lose but their chains'.

Towards the revolution of 1952

In 1942, the Bolivian government, under

pressure from the United States, tried to squeeze more production from the miners. The miners, though, were unimpressed by talk of patriotism and war effort and responded with an indefinite general strike. By December of that year the situation had changed very little and the people of Siglo Veinte resolved to march in protest to the Catavi mine. On their way they were ambushed by the army and 400 were killed. The strikes multiplied, and the determination of the recently organised miners hardened. A year later, a young officer, Villaroel, came to power and immediately went to consult with the miners. The US immediately imposed an economic blockade and plotted the murder of Villaroel, who was finally killed in 1946. Yet those three years brought the organisation of the miners into a strong union—Fedmin—that would be, from then on, the vanguard of the workers' struggle in Bolivia.

In 1952, the radical-nationalist organisation MNR called for a military coup to overthrow the government. But it was the working class that responded with a mass insurrection in which, for a few months, the miners took control of their own areas, defended them under arms, and built their own, new, institutions of dual power.

The MNR, though its leadership and its politics were bourgeois democratic, enjoyed mass worker and peasant support—perhaps because workers and peasants identified the MNR with the frustrated promise of the Villaroel government.

There was no revolutionary party in Bolivia—but there were fighting unions with a long history of bitter and costly struggle. It was they, led by the miners, who won power in 1952, and held it through a national trade union organisation—the COB—formed in 1952, and through the Popular Assemblies which met in the mining areas.

The absence of a revolutionary political leadership left the *political* direction of the revolution in the hands of the bourgeois-nationalist politicians whose programme for the 'nationalisation' of the mines fell far short of the demand for workers power that issued from the Popular Assemblies. The mines were taken into state ownership under a new enterprise called COMIBOL; yet the miners who had made that possible were very soon to call it 'the Company' and see it as the same enemy as the old Patiño regime.

COMIBOL took over an exhausted industry, whose workers were sapped and drained and whose machinery had not been renewed for over 20 years. 'La Salvadora' had yielded an ore of 66% purity; by 1952, that ore yielded only 1.11% of pure tin. The international banks refused credit unless the former owners were compensated; they were given 22 million dollars, and their control over the world market and the foundries was unaffected. Stocks held by the US government were released onto the market and the world price of tin plummeted. Here, as before and since, the multinational corpora-



Domitila Barrios de Chungara 'My people are not struggling for a small victory...'

tions were happy to leave the Latin American states to produce the unprofitable ore, provided they controlled the *metal* produced (the same would happen in Chile, with copper, in 1970). By 1968, as if to prove the point, the Patiño family fortune amounted to 3000 million dollars—four times Bolivia's GNP!!

The struggle unending

In April 1953, the miners' wage had been between 50 and 60 cents (of the US dollar) per day. Four years later, their wages had fallen by 42%. They were once again the victims—all they had gained was the lesson of organisation and struggle. By 1956, their loyalty had been stretched beyond endurance and they went on strike again. In 1959, a wage rise of 20% was followed by a decision to unfreeze prices at the company store; the miners and their families revolted and the government conceded a price freeze on four items—ten years earlier, 22 items had had fixed prices. By 1961, COMIBOL was in a financial crisis, and the government signed a so-called Triangular Plan with foreign banks which agreed not to invest, but to kick out numbers of workers and cut the wages of the rest. The workers exploded, and the traditions and methods of struggle of 1952 were revived; but the struggle had also taken on a new dimension as the resolutions of the National Workers Congress of 1963 (known as the Colquiri Theses) showed clearly. The Congress denounced the government, demanded workers' control and announced the formation of a workers' militia. In 1964, their political development was demonstrated in their scorn for an electoral system which had resolved nothing; the miners' union liberated the ballot boxes in the mining areas and declared the areas 'free territo-

ries' under the direct control of the workers.

In September of that year, the miners again marched, this time to the central town of Oruro. They were met in the desolate waste of Sora Sora by the US trained 'Rangers', and shot down in cold blood. In November, the government of Paz Estenssora was overthrown by a military coup led by Barrientos. Within 6 months the repression had begun again; a state of siege was declared, the army occupied the mines and 130 leaders were arrested and deported. In September, the miners gave their reply; they attacked the police post at Llallaque, took the arms, and confronted the occupying military. 83 miners died in the continuing struggle between the classes in Bolivia.

In 1971, the miners again led a mass rising, in support of the democratic General Torres who took up the demands of the working class and announced that power would go to the Popular Assemblies whose model had already been seen at work in the mines. Torres did not last long. After 10 months, Torres was overthrown by a new coup which was US-backed and inspired; the new regime of Banzer was ruthless, and again it was the miners who were asked to bear the brunt of the new austerity. Their response was the great strike of 1976. The army responded by putting the mining areas under military occupation, attempting to destroy the union organisation, arresting, torturing and deporting the miners' leaders.

Yet they were not destroyed. In 1979, it was the Bolivian workers who stopped the attempted military coup by Natusch—it was the working class that imposed democratic elections and guarded them with arms in hand. It was again the workers who died to defend their class and its organisations against new assaults from within and with-

out. In 1980, as Bolivia is again under the heel of a brutal and repressive military regime, it is the miners who will provide the backbone of the workers' resistance that has always been organised and will emerge again.

Let them speak

The best conclusion is given in the words of a fine revolutionary—the wife of a miner, Domitila Barrios de Chungara:

'I think it's vital for us to learn to organise in other ways so that we can defend ourselves better. Because we have a very strong tradition of struggle. How many people have already given their lives in our cause!...

Short-range solutions no longer interest us. We've already had all kinds of governments, 'nationalist', 'revolutionary', 'christian' with all kinds of labels. Since 1952, when the MNR government began to betray the people's revolution, so many governments have come and gone and none of them has done what the people really want ... And it's going to go on that way so long as we have a capitalist system.

My people are not struggling for a small victory, for a small wage increase here, a small answer there. NO. My people are preparing themselves to get capitalism out of their country forever, and its domestic and foreign servants too. My people are struggling to reach socialism.'

This history, both tragic and magnificent, has shown that the struggle of the Bolivian miners will not end until both the capitalists in Bolivia itself, and the capitalist system which has drawn so much of their blood, are finally blasted away.

Mike Gonzalez



The eve of independence

Zimbabwe: A marxist onslaught?

Spare a thought for the settler whites of Zimbabwe. The terrorists, still in the bush a year ago, now live amongst them. Outside the Prime Minister's office, the 10ft high bronze statue of Cecil Rhodes, Founding Father of Rhodesia, has just been removed.

To add insult to injury, a number of Blacks were seen to deface the statue as it lay in a lorry before being driven off. Jameson Avenue is now Samora Machel Avenue. May Day is a public holiday. The TV talks of Comrade Robert Mugabe and of colonial oppression. The police, once known as the British South African Police, are now called Zimbabwe Republic Police, and General Peter Walls has just resigned from the army.

You might expect mass white emigration to South Africa, most white accept the change, for it is not all gloom. For example, Zimbabwe womens hockey team—all white—won the country's first gold medal at the Olympics. More importantly for them, Edgar Tekere, Secretary-General of ZANU-PF and Minister of Manpower Planning and Development, is on bail, charged with the murder of a white farmer—an affair that's likely to end his political career.

Robert Mugabe could certainly have done without the Tekere affair, as it is bound to polarise already existing divergencies of opinion within ZANU-PF about the way his administration is running the country. But at the same time, Tekere's arrest may be a blessing in disguise because the internal opposition to Mugabe has been deprived of

a leader.

Tekere started political life at an early age as a militant nationalist and was first detained for two months by the Rhodesian Government in 1959. Later he was banned from attending public meetings or visiting tribal trust lands. He spent 10 years in jail from 1964. In 1975 he linked up with Mugabe and they broke away from Sithole to restructure the external ZANU Party in Mozambique. In 1975-6 the armed struggle against the Smith regime was re-launched.

This year, after the Lancaster House talks, Tekere became the organiser of ZANU-PF for the general election this February. He gained the powerful position of secretary-general.

However, at Lancaster House he started to drift away from Mugabe. He was, for example, opposed to the entrenched clause of 20 seats for whites. After the election victory, he opposed Joshua Nkomo being given a cabinet post. He saw the central committee of ZANU-PF as the highest decision-making body. Mugabe, in the past an arbiter, a committee chairman rather than a 'leader', was making decreasing use of the central committee.

In June, attempts by Tekere to reorganise the white civil service were sabotaged by the system, and to his surprise, his prime minister didn't support him.

Tekere, now projecting himself as a radical spokesman, soon became the focus for the opposition within the party. An under-

ground, ZANU-PF pamphlet appeared in Salisbury criticising Mugabe's policies of placating the whites. Tekere's name was linked to it, even though he denied any connection. Soon after his arrest, 200 students marched in Salisbury calling for his release. Bail, which was first refused, was immediately granted after rumblings among the 20,000 armed guerrillas in the assembly camps.

Tekere is not a radical Marxist. Indeed, he was a leading light in the crushing of the ZANU left forces in Mozambique. He is a populist politician who believes the victors of the elections should get all the spoils.

Another 'radical', a leading member of the party, Enos Nkala, minister for finance, showed his true colours recently. In July, he unveiled a budget that had, with the exception of health and education, little to do with 'a Marxist onslaught'.

The end of the war meant a 20% cut in defence spending, the money saved going to provide free primary education and free health care for those earning less than 150 dollars a month (the minimum wage is set at 70 dollars). But the white farming community were given massive subsidies. For example there was to be a rise of 60% in the preplanting price for maize and a guarantee was given to the banks to cover the losses of tobacco merchants. Foreign capital, which accounts for the major share of mining, manufacturing and banking and controls important sections of agriculture and ranching, was given an easy ride—foreign investors will be able to expatriate 25% of their profits.

Reg Sampson, president of the Confederation of Zimbabwe Industries, indicated that business confidence is returning. This followed the news that manufacturing production had risen 14% in volume during the first five months of the year. This rise is due to sanctions being lifted and the siege economy now flexing its muscles and finding markets in neighbouring states.

Such business confidence *along* with high unemployment is a major headache for the government. How can they explain this to the party's rank and file?

Bipin Patel

Socialist Workers Party

FOR WORKERS
POWER AND
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NAME

ADDRESS

TRADE UNION

TELEPHONE

Whites tinker with 'reform'

When Harry Oppenheimer sings in his bath, the Oppenheimer household must be getting bursts of 'Happy Days Are Here Again'. Harry's Anglo-American Corporation—one of the largest mining groups in the world—has just announced record profits.

But there are a couple of flies in Harry's ointment which prevent his profits being even higher.

The first is the maze of laws and regulations in South Africa which prevent Harry from using black workers to ease the shortage of skilled workers in the mines. And so he commemorated his record profits with adverts calling for education and labour reforms for blacks: 'Racial discrimination and free enterprise are incompatible and failure to eradicate one will ultimately result in the destruction of the other. Discriminatory laws, he complained, are a 'major obstacle to the participation of blacks in the free enterprise system.'

But the other fly in the ointment is the growing militancy of black workers. Faced with this, Oppenheimer uses the racist laws he claims to object to, to his own advantage. In mid-August one of his companies sacked several hundred striking black miners from the Finsch diamond mine. This strike was one of many that came along with the schools boycott by coloureds and the spectacular sabotage of the SASOL oil-from-coal complex.

Strikes involving more than 50,000 workers have affected all the country's big industrial centres—more than twice the figure already for all of last year. The figure has probably already surpassed the level for 1973, the last time there were widespread stoppages. And, as *The Times* has pointed out: 'This year the strikes have been more sophisticated, more sustained and on the whole more successful in achieving gains for the workforce—with the exception of the stoppages in Johannesburg.'

The strike wave has been for higher wages in the face of 20 per cent inflation and for the right to speak through the unions of their choice.

The Wiehahn Commission on labour laws is supposed to have extended the right of registration to black unions. Until then these were denied bargaining rights. But the registration proposals were really a way of imposing controls on the black unions that included a check on finances, prohibition of political activity and a restriction on blacks being trained or financed by foreigners. The employers were helped to develop 'in-company' or 'parallel' unions to negotiate with instead of the representative black unions.

The Johannesburg municipal strike is a good example of what has been happening. The independent union, the unregistered Black Municipality Workers' Union (BMWU), formed about a month before the strike, was able to bring about two thirds of the black workforce out on strike in the biggest action to affect a single employer in

South African labour history. By 30 July there were 10,000 workers on strike out of a workforce of 15,000. But the Johannesburg City Council refused to recognise the union, preferring to work through the council-sponsored Union of Johannesburg Municipal Workers, which as a *Times* report said, 'has little grass roots support, but was granted provisional registration by the government... Officials of the union were appointed by the council, not elected by the workers...'

The council responded to the strike with a threat of dismissal for those who continued the stoppage. Over 60% of the municipal workers are migrant workers from the rural 'homelands', for whom dismissal meant loss of the right to remain in an urban area.

On the morning of 1 August, a week after the strike began, armed police stood by as council officials ordered those still on strike to empty their lockers and get on to buses to take them back to the 'homelands'. 1,100 workers were deported. Joseph Mais and Philip Dlamini organisers of the BMWU, were arrested and charged with sabotage—for which the penalty ranges from five years in jail to death. (Trade unions in Britain, especially members of TGWU, GMWU, NALGO and NUPE, should be campaigning for their release.)

The South African regime has responded to the unrest by attempting to tinker with the political system—without any success.

Prime minister P.W. Botha planned to replace the Senate with a presidential Advisory Council consisting of whites, coloureds and Indians working in some relationship with a separate council for Africans. But the homelands chiefs refused to serve on their council if the Africans weren't included. Botha was forced to abandon this 'reform'.



Oppenheimer,
chairman Anglo-
American Corp.
of SA Ltd.

The recent cabinet changes have been hailed in the British press as 'reforms'. It is true that three new ministers are 'liberal' by South African standards, in believing that petty apartheid should be removed. But the homelands policy—the resettlement of surplus labour in underdeveloped rural areas—is to continue, with modifications, to create a relatively privileged urban group of Africans, Coloureds and Indians, who, the regime hopes, will identify with the system.

Bipin Patel

Inside the system

Under capitalism, wrote Marx, dead labour tends to replace living labour. What he meant was that in order to compete capitalists are forced to replace the likes of me and you with more and more machines. Nothing, he argued, could stop that process because it was part of the central dynamic of the system.

There have always been those who disagreed. For example, reformists like Stuart Holland, who devoted many pages to proving how government aid could be used to create jobs in those regions of Britain with high unemployment. They found an audience, and successive governments have poured out millions in the form of regional development grants' to create jobs in the worst hit areas.

Cleveland, in North East England, was one of the test beds of these ideas. Regional aid to companies in the area was 14 times the average for assisted areas. The bulk of the money went into the chemical and metal industries. In these industries, there was a net loss of 15,250 jobs between 1965 and 1976. According to a study by Dr. David Sto-

rey, the grants were used to subsidise local manufacturers to 'become more capital intensive and to trim their labour forces.'

The cuts in the National Health Service are having an important side effect. As it becomes more and more difficult to get decent health care free, the numbers queue-jumping through private schemes continue to rise. In the last year, the number of people on this game has grown by 13.7 per cent to 1.47 million. The sharpest rise, of nearly twenty per cent, has been in group schemes like the one Frank Chapple last year concluded for 40,000 electricians.

But despite this scabbing on a firm TUC position, the major beneficiaries are still the rich. With premiums rising sharply all the time, there are still more than half a million individuals who can afford to fork out for special treatment. And the bulk of the group schemes are part of management perks like cars and expense accounts. In sickness and in wealth ...

Touching the tensions

Start at the beginning. In July 1972 a group of women began producing a new women's magazine, *Spare Rib*. The name was a pun on the biblical explanation of the origins of women, but the magazine itself was not intended to be taken lightly.

It was to be glossy and professional—to prove that women could produce such a thing themselves, and to distinguish it from the rag bag of alternative mags that were being published at the time.

It was the experience of working on some of these—*Ink*, *Oz*, *Frendz*, *Time Out* and *IT*—doing the distribution and production, which brought these women together.

And what they produced was good. Looking back now I realise that they must have gone through the same arguments that we did when we first produced *Womens Voice* magazine. Its front cover announced that it was a 'woman's news magazine'. Quite quickly this changed to 'women's news magazine'. The articles were short, often one page or two, with lots of news, regular columns, all well laid out and easy to read.

A low cover price was achieved by taking advertising. This of course presents problems, it did then, and it probably still does now. I have one early edition with a full back page advert saying: "Wanted by April 9th, 22 intelligent, young minded people, who ... " will come and work for Control Date. Contact "The man: Mr S. Roper. The number 01 637 2171." It's a case of you take the money and you get no choice.

The aim was for the magazine to be popular and accessible. It would "put women's liberation on the newstands." The first edition announced to its readers: "What we can do is reflect the questions, ideas and hope that is growing out of our awareness of ourselves, not as a 'bunch of women' but as individuals in our own right."

Above all it was exciting. It introduced all sorts of new ideas and issues. It interviewed the famous and the not so famous. There was cookery and sewing, and do it yourself (the household sort). There were columns written by women like Anna Raeburn and Angela Phillips, which had their photographs to go with them.

If the important idea was to try and cut into the women's magazines market with a magazine that talked to women about feminism and women's liberation rather than the traditional view of women, then it certainly set out to do that by emulating those same magazines.

They were right to try to do that then and eight years later, I believe they would be right to do it now.

Which just goes to show how out of step you can be, because *Spare Rib* is not like that any more.

It is not just *Spare Rib* that has changed. In the summer of 1976 the cover adopted the words, 'A women's liberation magazine'. While it was never the property of the Wom-



en's Liberation Movement, and therefore not responsible for sticking to some argument or strategy, the magazine was seen as the magazine of the movement. There was no other. *Shrew* quickly came and went. *Womens Report* survived far longer but kept to its format of providing mostly news and information.

Others were started by women in particular socialist organisations: *Socialist Women* was an IMG paper, and has now ceased publication altogether. Women in the Communist Party started *Red Rag*, but the party wouldn't countenance it, so they severed its political ties. It only appears very occasionally. *Womens Voice* began life as an internal newsletter for women members of the International Socialists and took a while to flourish. Although it doesn't equal the circulation of *Spare Rib* it is the next most popular feminist magazine, with one crucial difference. It is socialist too, and *Spare Rib* is not.

Unfair, I hear from the side lines, *Spare Rib* never intended to be a socialist magazine, so don't make comparisons. Alright, then let's look at it another way.

In the early seventies, as the women's movement first gathered steam, it was accepted that society had to radically change and the working class was key to bringing that change about. One of the first campaigns the women's liberation movement was involved in was that to unionise the night cleaners who worked in London's offices. If it often seemed hopeless, it had some limited successes. What mattered was that we were talking to, organising with working class women.

Spare Rib reflected the unease with which some women took this political assumption. The early editions ran lots of news and features which were about or relevant to the specific work experience of working class women. When the women at SEI Heywood, lost their 11 week strike for equal pay in the



Spare Rib—a change of style and orientation

winter of 1975 Marsha Rowe one of *Spare Rib*'s first editors, wrote a five page long special special feature, which, in the women's own words, described the difficulties they had come up against. The cover had a photo of the women on the picket line.

That orientation gradually changed, as did the campaigning spirit of the magazine.

From the start the abortion campaign was bigger than the women's liberation movement. It threw together women of all political persuasions, determined to unite to win around one minimum demand, to defend the 1967 Abortion Act.

Because it went on for so long it was difficult to keep presenting the same arguments in different ways. We found that out quickly working on *Womens Voice*. But it had to be done because we knew that the women selling *Womens Voice*, organising locally, expected it. They were up to their ears in the campaign and the magazine had to fit their needs. They needed to know what was going on, month in month out, even when nothing was happening.

Spare Rib wasn't under that pressure. And

it showed. In my early days as editor of *Womens Voice* I used to scan *Spare Rib* each month, making sure I hadn't missed some vital piece of news. But last year I didn't need to bother.

The abortion campaign probably affected the women's movement more than we yet realise. For many here was a women's issue, relevant to all women, irrespective of class, for which it was possible to fight without any reference to working class women as a force for change. That unknown quantity 'the community' became the focus of attention.

Being of the women's movement *Spare Rib* inevitably reflected the growing obscurity of its politics. The emphasis on a world divided between men and women, and an obsession with the politics of the personal, has turned one and all up a blind alley.

Margaret Thatcher is, however, causing a crisis. At the time of the election in May last year *Spare Rib* ran an editorial—something it does not often do—which explained to its readers why those among the *Spare Rib* collective who would be voting would be voting Labour, to keep the Tories out. It was an editorial which could just have easily appeared in *Womens Voice*.

"The Tories' attempt to appeal to women across class lines, via the common factor of being housewives, is calculated and very skilful. As feminists we are a threat because we want more than attitudes to

change—we want a change in the entire system."

The question is, how? That will have to be thrashed out soon because Margaret Thatcher is not leaving us the luxury of thinking about it forever. The *Spare Rib* collective, the Women's Liberation Movement, the people who came to the *Beyond the Fragments* conference, all will now have to decide what happens next, and what part they will play in it.

Something of that crisis is already knocking on *Spare Rib's* door. In the latest edition (September 1980) there is an editorial, again, which begins:

"Recently the *Spare Rib* collective has come up against acute decision making problems. We realised very abruptly that in fact we had never worked out a clear collective practice.

"Personal rifts and disagreements opened up that had until then lain relatively dormant. Since then it has been difficult to produce work and get along in a sisterly spirit.

"The seriousness of it all made us decide to hold a series of special meetings, with a group counsellor, to help us sort out structural and personal problems."

Are the problems structural and personal? The article which caused the rift was critical of the women's movement because of the idea that women should have nothing to do with men. It did for some women, say *Spare*

Rib, "touch on real tensions within the women's movement." That, I'm afraid, is political and not personal or structural.

The structure of *Spare Rib* is peculiar. Who owns it, who controls? If you work for a women's magazine owned by a commercial publishing house then relations are easy. The company which owns it has the final say; the editor will have the utmost freedom to produce a good commercial product.

At the other end of the spectrum *Womens Voice* starts by being an SWP publication, with specific political ideas, which the women who work on it interpret as they see fit. Political arguments happen, and one or the other finally changes.

For both there is a clearly defined purpose and a structure within which it happens. For the women who produce *Spare Rib* it is not so easy. They can only judge the magazine against their own, personal view of the movement. When there are irreconcilable differences what happens? We shall see.

I am not gloating. I know that the movement which gave birth to *Spare Rib* also bore *Womens Voice*. We have had our own arguments in the past couple of years, and equally they were a reflection of the political times we are in. We resolved them and we still live to fight another day. Hopefully *Spare Rib* will too, if it can decide what it is that it is fighting and now.

Margaret Renn

INDUSTRIAL DISCUSSION SECTION



A shot in the arm

With the reinstatement of Phil Corddell and Richard Cleverley the longest-running unofficial dispute in the history of the Civil Service clerical union, the CPSA, came to an end. After being out for nine weeks the strikers in the Brixton employment office went back, having chalked up a major victory over management. True, there were conditions—Phil and Richard along with five others have been transferred to another office—but that doesn't detract from the achievement. Gareth Jenkins talked to members of the SWP in the CPSA about the result.

Several lessons can be learnt from the dispute. First, it proves that a hardline management can be taken on and beaten.

With rising unemployment, unemployment benefit offices, particularly ones like Brixton, place an added burden on an already hard pressed staff. Pressure of extra work has led to greater militancy; at Brixton, for example, when the heating broke down, people walked out. Managers, anxious to maintain discipline, cannot afford the 'luxury' of a well-organised and militant workplace.

The picking out of activists, like the suspensions and subsequent sackings of Phil and Richard for pursuing militant trade union activity, is unlikely to be the product of a conspiracy concocted at higher levels to 'get' revolutionaries. The evidence is far

more that this was a case of a local dispute that got out of hand. However, simultaneous but unconnected management moves to revise the facilities agreement in such a way as to make trade union activity more difficult—for example, by limiting the time available and by management not recognising anyone who has been disciplined—indicate the kind of pressure being exerted on the union.

During negotiations management constantly harped on how bad things had become in the office because of the attitude of the union. And despite their victory, the returning strikers have found that in their absence it has been decided to turn the sick

INDUSTRIAL DISCUSSION SECTION

room into a fraud section. There is also evidence of a tightening up on leave. One activist, whose request for leave was initially agreed, was then refused permission after regional management had intervened to know where leave was being taken. They said they suspected the leave was not 'authentic'—the activist quite correctly replied that they had no right to ask.

The second lesson to be learnt concerns the CPSA itself. The myth that you can't win except with the official blessing, and full financial backing, of the union has been destroyed. This was a dispute where the rank and file took control. Despite a clear mandate from the national conference early in May, where support for the victimised members had been unanimous, the Executive and the full-timers abdicated responsibility. They pinned their faith on the Appeals Board and did next to nothing to mobilise the membership. There were only two circulars calling for action, one of which said that if Phil and Richard were not reinstated as a result of a successful appeal then industrial action would be considered. The implications of what would happen if their appeal was unsuccessful were not spelt out.

The concluding circular from Ken Thomas was the notorious attack, eagerly gobbled up by the right wing press, on 'red infiltrators.' This torrent of abuse confronted with his earlier refusal to comment about the mass picket on 12 August.

The circular relating to the Day of Action on June 13th (the day Phil was sacked) carried a 'do-your-own thing' message. That the response was patchy is not surprising. For June 27th, the date on which Richard was dismissed the NEC suggested protest meetings, one hour walkouts, but made no further calls for one day actions. There was a three day official stoppage for Brixton on June 25th, 26th and 27th, on the last day of which a mass meeting decided to continue the strike unofficially. Both the Department of Employment and the DHSS section executive voted support, but were unsuccessful in persuading the National Disputes Committee of the union to make it official.

The rank and file defence committee issued publicity and built up a national network. Something like £9000 was raised by collections and meetings—enough to pay each striker an average of £40 per week. There was hindrance from the union leaders—the section voted a contribution of £100, which was ruled out of order by the president—and there were threats from management who forbade visits by Phil to members at Unemployment Benefit Offices and any other offices.

The network of contacts established by the defence campaign showed that left unity in action was possible. Involved were supporters of *Redder Tape*, the Rank and File grouping within the CPSA, supporters of *Socialist Caucus* working within the Broad Left, members of the CP and supporters of *Militant* tendency (though an article in *Militant* attacked the unofficial action as a

diversion of resources).

An error that could have had serious consequences was the omission to build a strike committee to run the actual strike itself. Fortunately, despite the occasional absence, picketing was maintained and the pressure kept up, without which the final mass picketings, which lifted the dispute from local to national importance, would have had no basis.

The union officials in charge of the two appeals were only nominally under the rank and file control of the union section. Despite pressure the main negotiator, Terry Ainsworth, resisted control by arguing that he took his orders from the National Executive. He also had a secret meeting with the manager, Lambert, who was on record as saying that Phil and Richard would only come back "over his dead body." With the connivance of the deputy general secretary of the CPSA, it is more than probable that he cooked up a deal with the Department of Employment management, which involved agreeing to the transfer terms in the final settlement. Evidence for this is necessarily indirect, but it is worth noting that in meetings with management at the end of the dispute he refused to challenge management attacks on union activity at the Brixton office, even though ordinary members of the union negotiating team did, only to be reprimanded publicly by Ainsworth himself.

It is also worth noting that at the National

Executive Committee meeting on August 26th a motion proposed by a CP member, instructing the union to take action to reinstate the other five included in the transfer from Brixton, was heavily defeated by 22 to 2, following strong opposition from the full-timers.

Of course, the leadership of the CPSA claimed the credit for the fact that the appeals verdict went in favour of Phil and Richard. Given that there is only an 11% success rate (possibly as low as 2% for militants), and given that verdicts do not have to be accepted by management, it is extremely unlikely that sweet reason and the self-evident virtues of the case won the day, whatever the claim made by the General Secretary, Ken Thomas, in his notorious second circular.

Industrial action did win the dispute, particularly when the patient rank and file work of meetings and collections all over the country lifted the issue from that of the right of trade unionists to take action in support of victimised fellow members to that of the general right of all trade unionists to take effective action without hindrance from the state and the police in the matter of picketing.

The fact that a white-collar union can, in the present climate, win back jobs lost as a result of attacks on basic trade union rights of organisation is a shot in the arm not only for the CPSA but for all of us.

Headteachers out of the union

To many readers this article may seem unnecessary. But it is a fact that bosses are well established in several unions, for example, the National Union of Teachers and the local government union, NALGO. In *Rank and File Teacher* the decision, taken several years ago, to raise the issue of "heads out of the union" was only reached after much argument and even then there was not unanimous agreement. The subject is currently under discussion in the NALGO Rank and File Paper, one of the key issues being at what point in the pay scale or management structure does someone become a boss. The aim of this article is to explain why it was essential to take the decision among teachers and hopeful to prompt discussion about other unions.

Why "heads out"? To answer this we need to look at their role in schools and in the union. It is argued that not all heads are the same, that it is wrong to equate a head of a large secondary school, who earns £10,000 and maybe never sees the inside of a classroom, with the head of a small primary school who may earn little more than some classroom teachers and have a substantial teaching timetable.

But all heads earn more, usually considerably more, than the people they work with; they have significantly more control over their working conditions, but most impor-

tantly, "the head of a school" under the articles of government, or rules of management and discipline, by virtue of his/her position, "controls and teaching and non-teaching staff". That is he/she may not be the employer but is certainly the boss, and any inconsistencies over pay cannot get away from this. There may well be other managers in schools we need to be rid of in the union, but it is quite clear we must start with heads.

Heads are only four per cent of the NUT membership, but because of their position in schools, (they can get out easily, they have ready access to a phone etc), they find it easy to become involved in the union bureaucracy. In fact they dominate the union at local and national level—at least 50 per cent of the National Executive are heads, and at local level, especially outside London, the local officers are frequently heads. Through their influence union policy is often distorted and does not represent the interests of the majority of union members, classroom teachers who are predominantly female.

One example is union salary policy. The pay structure of teachers is a great example of divide and rule. There are five scales, with further separate grades for senior teachers, deputy heads and heads. The top grade of Scale 2 is often quoted as the average teachers pay, but 70 per cent of teachers earn

less than that. The Clegg rise gave some heads an increase of over £4,000, which is more than the annual salary of many teachers on Scale 1. To put all this down to the influence of heads may be to overstate the case a little, but no union of class teachers could support the same policy.

It is important to understand the deference with which our union treats our bosses. They are thought to enhance the status of the union, and headquarters encourages their membership. Newham NUT now has the dubious distinction of having most of the local School Inspectors in the union as well! Headquarters has produced a special "heads' pack" (there is no equivalent for women or even heads of department). This is a well-printed, well-presented, foolscap folder of "advice" for heads, and is addressed to them in their capacity as managers and bosses in the school. It advises them about dealing with other members of staff, for example, when trying to enforce a policy about dress, or when making confidential reports about other members of the union. It implicitly acknowledges a conflict of interests, and is keen to help the heads through these awkward situations.

The NUT also allows headteachers to hold dual membership of the NUT and Head Teachers Association (HTA). The Socialist Teachers Alliance (the other 'left' grouping besides Rank and File) does not argue for heads out of the union, but merely for no dual membership. If heads prove themselves by remaining loyal members of the NUT, they must be OK! Of course it is easier to argue this and there are undoubtedly "progressive" heads who we can pull with us on educational issues. But if we force heads to choose between the HTA and the NUT, we cannot simply assume that it is the progressive ones who will choose the NUT.

It is the heads' attitudes to trade unionism that is most important, and unfortunately, being educationally progressive does not necessarily lead to being a trade union militant, whatever scale you are on. It is more likely the NUT would keep the politically cute bastards, who recognise the power of the union and know the best way to deal with it is to be on the inside. From the inside they can influence policy and check up on union activities and activists in their own schools.

In school union groups the head is no ordinary member. Like any other manager he/she is anxious to control the union. In small primary schools, he/she often takes on the job of union rep, and it takes a strong teacher to vote, let alone stand for election, against the boss. The implications of the boss being the union rep are many and obvious. In larger schools too the head will often blatantly try to intimidate member, watching the way they vote etc. (The heads are not usually the reps in large schools)

The no-cover campaign (the refusal to cover for absent colleagues), illustrates some of the ludicrous conflicts of having heads in the union. Many school groups

decided to use this sanction, but then when it came to implementing it many heads backed out saying, because of their position, they didn't feel they could ever refuse to cover. Can the school union group take any sanctions against the head? No! However the head-dominated executive is always quick to take action against rank and file teachers operating sanctions without their permission.

The heads' attitude is the same whether in school or in the union—they want to be in control, and are always ready to stamp on rank-and-file action.

Because of the promotion system and widespread discrimination experienced by women in teaching, few women rise to the highest scales and headships. The overwhelming majority are on Scales 1 and 2. This discrimination at work is reflected in

the union. The union is 75 per cent female but only 6 out of 43 members of the National Executive are women. At the recent salary conference to ratify Clegg there was not one woman speaker. Our aim as Rank and File teachers must be to establish an active, organised union, whose policies reflect its largely female, classroom teacher membership. Our starting point is school-based activities, but we cannot ignore the union structure.

The expulsion of heads would not transform the union automatically into a militant union, but there is no way we can develop such a militant union whilst they remain inside, and without challenging their power. It is important that "heads out" remains one of our most prominent demands.

Pam Corr

Pam Corr is one of the two Rank and File members elected to the NUT executive.

Inside the system

Hand-outs and subsidies, as everybody knows, are one of the main things that stop Britain competing in the world. If only we were forced to pay the full market cost of the goods and services we consume then the hidden hand would sort out the problems and we would soon be as prosperous as they are in foreign parts.

Take London Transport. Subsidized to the hilt, it provides the worst and most expensive service in the world. Cut the subsidies and run it on commercial lines and you would have a system as cheap and efficient as, say, Paris, Munich or Washington.

It makes a nice little story. Unfortunately, it doesn't stand a minute's examination. London Transport is subsidised, to the tune of 26 per cent of its running costs. But Paris is subsidised to the much louder tune of 59 per cent. Munich gets a 52 percent subsidy. And even Washington, the very capital of free enterprise and market forces, gets 55 per cent.

Different sorts of societies have different types of inheritance. Under feudalism if you were born a noble you inherited both lands and rights over the people living on those lands. If you were the son of a king, you inherited special powers as well. For example, the power to cure certain diseases like Scrofula simply by means of a touch were passed on from kingly father to kingly son.

Under capitalism things are slightly

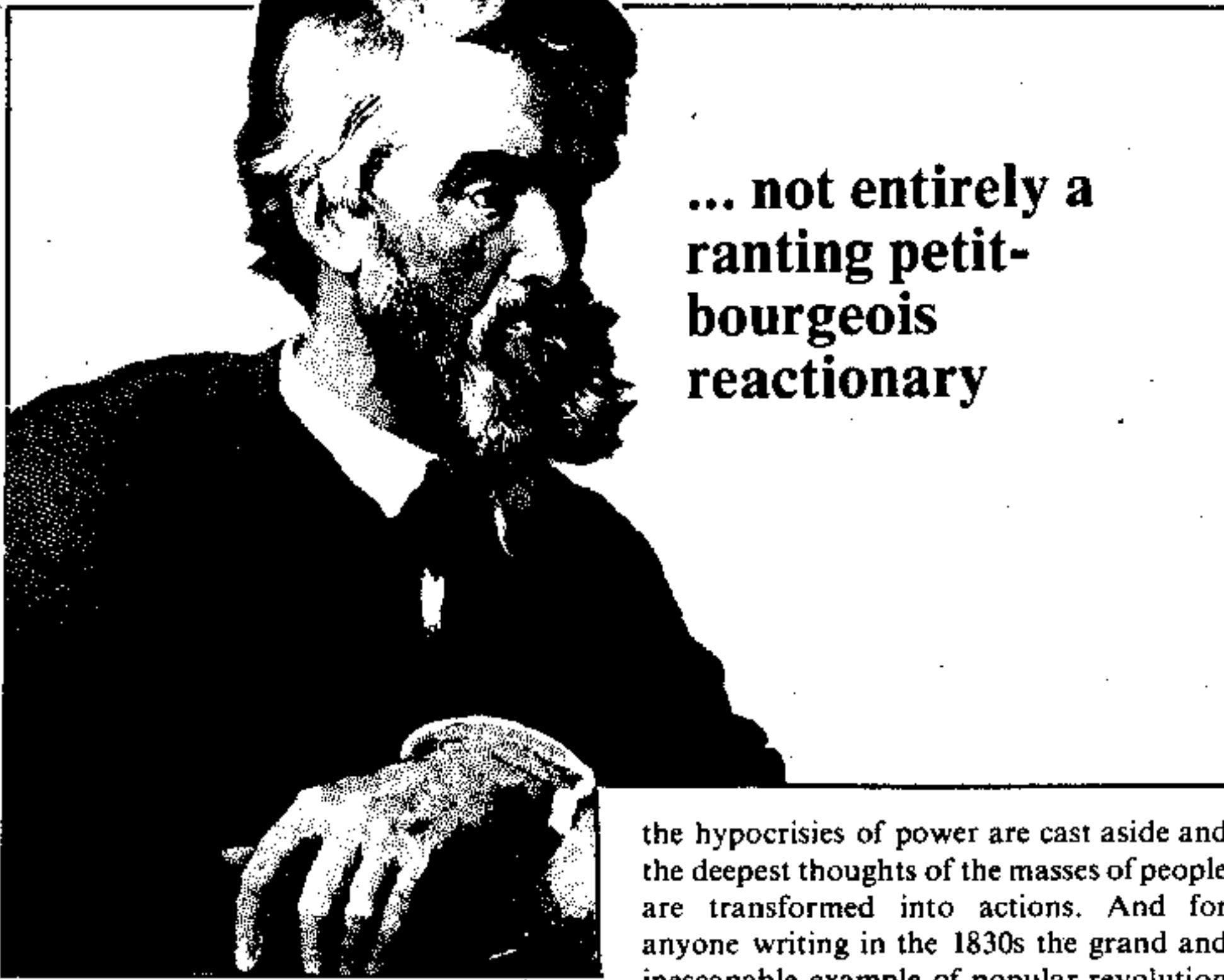
more rational. Apart from certain hangovers like the Windsors, the children of capitalists inherit wealth, but they are not supposed to inherit any special 'talents and qualities'. The money is quite enough.

In a workers' state, on the other hand, we will all inherit the right to work for others and for ourselves—which is quite the most rational way of organising things.

Or so you might have thought. However, Kim Il Sung, the President of North Korea, is 68 and is believed to be dying of cancer. This has caused a considerable amount of debate in the Korean Communist Party, who are debating the question of his successor. There are "opportunist" elements who are impeding the succession of his son, Kim Chong Il.

Pyongyang Radio has broadcast a lengthy discussion of this problem. Apparently, in the days of feudalism this idea that the 'successor may be descended from the leader' was 'reactionary and antipopular' Things, however, are rather different in a workers' state—even allowing for any bureaucratic deformations. In this case, it is quite in order since the person in question will also possess outstanding 'talents and qualities'.

The evolution of the House of Kim will undoubtedly pose serious problems of analysis. Perhaps we are on the verge of a breakthrough in Marxist science, with the discovery of the new category of a 'workers' state with feudal deformations.' The key issue will be whether the new ruler is able to cure Scrofula with a touch.



... not entirely a ranting petit-bourgeois reactionary

Thomas Carlyle was born in Scotland in 1795. His parents were not well-off but he was able to study at Edinburgh University. For many years he struggled by on literary hack work until, in 1837, his book *The French Revolution* proved an enormous success. He then spent thirty years as an eminent Victorian literary figure before declining into a protracted and unbalanced old age, finally dying in 1881.

His formative years, then, were spent in the period of rapid industrialisation and social conflict which we call the Industrial Revolution. The human consequences of the development of modern capitalism form the pole around which his major works were written.

A lot of his writing was very nasty indeed. He made racist attacks on the Jews and the Irish. His *Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question* is a great deal worse even than its title suggests. His essay *Shooting Niagara*, written as a response to the extension of the franchise in 1867, is a savage diatribe against democracy. His *History of Frederick the Great* was Hitler's favourite book. Many of his ideas were remote ancestors of modern fascism.

But Carlyle's work is not only and entirely the ranting of a petit-bourgeois reactionary against the age of industrial capital, and it would be quite wrong to say that he was himself a fascist. There is also in Carlyle an acute perception of the human cost of capitalism, its reduction of human relations to the 'cash nexus' and the consequent misery and starvation which flows from the drive to accumulate. So he, together with other writers of his time, raged against *laissez faire* and the belief that unfettered free competition was for the benefit of all. And he raged against the falsities and formulas behind which people seek to hide the truth about the world.

And so his attention was drawn to revolutions, those great periods in history in which

the hypocrisies of power are cast aside and the deepest thoughts of the masses of people are transformed into actions. And for anyone writing in the 1830s the grand and inescapable example of popular revolution was the French Revolution which put an end to the Eighteenth Century 'so opulent in accumulated falsities'. And out of that interest and attention Carlyle wrote *The French Revolution* which, alone among his many books, deserves to be read today by those who want to change society.

Half of his fascination with that revolution was a fear that it might be repeated. He wrote in his essay on *Chartism* that: 'These Chartism, Radicalisms, Reform Bill, Tithe Bill ... are *our* French Revolution: God grant that we, with our better methods, may be able to transact it by argument alone.' But the other half of his fascination was a genuine one which tried to understand how and why a great despotism came to be overthrown. And in that effort he was forced to abandon his normal fascination with the doings of Great Men and look at the real motor of history—the needs and actions of the peasants, artisans and workers, the *sans-culotte* mob of the popular legend.

The book opens with a description of upper class France enjoying its pleasures and arguing politely and ineffectually with each other, but beneath them:

'With the working people ... it is not so well. Unlucky! For there are from twenty to twenty-five million of them .. Masses indeed: and yet ... the masses consist all of units. Every unit of whom has his own heart and stands covered there with his own skin, and if you prick him, he will bleed.'

It is these people, this 'dumb generation' who will drive the revolution forward. The leaders and the orators and the statesmen will try again and again to compromise with the King, the aristocrats and the hordes of reaction. But they will be swept aside by the energy and determination of the masses.

Even the trusted recourse of military reaction the "whiff of grapeshot" will be ineffectual because:

'Good is grapeshot, Messieurs, on

one condition: that the shooter also were made of metal! But unfortunately he is made of flesh; under his buffs and bandoleers, your hired shooter has instincts, feelings, even a kind of thought It is his kindred ... that shall be whiffed; he has brothers in it, a father and a mother ... Your cause is not the soldiers cause.'

It is the poor who storm the hated Bastille while the deputies sit quivering in their chamber. A few months later, threatened with starvation and growing counter-revolution, it is the women of Paris who take the initiative and march to Versailles to force concessions from the King. When the King tries to escape from Paris to the army, it is the half-armed peasants and towns people of the village of Varennes who stop him and face down the royalist troops sent to his rescue. The masses go on to storm the Tuileries, smash the compromises of the rich and usher in the Republic. And they will be the raw Republican volunteers who will stand in the mud at Valmy and outfight the drilled veterans of the kings of Europe bent on a restoration. They are the force who will end for ever the old France.

Carlyle brings out the difference between the energy and abilities of a revolutionary class and the power of reaction by comparing their opposing armies:

'Such a fire is in these Gaelic Republican men ... Not scutcheons, with four degrees of nobility; but *ci-devant* (former) Sergeants, who have had to clutch a Generalship out of the cannon's throat ... Rash Kings, such fire have ye kindled; yourselves fireless, *your* fighters animated only by drill-sergeants, mess-room moralities, and the drummer's cat!'

But the masses are not the final inheritors of the French Revolution. The victors are the rich, the bourgeoisie, the bankers speculators and the general class of capitalists. Carlyle ends his history with the defeat of the *sans-culottes* at the hands of the 'gilded youth' and the cannons of the ambitious generals. They have swept away the remains of feudal France but they are not strong enough to mould the new France in the image of the poor. And beyond that point Carlyle is unable to go. His criticism of bourgeois society stops short of the recognition of the possibilities of a new revolution in which a new poor, this time an industrial working class, will carry through the desires of the inarticulate masses of past history and build a society of true freedom and equality.

The greatness of Carlyle's book, the factor which makes it unique in English prose right up to *Homage to Catalonia*, is that, for all its weaknesses and limitations, it does have a grasp of the dynamics of society in revolt. No doubt the professional historians treat it with scorn. No doubt Carlyle intended it as an awful warning to the rich of the day. But what he actually wrote can be put to other uses. We can get from it some sense of the ways in which ordinary men and women can take on the mighty of the earth and bring them down into the dust in which they belong.

Colin Sparks

Reaching for power

In the mid-sixties the British engineering firm Babcock and Wilcox was negotiating a contract with the Polish Electricity Board for the supply and installation of boilers to a Polish power station. When negotiations came to the *force majeure* clause of the contract the British negotiators asked about strikes. 'Strikes' echoed the Polish side 'Strikes? We don't have strikes in Poland.'

All that has changed. The confidence of workers has grown immensely. In 1977 the French paper *Le Monde* carried an interview with Jacek Kuron, the leader of the Workers Defence Committee. The interviewer asked 'The Workers Defence Committee has been declared illegal by the authorities, yet it continues to exist. How do you explain this tolerance?'

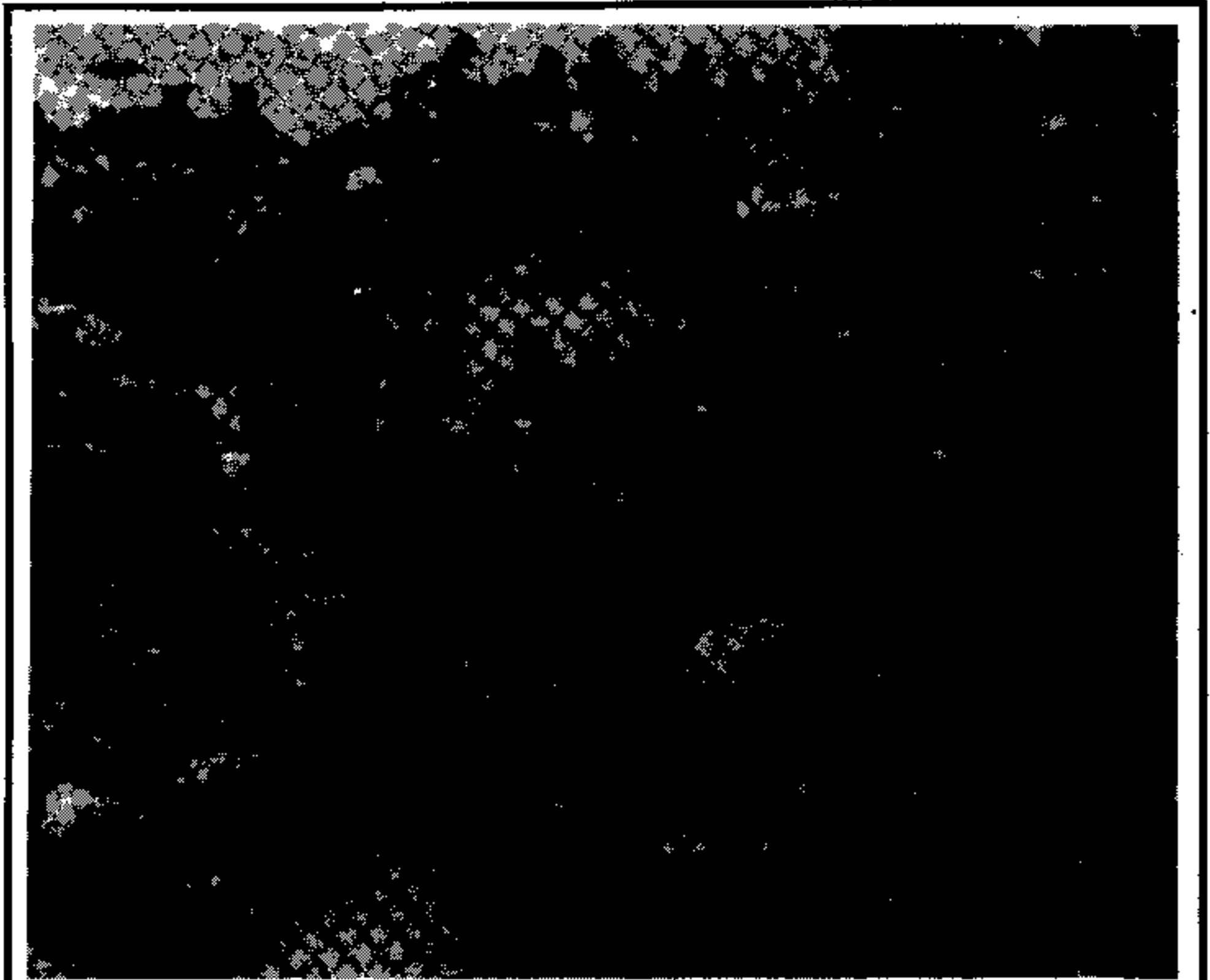
Kuron replied 'The statement of the problem needs to be inverted: it is we who tolerate the government.'

In the last three months Polish workers have shown just how acutely they are aware of that. Their escalating self-confidence and their high levels of rank-and-file organisation have forced concessions that were unthinkable even a year ago. They have demanded not only economic concessions but political reforms. And although nobody has actually mentioned the word revolution, the list of 21 demands on the table in Gdansk were not merely those for a larger slice of the economic cake. They were demands which voiced the desire for control of the whole bloody bakery.

The Polish state has found that difficult to handle. 'Strike Wave Not Political' ran the *Morning Star* headline on August 13, some six weeks after the first strikes. Confidently, it quoted a leading member of the Polish Communist Party who said, 'Workers have been seeking to redress economic grievances...None of the strikers' demands are political demands.'

Yet in a state where the government is the employer any strikes, whether for higher wages or against price increases, are necessarily political. That became increasingly obvious as workers added more and more demands for political freedoms to the list of what they want.

The strike at the giant Ursus engineering works in Warsaw was among the first. The workers at Ursus have a long history of militancy. It was Ursus workers who tore up the railway lines between Warsaw and Moscow when they came out on strike in 1976 against price rises. And true to their militant tradition they began to strike on July 1, the first day that prices were increased. Rumours of price increases and lack of official information caused the work stoppages. The absence of meat in the canteen on the following day was an added factor. One after the other each section in the works went out on strike.



Workers at the Lenin Shipyard in Gdansk

Only the casting plant remained working — and that because the sudden switching off of the furnaces can destroy them.

Everywhere in the works it was the same story. Workers stopped production, switched off the machines and gathered in small groups on the shop-floor to formulate their demands. Representatives of management and party activists began to approach groups of workers calling on them to resume work. Party activists appealed to the conscience of fellow party members. But the workers held firm. Then threats of sacking and prosecution were issued. The gates of the plant were closed and telephone lines to the outside were cut.

In each shop the workers proceeded to elect representative committees. Management met them with lectures about how western workers were even worse off than they. They made vague promises for pay awards for 'those who deserve it'. It was a confusing situation. Workers in the power plant were, however, better organised. They drew up a list of demands and gave management an ultimatum 'two hours or we turn all the power off'. Management made threats and attempted to withhold the written guarantee of no victimisation. But eventually they conceded. The workers gained all their economic demands and a promise of no reprisals. It was a staggering achievement.

The strikes rolled on, affecting all of Warsaw and other towns as well. Large industrial enterprises were followed by the service sectors and smaller industries.

And everywhere the workers won all their demands immediately. Some gained wage increases as high as 20%.

By the time the strikes had spread to the city of Lublin in eastern Poland, a package of four or five demands was standard procedure. Workers wanted wage increases, higher family allowances on a par with police and the army, an end to special shops, and guarantees of no reprisals. In Lublin, too, came the first demands for free elections and for reform of the trade union structure.

When the strikes had spread as far as the northern port town of Gdansk, the strikes were openly political. The level of rank-and-file organisation of the strikes was also correspondingly higher. Individual workplace committees were elected and they in turn sent representatives to the integrated strike committee based at the Lenin shipyard in Gdansk. Strikers demanded one set of negotiations and one settlement for everybody.

It is not surprising that the strike reached its highest level in Gdansk. Workers in Gdansk have an impressive record of organising. The movement for Free Trade Unions has gained considerable support there during the past year and has had notably more success in Gdansk than in Silesia, where attempts to form independent trade unions met with much less response.

Earlier this year workers at the Lenin yard took strike action to defend crane driver Anna Walentynowicz. Anna was a founding member of the 'Free Trade Union of the Baltic Seaboard' and

management attempted to victimise her by having her removed to another yard. The workers' action prevented that.

Another militant example of workers' organisation in the area occurred last November. KOR members at the port organised a demonstration to commemorate those who were killed during the events of 1970. Despite police harassment and arrests, between four and five thousand workers gathered. One of the speakers, Maryla Plonska, had this to say:

'If we forget December 1970, the sacrifice of those who then lost their lives will have been in vain. We must now draw the conclusion: learn to organise ourselves, defend workers' leaders, demand our rights... we are learning how to struggle in solidarity and we have learned from our mistakes.'

It was no empty rhetoric. The Gdansk workers have learnt how to organise. They have formed free trade unions, have an active KOR membership, and produce their own clandestine newspaper, *Robotnik Wybrzeza* (*Coastal Worker*).

Last year the editor of *Robotnik* in Warsaw, Jan Litynski, explained to a French reporter what kind of organisation they were aiming to build.

'We were greatly influenced by the example of the Spanish workers' commissions... by their role in the transition from dictatorship to a democratic regime... The workers' commission seem to us the best formula for genuinely working class organisation: that is to say decentralised, non-clandestine organisation, acting within the workplaces in response to precise problems and leaving behind the official trade unions.'

And if workers in Gdansk and the rest of Poland have learned to organise from the example of the Spanish workers, their own actions are in turn an inspiration to workers elsewhere. The level of rank-and-file control over the disputes has been an ideal that workers across the world are still struggling to achieve. The degree of control is perhaps best displayed by the way that negotiations were broadcast direct over the factory loudspeaker system giving workers an immediate opportunity to respond. The loudspeaker system was doubtless originally installed in order to exhort workers to ever higher feats of productivity. It is fitting that it should now be the vehicle for workers' democratic participation in negotiations. It is an example that hopefully will be initiated here. We look forward to the day when Frank Chapple's approaches to management are instantly available to his members.

If the tactics of workers are international so too are those of management. The reaction of the Polish government to the occupations of workplaces in the northern town was at first remarkably similar to the way that the

Engineering Employers Federation attempted to deal with the dozens of sit-ins by Manchester engineering workers in 1971.

In Manchester, management (and, unfortunately, the union officials) went for plant-by-plant negotiations. The policy of individual plant settlements effectively isolated the more militant factories who held out the longest and they were smashed. Polish negotiators must have been hoping for a similar victory when they offered to talk with individual workplace committees but refused to deal with the integrated strike committee in Gdansk. Unluckily for the Polish government, the Gdansk workers refused to participate in individual plant negotiations. They held out until the government was forced to meet with the integrated strike committee. That increased the strength and standing of the strike committee considerably and in the process it boosted the confidence of the workers it represented enormously.

'Until workers understand that every man removed from their ranks weakens them, until they can defend their organisations, they cannot be a true class...'

**Edmund Baluka,
1976**

The demands of the strikers have forced the Polish government to ever greater limits. Sackings of unpopular hardliners in the government (they were only appointed a few months ago), promises of trade union reform, free elections and economic concessions are much the kind of response you might expect from a western government. But for an East European government to go to such lengths rather than to attempt open repression is amazing. Clearly, the government is frightened of the workers' strength and support. Additionally, the Russian involvement in Afghanistan may make the Soviet Union reluctant to open hostilities on another front. Troops or no troops, however, the threat of repression is ever present.

Polish workers know from bitter experience in the past that any reforms they achieve will be hard to maintain. They also know that beatings up, imprisonment, brutal killings and sackings may well follow the present events. It happened in 1956, in 1970, and in 1976. The class has remained unbeaten every time it has fought. But individual leaders and militant groups of workers have suffered extreme harassment.

The June reality of physical repression is reflected in the Polish joke which

says that socialism was supposed to bring an end to the class system in Poland, but that there are still three classes in Poland — those who have been in prison, those who are, and those who will be.

The theory of state capitalism attempts to explain that reality. It says that the Russian economy and that of its satellites like Poland are determined not by workers' needs, but that the central dynamic of those societies is the drive to accumulate. Workers' needs in Poland are subordinated toward production for competition on the world capitalist market. The theory insists that the development of the state capitalist societies will inevitably force the emergence of a working class whose needs and aspirations will increasingly conflict with the priorities of the system.

The workers who took to the streets in East Germany in 1953, in Hungary and Poland in 1956, in Czechoslovakia and Poland in 1968, bore out that analysis. Writing of these events, Chris Harman said:

'They are significant because they show the bureaucratic regimes as much as the private capitalist regimes of the West to have created their own grave digger, a force that can carry through the necessary historical transformation of society: namely an industrial working class, growing in size and confidence and hostility to the present system.'

(*Bureaucracy and Revolution in Eastern Europe*, p.270-271)

Over the past decade the Polish working class has grown steadily in self-consciousness and in organisation. Edmund Baluka, who was chairman of the strike committee when shipyard workers occupied their yard in Szczecin in 1970, said after the repression of workers commenced in 1976:

'The Communist Party is doing its best to prevent a self-conscious organised working class from coming into being. Until workers understand that every man removed from their ranks weakens them, until they can defend their organisations, they cannot be a true class... The Polish workers are not yet a class, but they will become a class.'

In the four years since he said that (interview in *Socialist Worker*, October 1976), Polish workers have organised and developed as a class, in just the way he described. The process has been continuous and irreversible. And in the space created by the strength of the workers' movement there has been a mushrooming of many other elements of the opposition in Poland.

The growing strength of the working class is in fact the key to the growth of the opposition. There is a tendency in the Western press to trade the growth of the opposition to the influence of the Church. It is mistaken, the Church has been a conservative force in Poland despite the aspirations that many Polish

workers have towards it (see article on the Church). No element of the opposition apart from the working class has the ability to challenge the government politically or on economic policy.

As the working class progressed in self-consciousness so the rest of the opposition grew alongside. Free student committees were set up in opposition to the government controlled students union after the death of Stanislaw Pyjas, a KOR activist, beaten up and killed by the police. Students have developed from there to the establishment of the 'Flying University', which gives occasional lectures at towns all over Poland, providing an alternative analysis from that officially allowed in the universities. Peasants have also been pushing their demands for land reform. The vast peasant strikes in the past two years have undoubtedly exacerbated the already considerable food supply problems. New political parties have been launched, of the right as well as the left. All these have taken advantage of the climate created by a confident working class and a declining economic situation.

How The Workers' Movement Grew

The progress of the workers' movement has been remarkable. Isolated militancy was replaced first by spontaneous spreading of workers' actions and then by the attempts to form Free Trade unions, the co-ordination of workers' actions through the magazine *Robotnik*, finally achieving considerable degree of sophistication during the recent disputes.

In 1970 the strike at Gdansk, the shipyard occupation in Szczecin, and the subsequent strikes, notably in the town of Lodz, were obvious and organised class actions against the system. Co-ordination and tactics were developed on the spot. The ability to defend workers' leaders after the action was virtually non-existent, and for the following year members of the Szczecin strike committee were persecuted. Some disappeared in mysterious circumstances. Edmund Baluka, the chairman, fled to the west. It might have seemed that workers' organisation had been smashed. But there were signs of opposition apart from the eruption at Szczecin itself. Workers were deserting the Communist Party. At work, absenteeism reached ten per cent, and productivity began to fall. These last may have been passive forms of resistance. But other actions were also taking place. A correspondent from Poland writing in *International Socialism Journal* in 1969 already noted the phenomenon of local strikes:

'The official sources of propaganda do not give out news of the sporadic strikes, but news of them is widely circulated among the people. As a result of the situation in Poland many of them are politically motivated, less frequently they touch the question of the organisation of production.

'In some factories solidarity strikes have blown up. One of the news-

papers in Krakow included a note about dozens of people reporting to first aid centres after being mauled by dogs at their place of work. This was the only official report of the brutal breaking up of a strike in one of the largest steel combines in Nowa Huta (a large industrial area just outside Krakow)!'

'... we are learning how to struggle in solidarity and we have learned from our mistakes.'

**Maryla Plonska,
1979**

Censorship has made it impossible to establish just how high the level of strikes and militant worker activity was. The extent of the censorship was revealed when a Polish censor defected to Sweden in 1974. He took with him internal censorship documents covering a two-year period. They included the day-to-day directives to censors as well as instructions governing the general principles of censorship in Poland. Some of the directives give an insight into the atmosphere of Polish life:

'No permission should be given to the publication in the mass media of the figures showing the rise of alcoholism in the country.'

'All figures of health and safety at work and of accidents in any sectors or branches of the economy are withheld.'

'All criticism of income and social policies, including wage claims is forbidden. This also refers to social services such as pensions, grants, leaves of absence, health care etc.'

'Attempts to link socially pathological phenomena with the restrictions put upon religion and the ousting of religious values must be excluded.'

'In reports about the Polish exhibition in Moscow one should avoid excessive emphasis on the successes of a particular exhibitor, since this may suggest that some Polish products caused a furore in Moscow and were not previously known on the Soviet market.'

And what, one wonders, motivated the following instruction — vanity or rapid changes of personnel?

'All photographs of the Party Secretary and other Party leaders must be submitted to the Press, Radio and TV section of the Central Committee before publication.'

But despite censorship, underground publications like *Zapis* had a limited circulation and the work stoppages continued. Repression, poor economic progress and the increasing bureaucratisation of Polish life built up a huge

head of steam. When price rises of up to 30 per cent were announced in June 1976 workers took immediate action. Again, it is difficult to estimate the extent of the strike action in June 76. But what is important is that the actions were not limited simply to work stoppages. Workers had learned the need to generalise and as soon as production stopped, workers were dispatched elsewhere to spread the action. And as in 1956 and in 1970, the slogans and demands moved rapidly beyond the economic to the political. In the town of Radom the action was particularly widespread and violent.

On the morning of 25 June the Walter Metal Works went on Strike. A management representative went to the workers and was confronted with a shower of questions about price rises. He was unable to answer so he began to back out. The workers followed him. A crowd of some 1000 people gathered in the courtyard. A strike was declared and it was decided to tell the whole of Radom about it. Workers went off on battery powered trucks to tell other factories. A huge procession marched through the town and on to the Party headquarters. After a long wait a small delegation entered the building. Only a few low-ranking staff were there. Stones began to be thrown and windows broken. Several people got into the buffet and found cold ham and other meat. 'Look how the guzzlers live,' they shouted. This infuriated the crowd, who began to invade the building and ransack it. A fire was started, and a barricade was built in the street to prevent the fire brigade from getting to the building. One of the fire engines was set alight.

The victimisations following the strike were brutal. But the events themselves were enough to illustrate the growing dissatisfaction and the increasing level of organisation among workers.

For the first time a defence committee was set up in Warsaw to fight the victimisation nationally. Formed of intellectuals from two main tendencies, students from 1968 and individuals from the Polish Socialist Party, the most prominent member and chief spokesman was Jacek Kuron. The committee began to issue regular duplicated bulletins inside Poland. It also got publicity in the West.

The political ideas and direction of KOR, however, pretty soon emerged as far different from the revolutionary ideas which Kuron himself had held in the 1960s. Then, he and his co-writer Modzelewski had written that they were against the parliamentary system. They proposed

'The regular participation of the working class through its Councils, parties and trade unions, in economic and political decision making at all levels. In a system of workers' democracy, the working class will be organised into councils and have at its disposal the material basis of society's existence — the product of its own

labour.

'In a workers' democracy it will be impossible to preserve the political police or the regular army in any form... The working class should be armed... The working class will always be ready to defend its own state and its own revolution...'

By 1979 his view had changed greatly. He published his view of the opposition in the KOR information bulletin:

'We are threatened with an explosion of popular anger on a larger scale even than the combined force of June 1956, December 1970, June 1976 and March 1968. As we know, such a movement could easily become a national tragedy — in all probability a struggle with an eventual armed Soviet intervention.

'...From time to time, risings, revolts and revolutions do occur. I have no doubt that we all see rioting as an evil which we should try to prevent... I have no doubt that the whole democratic opposition wishes to realise its aspirations for parliamentary democracy and independent statehood gradually, by peaceful means. Attempts to smash the system right now I regard as adventurism.'

Yet although the ideas had changed from revolution to reform, the centrality of workers remained. Kuron and his colleagues were careful not to claim to speak on behalf of the workers, but they directed their energies into workers' defence, into writing a paper for workers (*Robotnik*), full of workers' experiences and to encouraging the formation of independent workers' organisations and free trade unions. It is that organisation which has helped to generalise workers' experiences. During the recent disputes *Robotnik* was the only source of information about strikes for workers and press alike. The 21 demands of Gdansk workers reflect the mainstream of KOR's position.

As it stands, KOR's programme' aims for what looks like a radical blow at the system — free trade unions and free elections. But despite the fuss made by the Polish and indeed the Western press, these demands fall far short of a fundamental change in the system. They leave aside the crucial question of who controls the state apparatus — the police, the military, the army, the party hierarchy. Indeed there even appears to be some illusion in members of the government. Kuron himself has said of Gierk:

'The present rulers have created a type of apparatchnik that does not know how to hold discussions with the people. When problems arise, he goes into hiding. Mr Gierk himself does know how to make contact, but he is the last or almost the last to do so. With one or two exceptions none of our leaders know how to talk to a strike committee. Believe you me, I am well placed to know it. I was brought up an apparatchnik.'

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that

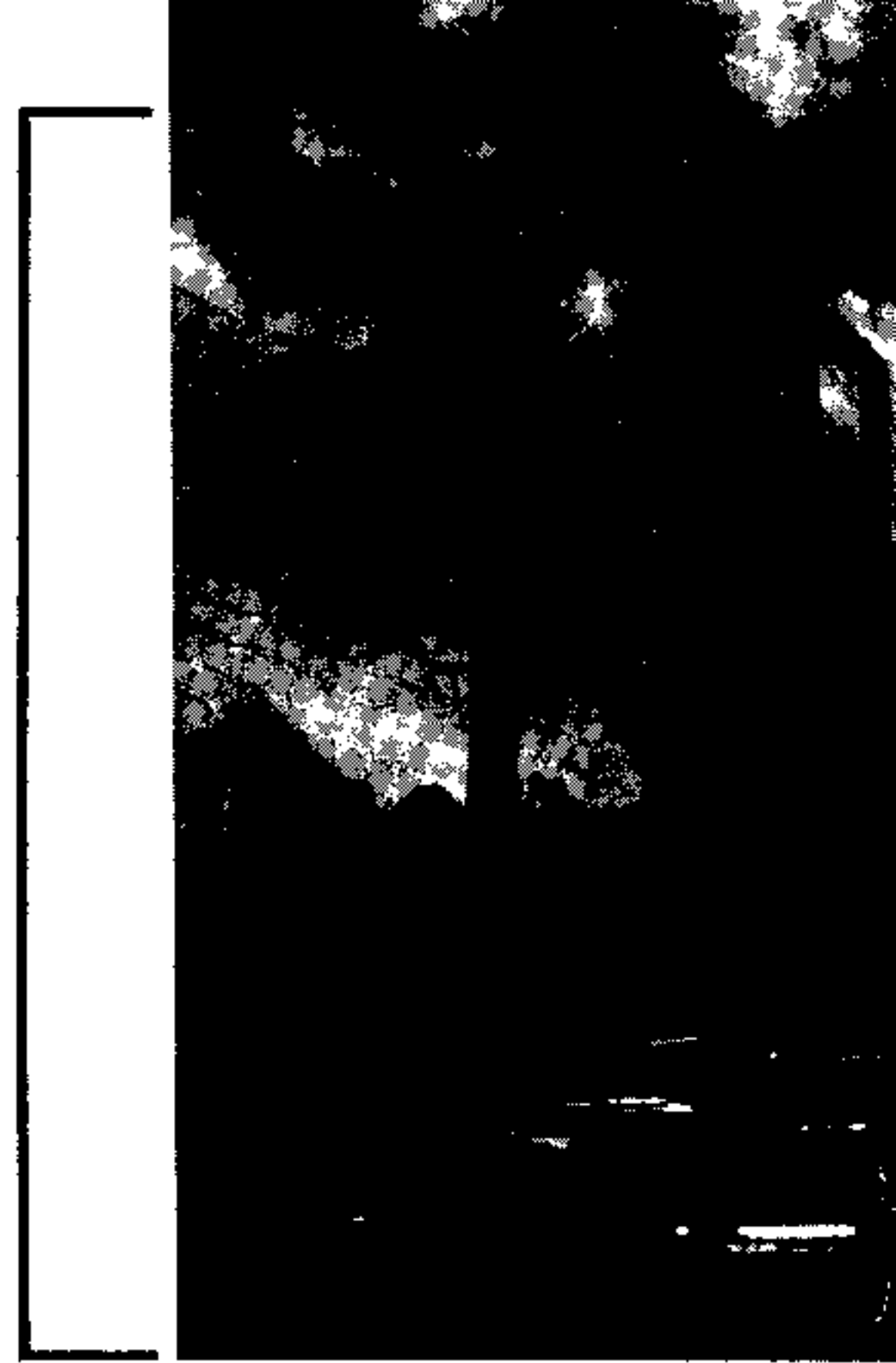
although the present demands have been won there are so many sceptics. 'How long will it last' is the most frequent comment by Poles on the settlement. And indeed, if the police structure, the army and the censorship machine are not dismantled, what guarantees are there that trade unions can remain free? The answer to that question depends both on the government and on the workers' movement.

The government has greater problems to solve. Many of the dozens of strikes in the past two years have been over increased work norms, compulsory overtime working, unpaid wages, poor wages, wage reductions, as well as unfulfilled work norms resulting from irregular supplies and poor quality raw materials. Poland's increasing economic crisis will only exacerbate those problems. And other elements of the opposition have been waiting to see what happened to the workers. They too will now want their settlement. The peasants want land reform, and the students want an end of party hegemony in education and intellectual thought. Right wing parties want alternative economic policies. They all form an increased pressure on the system.

As yet there is no revolutionary tendency among the workers' movement in Poland. Censorship, limited access to Western ideas, and the threat of the Russian invasion are all factors which contribute to that absence. It is to be hoped that that will begin to change in the coming period. The free trade unions, greater contacts with trade unionists in the West and with their ideas, and the increasing problems of the economic system itself are all pressures towards a revolutionary strategy.

Whatever the limitations of the present settlement the gain is enormous. It is impossible to assess just how much the workers have gained from forcing a totalitarian regime into the present concessions. The heady feeling of power which must have overtaken the workers sitting in the Gdansk shipyard will not be forgotten overnight. It may well be a springboard for the development of ideas towards a revolutionary workers' movement that can break the combined stranglehold of the Church and KOR in the opposition. For that is the only way forward. The Polish events have shown clearly how Gierk, like other government leaders the world over, has increasingly less room to manoeuvre. He is caught in the downward spiral as the world economic crisis drags Poland down with it. No one can miss the significance of the Polish strikes. The Polish government has shown itself to be part of the same ruling class that oppresses all workers internationally. In responding to it Polish workers have spoken the same language as the language of resistance. Their actions have demonstrated clearly that there is one world ruling class, one world working class and one world to win.

Anna Paczuska



State c

You still meet people who insist that the 'planned' economies of Eastern Europe cannot, by definition, run into the same crises as afflict the 'private' (more accurately, state monopoly) capitalisms of the West.

It is a contention that should have little credibility after the events that have been shaking Poland. The strikes that began in July were in direct response to price rises and to shortages of food that have hit whole areas of the country for months at a time. And these in turn were an aspect of an economic crisis that has been affecting all the East European countries.

The extent of the economic crisis

The scale of the economic crisis in Poland is shown by the accompanying block graphs. The rate of economic growth fell every year after 1976, until last year the national income fell—there was, crudely, a recession.

At the same time, Poland has been faced with mounting debts to Western banks. These had reached £8.2 billion by the end of last year, and 70 per cent of the receipts for goods Poland sells to the West go into servicing this debt. The point has been reached where the regime has to borrow over greater sums just to pay off past debts.

Elsewhere in Eastern Europe the picture has not been quite as grim as in Poland. In Hungary last year actual economic growth was about one per cent (as against a plan target of 3-4 per cent); real incomes fell by 1-1½ per cent as price rises cut into wages. In Russia the growth rate, 2 per cent, was the lowest since World War Two, and there have been authenticated reports of acute shortages of meat and other foodstuffs in Russian cities. In East Germany, 'the ambitious industrial targets announced in 1976 have all been reduced year by year' (*Financial Times*, 31-7-



Turaszow power station

capitalism in crisis

80) In Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia real wages fell. And for the six East European Comecon countries together, the average growth rate last year was only two per cent.

Overall, the situation is one in which workers have been squeezed and resentments are high. It is also one in which the bureaucracies feel that they have to squeeze workers still more, by pushing up prices and cutting into 'subsidies'.

The causes of the crisis; Marx's account of capitalist crisis focussed on two different aspects: the long term tendencies within capitalism which led to industrial stagnation and ever greater crises; and the short term factors that made the crises take on a cyclical form. On the one hand, he talked of the long term tendency of the rate of profit to fall, on the other of the way in which boom turned into slump and slump into boom.

The Eastern European economies have displayed both a long term trend towards stagnation, and short term crises when this trend becomes extremely acute.

The long term trend was already clear by the 1960s, as the following table shows:

Marx explained the trend towards stagnation for capitalism in terms of what he called 'the rising organic composition of capital'—as the surplus value extracted from workers in the past is invested in ever greater quantities in new means of production, the ratio of total investment to the number of workers grows. But it is workers, not means of production that create new value. So the cost of investment grows much more rapidly than the new value—and consequently the profits—to be obtained from it. The rate of profit, Marx argued, would tend to decline. He saw this as driving capitalism into more

and more intractable crises.

IN the case of the East European economies there has certainly been a tendency for ever larger amounts of investment to be needed to create the same amounts of new value.

Growth of national income per unit of investment, Poland:

1951/4	1955/8	1959/63
0.373	0.335	0.201

Average increase in industrial production per rouble of investment, USSR:

1951/5	1956/60	1961/5
6.4	5.1	4.7

The result of these trends was that by the beginning of the 1970s, the East European and Russian regimes had growth rates lower than some of the key western states with which they were competing (Japan, West Germany). They attempted to compensate by ploughing still more to the national income into investment: the proportion of industrial output taking the form of 'producer goods' (factories, machine tools and raw materials) grew from 70 per cent to 75 per cent in the USSR between 1950-55 and 1970, from 55 per cent to 61 per cent in Czechoslovakia, from 55 per cent to 65 per cent in Poland.

But such an increase could only be achieved by preventing real wages from rising as industrial production rose—indeed, in some cases cutting living standards as production rose. So for instance, in Poland where real wages had risen after the great strikes of 1956, they stagnated through the 1960's. When in 1970 the government tried to cut them by raising meat prices Gierek, argued with workers:

'We voted (at the party congress) for increasing living standards. These were

ignored because it was not wished to annul certain decisions on investments which were very drawn out and had to be completed'.

Cyclical crises and inefficiency

On top of the long term trend towards stagnation, the East European economies are subject to cyclical crises that have certain similarities with those in the West.

The fact of cyclical crises it has long been recognised by the more honest East European economists (even if most Western Marxists have chosen to ignore the matter): accounts of them have been provided, for example, by the Yugoslav Branko Horvat (*Business Cycles in Yugoslavia*) and the Czechs Goldman and Korba (*Economic Growth in Czechoslovakia*). These have pointed out that in the 1950s and 1960s the cycles were more marked than those in many Western countries.

The pattern goes like this. For two or three years those running the economies assume that they can achieve very fast rates of economic growth; vast new investments are undertaken, new construction sites proliferate and large numbers of new workers are taken on. Then it is suddenly discovered that the resources do not exist within the country to finish all these new investments. Some are abandoned for the time being (leading to a massive waste of potential wealth); some are finished by importing from abroad the necessary resources (so creating balance of payments deficits); some are finished by diverting to them goods which were meant for workers consumption (meaning that prices rise and/or consumer goods and basic foods disappear from the shops—in either case, real wages fall).

The fast rates of economic growth boasted of only months before give rise to very low, or even nil, rates of growth and a general sense of crisis. Promises made to workers of higher wages are replaced by wage controls, attempts to push up prices, the disappearance of basic goods from shops, and continual calls for 'realism' and sacrifice from the regime.

As with the cynical crisis in the West, the Eastern crisis does not last forever. Eventually growth is resumed again (although as we have seen, at ever slower average rates). But this only leads those running the economy to dream of still more grandiose investments and to drive society towards the beginning of a further crisis.

These cyclical crises are important for two reasons.

First, they encourage chaos, inefficiency, waste and cynicism throughout society. The initial attempt to make the economy expand more quickly than can be achieved given existing resources is the opposite of real planning. When it is found that the exaggerated 'plan targets cannot be met, the bureaucrats run round like lunatics, chopping and changing on a monthly a weekly or even a daily basis the goods with particular industries and plants are expected to produce. No-one, manager or worker, knows what they might be expected to produce at short notice, and deliberately conceal from

those above them the resources available for production so as to give themselves leeway when the changes are announced. The result is the proliferation of inefficiency and waste throughout the economy that is often noted by economists and even party leaders.

Second, the cynical way in which the symptoms of crisis appear means that the tensions in society grow very intense for a period, then seem to die down, only to re-emerge in a more intense form at a later stage.

A final point needs to be made in relation to the cyclical aspect of the crisis: its cause. The East European economists who have drawn attention to the crisis have not usually come to term with this. Yet it is not too difficult to locate.

All the East European economies are relatively small compared to their main competitors: the Polish shipbuilding industry is a midget compared to Japan; the Czechoslovak car industry is not in the same league as General Motors; even the whole Russian economy is smaller than the US with which it is in military competition. In order to survive in international economic and military competition, the industries of each East European state have to engage in a level of investment comparable to that of much bigger rivals, even if this is beyond what can really be sustained by the national economy. Hence the continual tendency for the over-ambitious plans that begin the cycle. The crises are a by-product of participating in a world capitalist economy. For an elaboration of this argument, see my two articles, *Poland and the Crisis of State Capitalism* in IS (old series) 92 and 93)

Borrowing their way out of trouble.

We have seen how the growth rates of the East European states had fallen to below the level of some of their Western competitors by 1970. The problem tended to be most severe for the relatively more advanced Eastern states. In Bulgaria, Rumania and Russia there tended then still to be some untapped reserves of raw materials and labour (in the countryside); things tended to be much tighter in Czechoslovakia (where economic crisis had already helped precipitate an acute political crisis in 1967-9), Hungary, East Germany and Poland. When Polish workers took the country to the edge of a general strike in 1970-71, it became clear of the rulers of these countries that any further attacks on living standards was very dangerous.

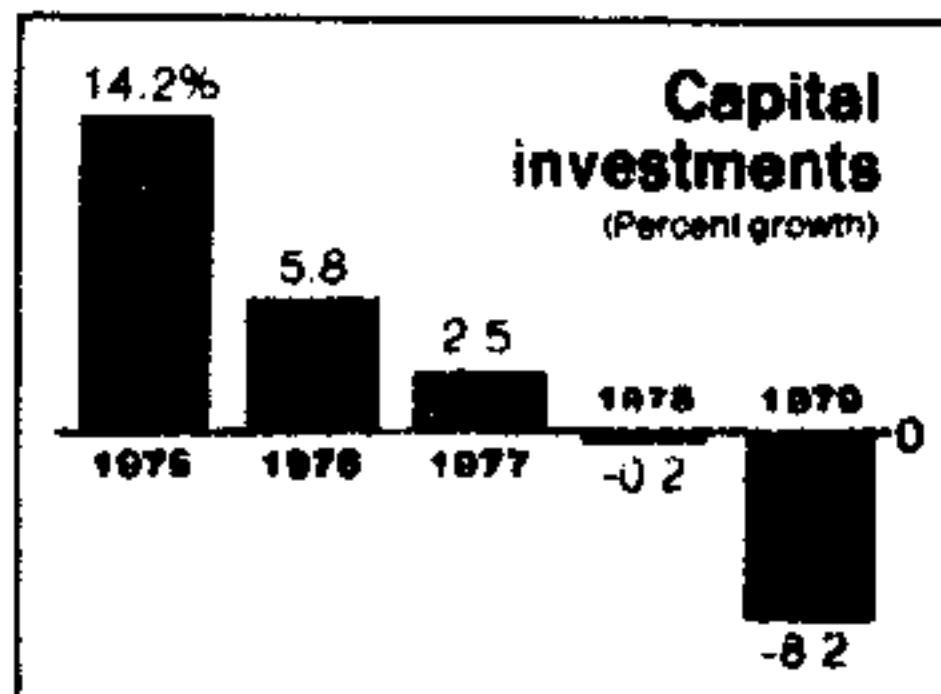
It was then that the Polish leaders, followed by the Hungarians and to a considerably lesser extent the Czechs, turned to the Western banks for a way out of their difficulties. They seem to have had unbounded belief in the ability of western capitalism to go on expanding indefinitely: they began borrowing on an ever-increasing scale to build vast new industries, on the assumption that there would be no difficulty in selling the products of these industries in the West a few years later. In this respect, they behaved just like any Western company that borrows from the banks to finance an expansion of output during a boom.

At the same time they bought off some of the discontent of the workers by allowing increases in living standards (although these were not nearly as high as often claimed). It was this that allowed the Polish leadership to get away with victimising in various ways many of the leaders of the strikes of 1970-71

IN the early and mid-70s Poland seemed to have achieved a new stability. Very high levels of economic growth were achieved, the bureaucracy gained new faith in itself, and the workers seemed contented.

But all this rested upon a trebling of imports from the West: at a time when exports did not even double; the difference had to be paid for out of the loans.

When the Western economy went into a recession in 1973-4, it should have become clear to Poland's rulers that they were not going to be able to pay off these loans to the West merely by selling the goods produced by the massive new investments. But for more than two years they did nothing, still believing that the Western crisis could not last long. Then in the summer of 1976 they tried to take the only remedial action that seemed open to them—they raised prices of basic goods. But once again they were faced with massive strikes that repression could not smash. And once again they had to rely on loans to get them out of their difficulty.



They were effectively gambling on a further western boom to solve their problems. It is this which has led them to the present impasse—an impasse that could be predicted back in 1976:

'The result in 1978-9 could be catastrophic for the Polish bureaucracy. Many of their foreign loans will fall due just as internal inflationary pressures peak and world markets shrink. Then they will have to either turn on the workers still more viciously, risking a repetition of 1956 and 1970, or suffer a full blown recession... (*Poland and the crisis of State Capitalism, op cit*).

IN fact, over the last 18 months they have tried both tactics at once. They have forced the economy into a recession last year and this, by postponing completion of many large investments that were only half finished and prevented industries getting basic goods they had been expecting from abroad; and they have tried to push through massive cuts in real wages.

Agents and victims of the world crisis

The Polish bureaucracy is clearly suffering from the impact of the world economic crisis. This has helped push up material costs and interest charges for Polish industry at

the same time as reducing the market for Polish goods. But the bureaucracy is not simply a victim of the world crisis. It is also one of the elements—just as any individual capitalist is—producing the crisis. In 1971-3 and 1977-9 Polish bureaucracy was among those scouring the world market for raw materials and loans, forcing up world prices and so precipitating the international crisis of 1973 and 1979. Like any other capitalist its reaction to a boom was to expand flat out, without even considering whether there were the resources to maintain such a rate of expansion or whether there would be markets left to dispose of the goods produced.

But that is not all. By its holding of workers living standards below the increase in total production, it has helped to contribute to the world wide discrepancy between the expanded scale of production and the narrow limits of consumption. By its slashing of investment in an effort to balance its books, it has made that discrepancy still greater. It has contributed to creating the very situation from which its exports suffer, of too many goods chasing too little 'demand'. It has been one element in the capitalist system internationally, and has helped cause all the symptoms of crisis from which it suffers.

Prospects

The immediate economic situation gives the rulers of Poland less room for manoeuvre than in previous great crises. They are caught between the rival demands for resources arising from the need to complete huge, half finished investments, from the costs of servicing their overseas debts, and from the workers. The only ways they have of easing the pressures if they cannot cut workers' living standards is to leave the unfinished investments as they are (thus abandoning economic growth for the time being and the production of further export goods to pay off their debts) and to beg still more from the bankers.

What applies to Poland applies—although not always to the same degree—to the other East European states. The more advanced industrially have increasingly turned towards the world economy to overcome their own problems over the last 20 years, in response to the long term trend to stagnation in their economies. But this has landed them with balance of payments deficits and debts that now confront them as urgent problems in their own right. The not-as-advanced industrially were able to proceed over the last 10 years without a great degree of integration with the West, and without the huge debts. But now these—especially the USSR—find themselves with the same low growth rates that afflicted Poland a decade ago. They also find that their own workers are unwilling to suffer cuts in living standards (witness the strikes in Russia's autoplants). Yet for them the scale of the crisis in the West rules out any easy way out though further integration into the Western economies.

Such are the economic constraints—and very tight ones they are—within which the current social conflicts in Eastern Europe are being played out.

Does this mean there are no ways out for the East European regimes? Lenin once said there was no crisis which capitalism could not overcome if the working class missed its opportunity and gave the system a chance. This applies just as much to the East European state capitalisms today. If the working class fails in its defence of living standards and if the Western banks keep renewing their loans, then in a couple of years time things might start coming right for the Polish bureaucracy.

There are already a few isolated pointers as to what might happen. In recent months economic stagnation in Eastern Europe has reduced trade deficits with the West. As new very modern investments are completed, Polish exports might rise a little, even in glutted markets, because of the low wages of Polish workers.

However, none of this can take place unless the bureaucracy succeeds in disciplining the working class. Its strategy has been to divide and rule—to allow certain groups of workers to protect their living standards against the effects of crisis, while hitting other groups of workers harder than ever. That is the logic behind the moves throughout Eastern Europe to replace food subsidies that aid everyone (at least, everyone who can push or bribe their way to the front of the queues) by general price rises combined with wage rises for selected workers. Then those who work in enterprises that are profitable by world standards will get something more than a bare subsistence wage, while those who work in other ways will sink down to living standards even worse than those of the long term unemployed in the West. The 'reserve army' of the miserably paid will discipline the rest.

If it can get away with some such scheme, then the bureaucracy will have been able, like the ruling classes in the West, to use the cyclical crisis to alleviate some of its long term problems.

However, any alleviation can only be temporary. Such measures will not stop the long term pressures causing the rate of growth to decline. Nor will they stop the ever greater integration of the East European economies, with their cyclical patterns of growth and stagnation, into the boom-slump world economy. And so they will not stop a recurrence, in four or five years time, of exactly the sort of crisis we are witnessing now, with all the social upheaval it can produce.

The point is important. If the Polish workers do not succeed in breaking through this time, that does not mean the struggle is over, however stable things might appear to be in a 'couple of years' time.

But of course, it is by no means certain that the bureaucracy will even succeed in finding a way out of the impasse this time round. The workers have already shaken Polish society. Their actions may well prevent the Polish bureaucracy from resolving the crisis on its terms. And then, not only Gierek, but Husak and Kadar and Brezhnev... and Schmidt and Thatcher and Carter (or Reagan) will have cause to worry.

Chris Harman



Bishops and bureaucrats

Poland is a Catholic country. The numerous churches are packed to overflowing every Sunday in city and countryside alike. Even Party members sneak into the congregations. Religious festivals are events of national importance. Every year on the feast of the Assumption over fifty thousand pilgrims flock to the monastery at Czestochowa to pray to the black madonna — the Queen of Poland. Throughout the summer small bands of pilgrims sing their way between shrines in the Polish countryside. They carry colourful church banners adorned with flowers. These religious processions take to the streets on the feast of Corpus Christi when young girls strew flowers on the roads.

In November the cities empty as people stream out to the country towns and villages their parents came from. They pack the cemeteries where family graves are cleaned, sprinkled around with white sand and greenery, and decorated with candles. The candles burn all through the night on All Saints. Meantime the government covers its embarrassment by holding official ceremonies in honour of war heroes. The authorities have renamed it 'The Day of the Dead' and declared it a public holiday. But the attendances at government functions are sparse.

Christmas too is celebrated everywhere. The government allows women

to leave workplaces at midday on Christmas Eve in order to prepare the traditional Polish meal for Christmas.

The amazing strength of the Catholic Church in Poland has presented problems for the government ever since the establishment of the Communist regime. Right at the beginning, during the immediate post-war period, the authorities felt unable to take on the Church directly. Party members were seen in religious processions whilst all great state occasions began with the celebration of mass at Warsaw cathedral.

Of course, the popularity of the Church irked Communist leaders. But the influence of the priests and the bishops was hard to stamp out. Evin Weit, who was Gomulka's personal interpreter for many years before defecting to the West, describes an interesting scene in his autobiography. The occasion was a meeting between Gomulka and the East German leader Ulbricht in Warsaw in 1963. Gomulka began to talk about the Polish cardinal Wyszynski and about how he, Gomulka, harassed members of the Church. From time to time a Church dignitary would be refused a passport. Each time this happened, Church leaders would appeal to Gomulka. He would always reply that in this kind of matter he could only act in his function as member of the Council of Ministers or as a deputy of

the Sejm (The Polish parliament).

'Gomulka and Ulbricht laughed uproariously at this joke. Then Ulbricht explained to his host in more detail how the Communist Party organised the campaign against the Church in the German Democratic Republic. He suggested that Gomulka might follow the East German example and introduce into Poland a ceremony of Youth Dedication to act as an atheistic counterpart to Church confirmation. Ulbricht explained: 'Comrade Gomulka, we make all children take part in this Youth Dedication. We make a big thing of it with plenty of ceremony. Some take part because they want to and the rest because they are afraid. This means we have a counterweight to the activity of the Church. Why don't you do the same?' 'In our country it is not so simple,' said Gomulka sceptically.'

Gomulka was right. Religion in Poland is too deeply rooted to be snuffed out with a mere measure of ceremony and a dose of repression. The millions who mobbed the Pope on his visit to Poland last year make that quite clear. Those who packed the streets and squares of Warsaw were not just old people or peasants. There were many young people and many educated people among them. Their demonstration was a continuation of the profound religious nationalism which Poles have used for over a thousand years as a protest against oppression and occupation.

Poland is a country with no natural physical boundaries. Its history has therefore been a succession of invasions and occupations from all sides. Throughout this, the Church has remained an emblem of national resistance. During the last war over 3,000 priests were killed, many of them in the concentration camps. The persecution of priests and the persecution of the people are now synonymous in the eyes of Poles.

The Polish Church is a powerful popular force and the government has had to learn to live with it. But it is an uneasy alliance. The real feelings of many Party leaders for the Church were expressed by the Minister for Religious Affairs, Kazimierz Kakol in 1976. In a meeting with Party activists he said:

'I feel ashamed when Communists from other countries ask me why so many Poles go to Church; I feel ashamed when guests congratulate me on the spread of religion in this country...If we cannot destroy the Church, let us at least stop it from causing harm.'

Antagonism towards the Church is undoubtedly shared by many of the leading figures in the Polish government. But others are more pragmatic. They have realised that the Church has a hold over the people and can therefore be recruited to maintaining law and order. So government policy toward the Church has alternated between repression and alliance according to the composition

of the leadership and the strength of popular opposition to government policies.

In 1953, once the government had settled in and gained confidence, they arrested the Polish primate Cardinal Wyszynski. By the end of that year 8 bishops and over 900 priests had been imprisoned. The building of new churches was forbidden. But relations between church and state were to thaw following the workers' strikes in Poznan in 1956. When Gomulka came to power one of his first actions was to conclude a church/state agreement, which, among other things, allowed the incorporation of religious education into the school timetable. The concession was a shrewd investment. When in 1957 students began to organise protest activities against the banning of the independent publication *Po Prostu*, it was Cardinal Wyszynski who did Gomulka's work for him. He appealed for calm and condemned the demonstrations.

Gierek is also aware of the Church's power. When he came to power in 1971 the new administration appealed to the Church for support. In return religious education, which had been made illegal in 1961, was allowed again in 1973.

The Church is no naive recipient of this manoeuvring. Conscious of its power base, but at the same time anxious to retain stability and order, it has striven to defuse the independent workers' movements, while ostensibly championing opposition to Communism. It has done this by appealing for concessions *on behalf of* the workers rather than by stressing the need for self-organisation. Indeed, it has repeatedly emphasised its own responsible role.

This philosophy was illustrated in speeches made by Church leaders during the aftermath of the 1976 events. The Church hierarchy championed the cause of the oppressed workers and encouraged people to organise financial aid for the families of those workers arrested and imprisoned following the strikes in Radom and Warsaw. In a speech made to the pilgrims at Czestochowa, Cardinal Wyszynski declared that workers deserved enough to eat and that their cause was just. But he went on to allay any fears that the government had about the role of the Church:

'I often repeat that there is no reason to fear either the Church or the Bishops or the clergy of Poland, because by the will of the Creator they are allies of divine order and in consequence of economic order.'

Later that year in his Christmas Day sermon he again stressed the mediating role of the church:

'Let no one think that the Bishops embarked on a struggle against the system. No, they only recalled the Rights of Man, of the family and citizens in their country. These are the only objectives that guide us. We

cannot accept comments appearing in particular in the foreign press, which scent political motives in everything we do...We do everything in our power that our country may be calmer, better, quieter...'

The thrust of the church campaigns has remained conservative and religious despite its sympathy for the 'just demands of the workers'. Continually concerned about hard work, productivity and order, the church, a sceptic might conclude, appears to demand better wages and more food simply in order that workers may produce better. Similarly, demands for better housing appear as much tied up with the church's concern over the low birthrate and the need to oppose abortion, as with a genuine concern about the material welfare of workers themselves.

It is evident that however sympathetic individual priests may be toward workers' organisations, church leaders themselves steer a fine course between verbal support for workers and commitment to as little active support and encouragement as possible. Yet while the role of the church within the opposition is vetted carefully (and cynically) from above, millions of Poles look to the church and to catholicism as a bulwark against the Communist regime. For workers, the singing of religious hymns is an act of rebellion. The Gdansk shipyard workers celebrated mass in their occupied yard and hung a picture of the Pope out over the wall of their occupation. It was an act of defiance as much as an expression of religious fervour. For Poles, religion is an expression of Polish nationalism directed against the Soviet system and those who impose it upon them from Moscow.

Recent events have shown that whatever the role of the church hierarchy itself, the workers' opposition has to voice the demand for religious freedoms. Any emergent workers' movement cannot win the allegiance of the mass of workers unless it does so.

Yet the incorporation of the demands of the church into the list of demands for free trade unions and more democracy, could, in the long run, be a factor preventing the workers' movement from developing as a radical force for change. An independently organised workers' movement challenges the authority of the government. Equally, it challenges the ideological hegemony of the church within the opposition.

The church will undoubtedly use its hold in the opposition movement to damp down the militant demands of the workers. Neither church nor state wants radical change *from below*, and they will cement an alliance with each other rather than risk the insurrection. That is why the official statement from the Polish Catholic Church on August 22 predictably sympathised with the workers but warned that prolonged disputes would only be against the workers' interests in the end.

Anna Paczuska

What happens next?

The men (and they are nearly all men) who rule over Eastern Europe are in a dazed shock. They have been shaken as nothing has shaken them since the convulsions that the Russian empire in 1956. Options are in short supply as the Polish bureaucrats make concessions they vowed never to make and the rest pray that their workers do not hear about.

The return to work by the Gdansk workers has provided a breathing space—but only a breathing space—for them to consider what to do.

Their instinct will be to do what they did in 1956—to give way before the mass movement now in order to recoup ground in a few months time when that movement has receded.

It is worth recalling just how much ground was given in 1956, after the uprising in the city of Poznan had rocked the country. Those who had been arrested in Poznan were released, the party leadership handed over power to a completely new team led by Gomulka, the Russian head of the Polish armed forces was forced out, Gomulka gave orders for the army to open fire on any Russian troops to enter the country without permission, there were tumultuous demonstrations of hundreds of thousands in Warsaw, the press censorship collapsed, workers councils sprang up in the factories and were officially recognised, the old union leaders were forced to resign, the old youth organisation of the regime fell apart, the right to strike was taken for granted ('We do not want to resort to administrative means when workers stop work ... depriving workers of the right to strike'—Gomulka May 1957), there were even relatively free parliamentary elections.

The Western press was elated, singing the praises of the 'Spring in October', and even gullible (and theoretically confused) anti-Stalinist socialists from *Tribune* to Ernest Mandel, lauded Gomulka's Poland.

Yet within months, the police were being used to break strikes again, left dissident

papers like *Po Prostu* were banned, critical discussion clubs were broken up, the unions and the youth organisation were back under tight state control, the workers councils were denied any power.

In all the turmoil and all the elation, the levers of bureaucratic class rule—the mechanisms of real economic control, the 'armed bodies of men' and the party apparatus that bound the two together—remained intact, ready to reassert themselves.

So far, this apparatus of control has been less damaged this time round than it was in 1956. The censorship has not collapsed. There are no *legal* publications, acting as *Po Prostu* and other papers did, as mouthpieces for dissent. The powers and structures of the police have not been touched.

Gierek's replacement by Kania appeared a model of smoothness compared with the paralysing faction fight that brought Gomulka to power.

But it will not be that easy for the bureaucracy to repeat history.

Workers have memories of the promises of 1956 and the lesser promises of 1970. They just do not trust the bureaucracy. Significantly, in 1956 there were still limited mobilisations of the workers directed by sections of the bureaucracy against rival sections. Today, the workers have their own leaders, distinct from all sections of bureaucracy.

And the bureaucracy does not have the economic reserve resources that enabled it to buy the acquiescence of workers after 1956 with big increases in real wages. It can only begin to pay off its foreign creditors if it can raise prices to match wage increases.

Such difficulties may tempt some of the bureaucrats to flirt with another option. They might try to make a virtue out of necessity, to accept the independent trade unions with the intent of creating within them very quickly a layer of full time officials who will work with them to stabilise Polish society.

The example they would copy would be

that of Spain after the death of Franco, when life-long fascists like Suarez signed the Pact of Moncloa with previously persecuted Communists and Socialists. Recognition of the opposition and the workers' movement was exchanged for guarantees from its leaders that the structures of the state would be left intact and wages held down.

But there are powerful obstacles to success for this tactic as well. The Polish workers' leaders have just been thrown up by the strikes; they are not part of structured, disciplined organisations that can bind workers to any agreements they make, as in Spain. The economic difficulties facing the Polish bureaucracy—despite the array of Western loans designed to help it out—are much greater than those facing Spanish capitalism in 1976. And the old structure of bureaucratic rule itself would have great difficulty in adjusting to any changes.

It is sometimes argued that the Eastern European regimes by their very nature must be totalitarian: the complete merger of state power and economic control makes this inevitable since the ruling class cannot, as in the West, divest itself of direct political power without losing its (collective) control over property.

I do not accept this view. It contains a partial truth. The more property ownership becomes entwined with the state, the more difficult it is to separate 'economics' (fighting one capitalist) from 'politics' (fighting the system). But experience in the West shows how an experienced ruling class can create state structures (whether running the SPG or the National Coal Board) that are almost completely immune from influence by those who cast votes in elections. Those who control the structures gain legitimacy just as secure as those who control 'private' industry through share ownership.

However, no such structure can be stable if the economic pressures on the ruling class (from international competition) deny it the means to accede to the basic needs of the population. That is why bourgeois democracy is a rare and continually threatened species among all the more backward 'private' (more accurately, state monopoly) capitalisms, from South Korea to Brazil, from Argentina to Egypt.

The point about the East European countries is that all of them (with the partial exception of East Germany and Czechoslovakia) started off as relatively backward countries with ruling classes intent on imposing a very high level of accumulation. It was this that led to the totalitarian repressive structures.

But now the structures have a life of their own. In Poland the top levels of the bureaucracy have less and less been able to gain spontaneous enthusiasm for their goals from below. And so they have resorted to a variety of measures designed to fragment and atomise any possible opposition: a fantastically widespread system of police surveillance, the use of nationalist and anti-semitic ideologies, allowing the middle and lower ranks of the bureaucracy to engage in a vast range of corrupt practices



Gomulka in Warsaw's Plac Defilad, October 1956



(from open bribery to the use of state personnel as servants who will stand in the front of the meat queues for their masters). Those who have benefitted from this method of rule will not readily acquiesce to change (any more than the Orange order in Northern Ireland or the Mafia in Sicily will); at the same time among those who have suffered are a vast reservoir of resentments that would find an explosive outlet in any genuinely independent structure of trade unions or any uncensored press.

In Spain it was said that Suarez carried through 'democratic' reform in order to avoid a 'rupture'—an explosive break with Francoism that would have torn the state structures apart. The difficulty in Poland for the bureaucracy is that even limited reform can unleash further social pressures that can bring a rupture nearer. So real reform is unlikely. That need not, however, prevent the arguments in the traditionally fractious Polish bureaucracy causing bitter splits which will provide dissidents with greater space in which to operate.

Finally, there is the further complication of the regimes on Poland's Eastern, Southern and Western sides—state capitalism where the bureaucracy lives in fear of workers copying the Polish example. The East

'We have been witnessing the first battles of what could be the Polish revolution.'

German, the Czech and above all the Russian government will see any real reform in Poland an acutely destabilising factor on themselves. They will be doing their utmost to stop Poland following the 'Spanish' road of controlled 'democratisation'.

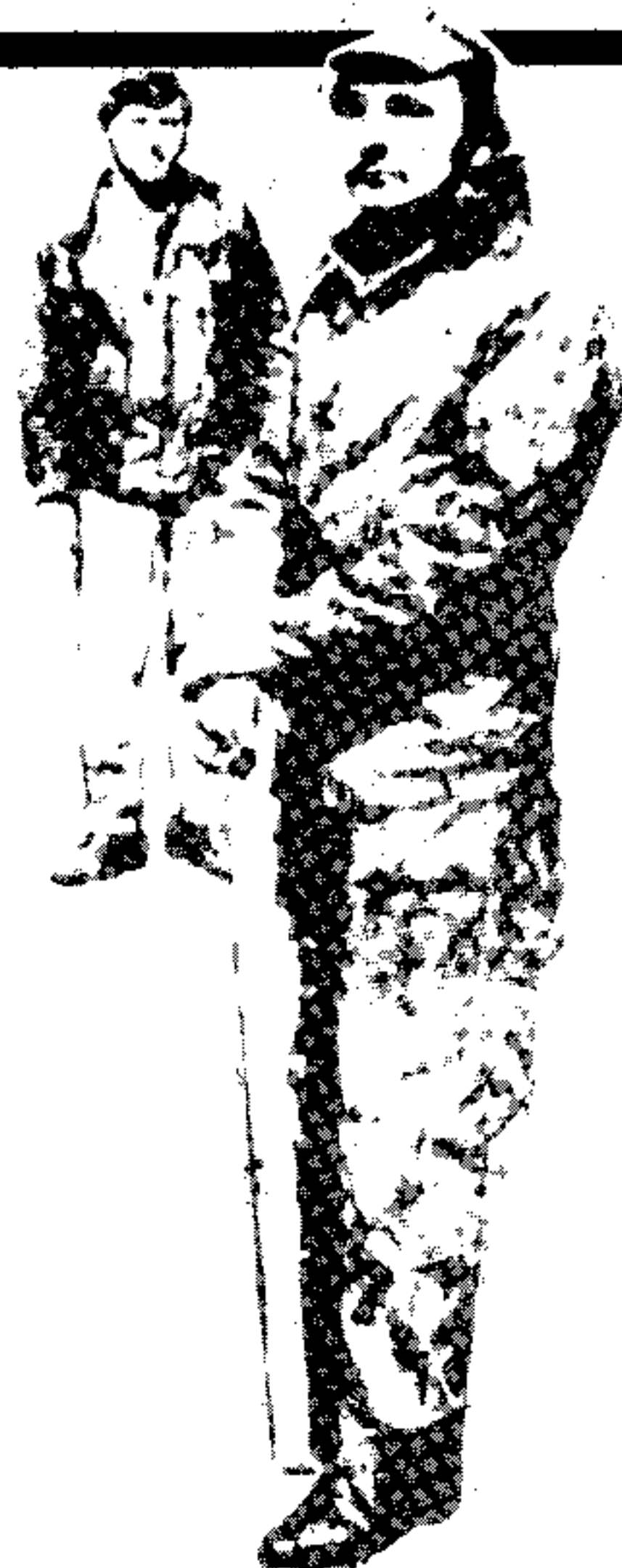
The threat of Russian intervention is often interpreted—especially by the most vocal elements in the Polish opposition around KOR—as implying there is no choice between workers accepting tight limitations on the scale of reform and witnessing the devastation that afflicted Budapest in 1956.

I believe this to be a wrong interpretation in two ways. First, and most obviously, any reform, however limited, is a threat to bureaucratic hegemony in the neighbouring regimes. If the popular movement is held in check through fear of the Russians, the Russians will exploit the loss of momentum of the movement to demand ever more watering down of reforms.

This they might be able to achieve—if the KOR arguments gain widespread acceptance. For example, the fact that the regime could not resist the demand for independent unions in a near general strike does not mean that they will not be able to whittle down the rights of the union to represent the workers in negotiations, to gain access to the plants, to hold meetings and so forth once the mass movement has been wound down for fear of the Russians. Nor does it mean that they will not be able to infiltrate some of their own people in apparently independent unions in less militant regions.

But the 'Russians' argument is wrong for a second reason. It assumes the choice now is between immediate invasion or complete self-restraint. Yet all the indications are that although the Russians are very unhappy about what is happening in Poland, they are not ready to intervene yet. Intervention always carries the risk of spreading the conflict into the rest of Eastern Europe, not containing it. The Polish army might well fight back as the Czechs never did. Widespread fighting in Poland would disrupt Russia's lines of communication to East Germany and its access to hard needed high technology equipment from West Germany. And so rather than take the risks of immediate intervention, the Russians will try to play for time.

This is something that a genuinely revolutionary opposition in Poland could exploit to spread the agitation for independent unions from the shipyards and mines to every factory, office, school and hospital, using the time to deepen its roots among the



workers to popularise the notion that the present truce between the authorities and the workers cannot last long, that at some point the structures of the state itself must be assaulted, or the movement destroyed, that when that happens only a spreading of the ferment into the other East European countries can defend the gains made so far in Poland.

For the moment there is an unstable equilibrium. The situation is a bit like that in Russia in the summer of 1905: the regime feels it can only maintain itself intact by making concessions that threaten to further weaken it, the workers have not yet the consciousness or the confidence to smash the regime. An unstable equilibrium cannot last. As Trotsky once remarked (in a different context) like a ball balanced on top of a pyramid, it must roll down one way or the other.

It will probably be months rather than weeks before either side gains the determination to bring this about. In the meantime we can expect the ferment to spread, for other social groups and for political forces (from the extreme left to the extreme right) to use the space created by the workers to assert themselves, for new sections of workers to press for the gains won in Gdansk and Silesia, for the ideas of the Polish workers to diffuse themselves across national borders into the ranks of the armies that would threaten intervention. We have been witnessing the first battles of what could be the Polish revolution. But there are many more to come before it is an accomplished fact.

Labour at the Crossroads

The TUC was very much a damp squib. But the press took the opportunity to speculate about rather more explosive happenings at the Labour Party conference, four weeks later. Jon Bearman looks at the arguments that will arise and Pete Goodwin, at rather greater length, asks who they will influence.

Bill Rodgers, Shirley Williams and David Owen, Labour's Gang of Three, have issued statements saying that this year's Labour Party Conference will mark a turning-point in the Party's history. It will be, they claim, the last chance to save the Labour Party before it finally abandons the principles that have guided it for the past three decades and plunges headlong into a leftward course that leads to sectarian irrelevance.

The Labour Left, in contrast, have countered this hysterical outburst with some serious and refined arguments. What has been taking place in the Labour Party, they point out, has very little to do with the ritual battle between Right and Left, although ostensibly it might appear like that. The debates and struggles within the Labour Party are really concerned with the development of a strategy which will overcome the deficiencies of parliamentary democracy.

Two Labour governments inside 10 years have been forced, under the pressure of international capital, to scuttle their manifesto commitments without even a sustained fight. Policies which the Labour Party conference has consistently upheld were successively betrayed. Labour governments had acted as no more than a milder variant of the Tories. And even when Labour ministers tried to remain faithful to Party policy, like Eric Heffer and Tony Benn at the Department of Industry 1974-76, they were forced aside by the leadership for undermining the confidence of the British economy.

Obviously, something was badly wrong. The problem, the Left judged, is the existence of a blockage within the Parliamentary system. Two sources of the blockage are identified: (1) lack of accountability within the Party, especially in relation to the leadership; (2) obstacles to parliamentary government. The way forward, for the Labour Party, is thus the removal of these blockages.

'How can we make the movement more effective—in setting the political objectives to be implemented by a future Labour Government?' These words, spoken by Tony Benn in the aftermath of Wilson's defeat in 1970, comprise the basic question on which the present contest turns. They show that the Labour Left are not challenging the Party's overriding commitment to reform, but the inefficiency within the present processes of reformism.

The immediate priority for the left is to extend and enforce accountability in the Labour Party through mandatory reselection of MPs, conference control of the mani-

festos and election of the leader. Then, after that, face up to the more difficult problem of the obstacles within parliamentary government.

Given that the nature of these obstacles is extra-parliamentary (banks, industry, state apparatus, etc) the Left recognise that they can only be cleared by some form of extra-parliamentary action. A new world has entered their vocabulary, 'countervailance.' Power centres outside parliament would have to be countervailed, thus facilitating the passage of legislation.

Would such a strategy work? No, it wouldn't. But we have to be very clear in our own mind why it wouldn't. Here are three reasons why, even if they win their internal reforms at this year's Party Conference, their strategy is untenable.

1) Capitalist resistance has been consistently under-rated by the Labour Left. Benn and Heffer, for example, at the Department of Industry, were completely overpowered by capitalist pressure and defiance and were in no position to respond even if they knew how to.

2) At present the Labour Left is so organis-

ationally weak that it would be impossible for it to mount a crucial mobilisation behind its policies to countervail resistance (see Pete Goodwin's article).

3) The Labour Left are committed to reform as much as the Labour Right. They do not support the overthrow of the state, the seizure of power by workers from *below* and the evolution of new democratic organs of power the keystone of any viable socialist strategy. For them the state is essentially a neutral body which could be made more accountable to the wishes of Labour ministers. They believe that sabotage from the state will be minimal.

The Labour Right's portrayal of the Left's strategy is, at most, dishonest. It is the old publicity stunt—sensationalism, concealing and distorting the real issues at stake with the Labour Left, concealing and distorting the fact that it is they and their brand of 'Gaiskellite' politics which have dominated the Labour Party for the last 30 years. In content, you see, there is nothing really new about the present Labour Left, irrespective of whether they'll ever have the chance to give it a go.

Tony Benn's Army

Stalin has not gone down in history for his witty and perceptive comments. But one he is renowned for. On being told that the Pope had made some pronouncement now entirely to his favour he replied 'And how many divisions has the Pope got?'

As the press gets well into its annual pre conference month of concern with the fortunes of the Labour Party they will be trying to squeeze every ounce of drama out of the 'Jim/Tony battle'. Revolutionary socialists however, would do better to ease up a bit on the speculation and instead rephrase Stalin's old poser. Win or lose this time, just how strong is Tony Benn's army?

There can be no doubt that on the constitutional issues at least, especially on the question of reselection, the left has the vast majority of the constituency parties. But just how strong are these?

Individual membership of the Labour Party reached its high point at the beginning of the fifties. Since then, with the occasional hiccup, it has steadily declined. Here are some of the official figures:

1952	1,014,144
1959	847,526
1962	767,459
1968	700,850
1973	665,379

After the early sixties however the official

figures do not register the full extent of the decline, because since 1963 each constituency party has had to affiliate on the basis of at least 1,000 members (until this year when the figure was changed to 256). So, apart from a few constituency parties which simply cannot afford to affiliate (including some in Labour held seats!), official membership could not decline much below 600,000 regardless of what real membership is.

This can make a nonsense of official figures in recent years. In 1969 only 111 Constituency parties even claimed to have over 1000 members. Most of the other 500 or so had considerably less. To take an extreme example. An official Party enquiry into the fifteen Glasgow Constituency Labour Parties revealed that their *total membership* was 1784 (an average of 119 per party) and some parties had less than 50 members.

So from from the early sixties onwards we must rely on estimates for total Labour Party membership. The general consensus is that there was a very sharp decline under the Wilson government of 64-70, some recovery under the Tories 70-74, and a further decline under the last Labour Government (though not so sharp as 64-70). So what is membership now? Well, last year *Labour Weekly* (the official Labour Party paper) cast a shadow over the conference by revealing

that individual membership was 284,000.

The Labour Party Commission of Inquiry apparently thought it was a bit of an underestimate. On the other hand we have heard other inside sources give an even lower figure. But the differences are not large. We can take *Labour Weekly's* figure as a relatively authoritative estimate. 284,000 in 1979 is a far cry from the million of 1952. We will look shortly at what has happened in the last year.

But before we do that one or two other things are worth noting. When a figure is given for Labour Party membership that means people who have signed up and pay dues (at present 25p a month). That does not mean they do anything else. And indeed most of them do not.

They certainly do not organise under constituency party discipline in the unions, or go out on the streets selling the party paper (one estimate of *Labour Weekly's* circulation is 17,000 and much of that is bulk orders by unions or sold through newsagents). The Labour Party is just not that sort of party. What is available to them is to go to their ward meetings once a month.

Practically all the studies of local Labour Parties reach the same conclusion on how many of them do this on anything like a regular basis: some 10-12 per cent! The other 90 per cent have no more organisational involvement in the Party than handing over their dues.

Tony Benn's army is therefore recruited from probably no more than 30,000—35,000 Labour Party 'activists'. (and remember 'activists' in this case includes anyone who goes to a meeting once a month). That is not a figure that should make the revolutionary left shudder.

Nor should it be imagined that these Labour Party activists are overwhelmingly more proletarian than the revolutionary left. The case for the 'middle class takeover' of the Labour Party has sometimes been rather wildly put (most famously by Barry Hindess in a book entitled *The Decline of Working Class Politics*) But the facts remain. About half of the twenty largest Labour Parties are in Tory held (and therefore presumably more middle class) seats. On the other hand some of the areas where constituency Labour party decay has gone furthest are in heavily manual working class areas. (Remember those figures from Glasgow.)

Ward parties in 'middle class' areas quite often have larger memberships than their 'working class' neighbours. And even more often have larger attendance at meetings. Surveys of members in particular local parties have always shown that the members from the professions are several times more likely to have attended their ward meetings than those who are manual workers. It is very difficult to escape from the conclusion that although manual workers have by no means disappeared from the ranks of Labour's activists they now mix with a high proportion of teachers, lecturers, social workers etc.

How much has all this changed in the last

year? There seems little doubt that the Labour Party has recruited significant numbers of members over the last year. On exactly how many, opinions differ, although certainly no-one is claiming a flood. In May, under the headline 'Labour Party hits 300,000', *Labour Weekly* estimated that membership this year would be 10 per cent up on last year. We have no reason to doubt this. What observers both in and out of the Party have all added to us is that this recruitment, certainly in terms of activists, is heavily weighted in favour of people from the professions.

'Local Labour Parties estimate that about one in four party members are pensioners compared with one in seven adults in the population as a whole.'

In itself this recruitment obviously does not qualitatively change the character of the party as we have described it. And one telling indication that things are still very much the same can be gathered from the following comment in the same *Labour Weekly* article which reported the membership increase:

'Local Labour Parties estimate that about one in four party members are pensioners compared with one in seven adults in the population as a whole.'

Whether the membership increase is more than the sort of hiccup one would expect during 18 months of Thatcher government must be judged on the organisation and activities of the left within this for once expanding party.

All varieties of the left are now freer to act in the Labour Party than for many years. The press witch hunt against the *Militant* at the beginning of the year was a damp squib where it mattered. 'If the party were foolish enough to start rooting out the Militants it would split wide open every Constituency Labour Party', wrote Frank Allaun in *Labour Weekly*. 'We don't always agree but they are hard working comrades prepared to share in the slogging work on the streets and doorsteps.' And the National Executive Committee has refused to confirm disciplinary action against the most vulnerable of the 'entrists', the Workers Socialist League.

But despite this freedom of manoeuvre the Labour Left seems both organisationally weak and inward looking.

Tribune is a shadow of its former self. Whereas its circulation reached a highpoint of around 40,000 during the mid fifties, it is now less than a quarter of that. The *Tribune* group in Parliament gives the appearance of a number of MPs united by sentiment rather than anything else—with Michael Foot still its star despite the fact that he is now siding with Callaghan on most of the crucial issues.

So, despite a recent conference attended by about 200 people *Tribune* does not play the preponderant role in the left it did in the days of Bevanism.

The nearest thing to that role is played by the single issue Campaign for Labour Party Democracy. With a membership of about 2000 its influence and prestige ranges far wider. It has very efficiently coordinated resolutions on the constitutional questions and anyone on the Labour left who refuses to accept its discipline on these issues does so at considerable risk to their reputation.

But of course all of this is by the very nature of the Campaign confined to the essentially inward looking question of Labour Party democracy and focused on the conference. When one turns to more general questions on the Labour Left then the level of organisation is weak indeed.

Probably the best known among the Labour Left organisations is the Labour Coordinating Committee, which, with some justification is often regarded as Tony Benn's particular organisation within the Labour Party, given that it has seemed to be dominated by some of Benn's closest advisers. The LCC has about 800 members, produces an irregular and rather dull paper called *Labour Activist* which claims a circulation of 2000 and has recently organised a number of extremely unimpressive national conferences, the last one of which in Birmingham was only attended by about 50 people.

There are some within the LCC, like Peter Hain, who have argued for a more outward going extra-parliamentary approach, and they may possibly become more influential after the latest elections to the LCC executive. The LCC also plans a trade union conference in November. But looking at its recent form it is very difficult to see the LCC as an efficient fighting vehicle for this sort of orientation.

There are a couple of rather more tightly organised groupings on the Labour Left, Independent Labour Publications (with their paper *Labour Leader*) and the Socialist Campaign For a Labour Victory (paper, *Socialist Organiser*). But both are very small, each perhaps 100-150 members. And both have the atmosphere of a sect about them: the ILP a rather rightwing and purposeless sect centred around a rump from the old moribund (but rich) Independent Labour Party, and the SCLV a rather more dynamic and purposive one centred round supporters of *Workers Action*.

All in all it is a rather feeble organisational picture. And its feebleness can be judged by the fact that sum total of the nationally organised activists on the rest of the Labour Left is probably no more than that of the *Militant*.

There are probably some 2000 *Militant* supporters with a paper, discipline and apparatus of full timers which puts the LCC to shame. But they do not seem to have grown much in the last year, probably because of their sectarian approach with which SWP members will be familiar but which they may be rather surprised to learn the *Militant* also apply to their colleagues on

the Labour Left. So the *Militant* have been distinctly lukewarm about the Campaign for Labour Party democracy and have only been reluctantly dragged into the new Rank and File Mobilising Committee for Labour Party Democracy (an umbrella group of all the Labour Left organisations to agitate over the constitutional issues). They generally seem to be regarded with hostility by the rest of the Labour Left and in as much as the rest of the Labour Left has grown a bit, that seems to have blocked off some of *Militant's* sources of recruitment. (For example, their tight hold on the Labour Party Young Socialists is beginning to develop a few

cracks.)

But *Militant's* continued organisational overshadowing of the rest of the Labour Left, combined with its sectarianism, is only one more factor weakening the organisational potential of the Labour Left as a whole.

So if we are to give an overall answer to our question 'how strong is Tony Benn's army?', it must be, 'Not nearly as strong as those who hold out the delights of Labour Party' membership would have you believe.' And no amount of theorising about the 'historic link between the trade unions and the Labour Party can get away from it.

But remember also where we got our

question. Stalin's jest about the Pope. The Pope may have no divisions but in terms of ideas he is still a force to be reckoned with. Poland is only the latest reminder of that, whether it be the pictures on the shipyard gates or the broadcasting of a Cardinal's sermon when all other means to get workers back to work had failed.

And the same goes for Benn's army. Organisationally the Labour Left may be weak, but some of the ideas they put forward are going to be of increasing influence in the working class way beyond the confines of the ill-attended ward meeting. It is for that reason that they cannot be ignored.

THE MOVEMENT

In the slough of friendly despond

The book *Beyond the Fragments* must be one of the best-sellers in the field of socialist ideas over the last few years—stimulating discussion in publications as diverse as the *Guardian* and *Socialist Worker*. The debate about the book has largely concentrated on its anti-Leninist stance, and upon the nature of the fragments themselves (which appear to be everything from left-wing bookshops to shop stewards committees!)

Last month's conference of 1,500 people gave us a chance to see the type of audience which the book has attracted, and also revealed the weaknesses of the book's ideas.

The ideas in the book, and those of the audience coincided in one major respect, a dislike of the organised left, especially the SWP. But the conference certainly wasn't a 'place where people from very different traditions learn and commune', that Sheila Rowbotham had hoped in the *New Statesman* the day before. Despite the superficial heterogeneity of their opinions, the fact that the audience was drawn from the *same* tradition was striking.

Although the number of men showed that *Beyond the Fragments* has an appeal wider than the feminist movement, the age and social background of both the men and women present showed that the book has touched neither the young nor the traditional sectors of the working class. A speaker at the plenary session claimed, with much pride but more tiredness than she had 'been through the whole bloody thing from 1968 onwards'. And I did detect a wish to return to the student demo rather than to progress beyond the fragments.

By making a virtue of the lack of a coherent political theory the people around *Beyond the Fragments* have laid themselves open to demoralisation and confusion—they were unable to formulate any long-term perspective even at the level of a need to fight the Tories.

This lack of direction was revealed in the lack of political initiatives focused on the working class. In a workshop, I suggested that workplace struggle must be *central* to socialist politics, only to be told that I

'couldn't just ignore the other classes'. Where such politics lead can be seen by the fact that the Right to Work Campaign only collected £39 (2.6 p per participant) throughout the day. On this evidence we must suppose that a large section of the audience was unwilling to support one of the most important socialist initiatives since the Tories came to power.

The lack of any sense of direction was most apparent throughout the afternoon sessions, which had been hopefully titled 'The Way Forward'. The conference as a whole was not sure where, if anywhere it wanted to go from here. Many people objected to the organisers assuming that there was any basis for unity. Thus the discussion remained at the level of basics, another conference being called for to discuss a possible basis for unity.

One of the motivating forces of the book was the author's desire to extend the anti-organisational tradition beyond its customary role in certain sections of the women's movement. Although they carried their audience on the organisational question they failed to convince many people of the need for socialism as well as feminism. Once away

from the negative politics of criticising the Leninist party, the basis for unity fell apart. In the final plenary, Hilary Wainwright was reduced to almost pleading for people to come forward to organise local initiatives and conferences.

Despite these pleas the conference remained fragmented. Fragmentees seemed determined to huddle together, endlessly discussing possible unity rather than uniting in action around something which would actually fight the Tories. One man in an afternoon workshop summed it up. He had been disappointed with what the conference had achieved. Given the presence of people in the workshop who had reduced socialism to 'people socialising with each other' this was understandable. He finished by saying that, 'Maybe I'm just too much of a dyed in the wool Marxist'.

For him, as for others that expected serious socialist initiatives, the conference had certainly fallen far short of its goals. The constant references to where the SWP had gone wrong echoed somewhat hollowly as the fragments themselves seemed to do little besides sinking into friendly despondency.

Those disillusioned by the conference will hopefully look towards initiatives such as the Right to Work March and October 10th. Ann Rogers

East Anglia against Cruise

In past issues of *Socialist Review* we have dealt with arguments over both nuclear power and the deployment of new generation of Cruise and Pershing nuclear missiles. The anti-Cruise campaign in particular seems to have begun to take off over the summer, with big meetings in many cities and sizeable demonstration (called by the Labour Party!) in London. A further demonstration called for the end of October looks like being quite big.

But how can the campaign be organised on the ground? Norwich SWP has taken local initiatives over both nuclear power and the Cruise missiles. One of its members tells of the experience so far.

We took the initiative last December to try to set up a branch of the ANC in the City.

Our position was easier than in most areas. Nuclear power and nuclear bases were already very much live issues in East Anglia. Norwich SWP had already supported the North Norfolk (Denver) Alliance and had campaigned locally against Cruise Missiles.

The previous June we had held a debate with the Ecology Party on nuclear power. The mood of this meeting was for trying to set up some kind of broad campaign, however, this attempt failed due to the suspicions of some members of the Eco. executive. At the least this prepared us for some of the difficulties ahead. So we did have some small reputation of concern for the nuclear issue.

Our delegate to the founding conference of the ANC convened a meeting of all likely

interested groups in the city, which was attended by representatives from Norwich Peace Council, Ecology Party, Friends of the Earth, an Anarchist collective, the SWP and various individuals. Early suspicion as to what secret plans revolutionary socialists had for the campaign were slowly dispelled as people settled down to the task of working together to build a base for the campaign.

The campaign was officially launched at a public meeting in January, attended by over two hundred people. The speakers on the platform ranged from SWP to Friends of the Earth, with Tony Webb of the ANC Steering Committee. Since then an active group of around 30 have met weekly to plan the local campaign. From the start (in advance of official ANC policy) it was decided to campaign against both nuclear power and nuclear weapons.

To date Norwich ANC has organised regular leafletting sessions on housing estates (after producing our own general leaflet) and has leafletted the city centre on specific topics. Local working parties are being organised to develop local campaigns around the topics of Health and Safety, Trade Unions, Weapons, Power alternatives. By this method we hope to involve as many people as possible in the actual running of the campaign. We have a standing offer to speak to any organisation in the area and have circulated all trade union branches. So far we have been invited to speak to ASTMS, UCAT, NUJ branches and Norwich Trades Council.

The ANC helped organise an 'anti-cruise' motorcade, and in July organised a procession and free festival against both nuclear power and nuclear weapons. Contingents have also gone to most of the regional and national demonstrations held since its formation as well as operating stalls at local fairs and carnivals. Through all this activity we hope we have begun to reach a much wider audience than ever previously; we have also been able to create a genuine united campaign bringing together a wide range of activists which we hope will develop further.

What has been the particular role of Norwich SWP in all this? And what has SWP gained from its involvement? Most importantly we have been accepted as honest members of ANC and as such have been able to play our part in putting the anti-nuclear movement in Norwich on a new sound footing. In doing so we have raised the credibility of SWP as a whole and made contact with a wide new audience that are at least prepared to listen to our views. The party has to tread the thin line of not allowing ourselves to be accused of swamping meetings whilst still showing sufficient interest in the routine of ANC meetings. One comrade is local organising secretary and is also a representative for East Anglia to the national steering committee. He and another comrade have also carried out much of the public speaking for Norwich ANC—although we ourselves recognise that this is unhealthy and we hope to build up a wider panel of speakers. We also took an active part in helping to set up 'East Anglia

Against the Missiles campaign' speakers.

Whilst being careful not to allow the charge of using ANC meetings as simple platforms for SWP opinions our comrades have been able to build up sufficient credibility by their work for the ANC to argue the course of the campaign, content of leaflets, etc. So, whilst there is much left unsaid in the ANC propaganda there is little that SWP would actually disagree with the Anti-Nuclear Campaign is not a revolutionary socialist organisation and we cannot expect it to have the same perspective. Therefore we have tried to leaflet and sell SWP at all the public events ANC or other anti-nuclear organisations have organised.

Norwich SWP has also organised its own public meetings on the nuclear issue where we can argue our case on 'home ground'. We also produced a local pamphlet specifically for trade unionists to sell alongside the national 'Workers Power not Nuclear Power' pamphlet. Total sales for both now run at around 150. A high percentage have been sold to people who previously would have thought they had nothing in common with an organisation such as SWP. We hope they will look further into our politics. We have a particular advantage in being one of the few organised groups to campaign fully against nuclear power and nuclear weapons. It is accepted in SWP that while it might be best to fight certain issues as 'single issue' campaigns on tactical grounds to get some results it is impossible to separate one aspect of capitalist exploitation from another. The nuclear industry can only be effectively fought by attacking the rest of the trappings of the capitalist state that puts profit and nationalist glory over the health and security of the working people. Thus in Norwich comrades active in ANC have also been active in the steel strike, cuts campaign, right to work, etc. It is important that other activists in ANC see that we do have this practical commitment to a broad approach.

The Cruise Missile issue has given a special impetus to the campaign locally. Opposition groups have sprouted up all over East Anglia in the last six months. More so than even the anti nuclear power groups these

have attracted a very mixed support—from church, environmental and political groups. This has caused some difficulties. In Norwich there is both the ANC and a pre-existing 'Norwich Peace Council' which campaigns solely for disarmament and has a somewhat less strident approach.

A local liaison group has recently been set up (on the initiative of ASTMS) to specifically campaign against the missiles (NORAM). It remains to be seen how far this will be successful in drawing the efforts of present activists into building up the identity of a third group and widen the basis of support. Regionally the 'East Anglia Against Missiles Campaign' has been established to try to coordinate the activities of all the local groups on the issues and prevent us falling over each other's feet.

The number of groups does seem confusing and leads to a proliferation of time consuming meetings. However, a majority of activists have thought this the best way to encourage local support.

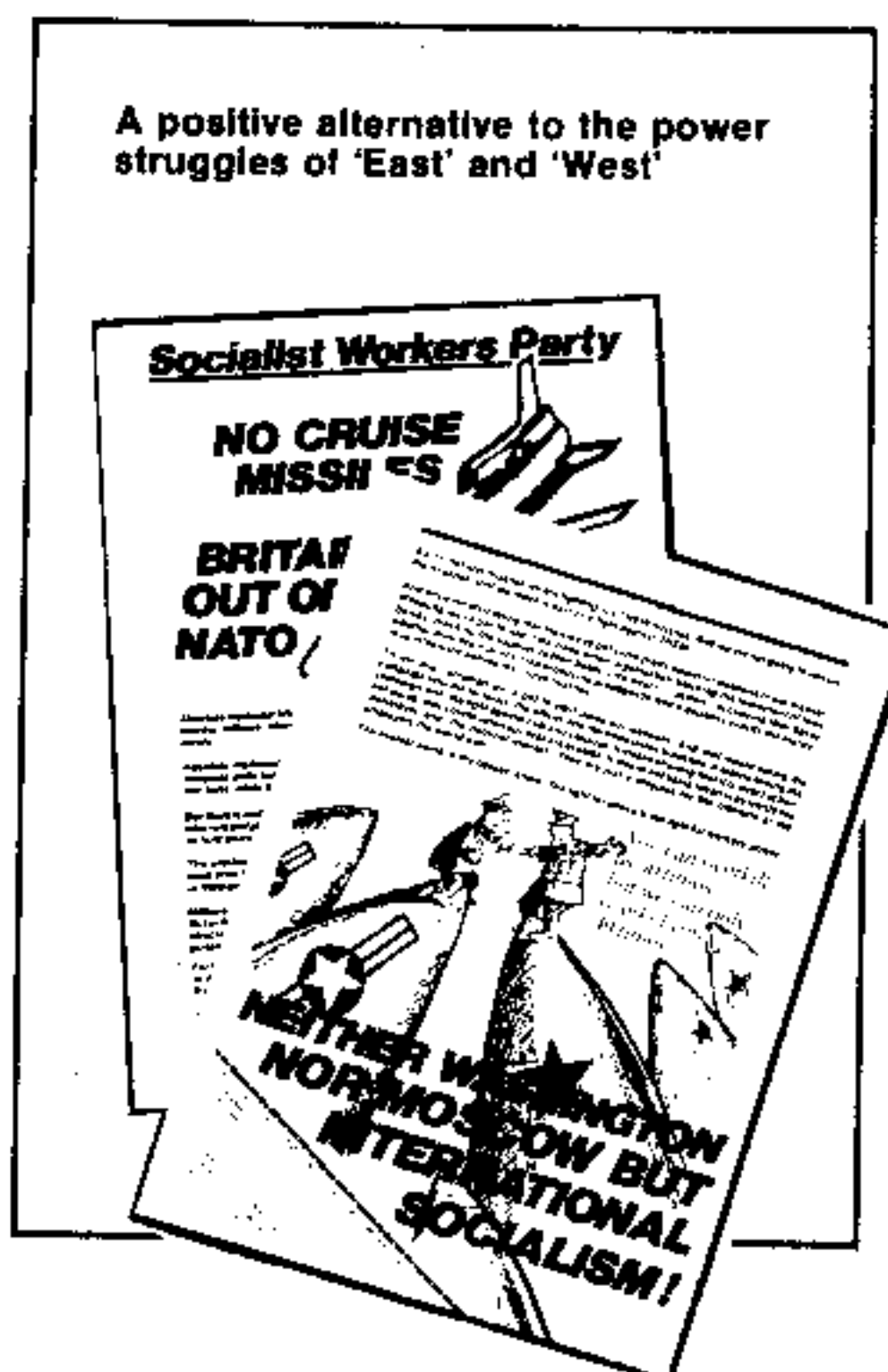
Thankfully the local campaigns have been able to recognise that the campaign has not just been about getting the missiles off one's own doorstep and so have supported demonstrations further afield when the siting of the bases was changed. There has been a steady stream of action at many different levels, from film shows, public meetings, street leafletting, 'vigils for peace' on Hiroshima Day, to local and regional demonstrations. A fault of the demonstrations around the bases themselves was that there were few local inhabitants to actually see and be affected by them.

There has been a good deal of local sympathy for the anti-missiles campaign. The threat is very real and direct in East Anglia and it has made people think more carefully about where society is going—and why. Nevertheless two local referendums on the issue were lost (Brandon and Thetford). The government has used the 'Red Scare' tactic. In January the *Daily Telegraph*, in a large article tried to suggest link between anti nuclear groups and Moscow and made a particular point of the interest that the SWP was taking of the issue in East Anglia. This has made the SWP leaflet '*Nether Washington nor Moscow but International Socialism*' particularly important in showing that we really do have a positive alternative to the power struggles of 'East' and 'West'.

Socialism is about nothing if it is not concerned with the *quality* of life. Society would be a hollow shell without a safe and clean world to live in. Much of our efforts in politics is spent in the harsh immediate reality of wages, hours and disputes. This tends to dominate the reports coming out of 'Socialist Worker'. We have also to show that we are concerned with other problems. In the nuclear issue, politics, trade union rights, and the environment combine. If the level of debate at present is at a generally low and superficial level then that is even more reason for socialists to become more deeply involved.

Malcolm Atkin

Norwich SWP and National Steering Committee, ANC (personal capacity)



Abandoning dogmatism

The general attitude of the SWP to alternative and workers' plans has always seemed to me schizophrenic.¹ On the one hand, we see them as impossible pipe-dreams which will invariably lead to class-collaboration or to workers organisations taking over the role of management, and so we argue that they are traps which must be avoided. But on the other hand, we use the publicity generated to make general propaganda about workers' creativity and the ways in which a socialist society could use present-day technology.²

Now, this schizophrenia may well be containable in the pages of our press, but it is not possible for our militants who find themselves faced with the question at work when sackings are threatened. Unless we can provide a more sensitive analysis, our comrades could very well fall into two extremely wrong positions: either refusal to have anything to do with it because it is 'class-collaboration', or uncritical support for it because 'we must back up whatever the stewards have decided.' The second leads straight out of the SWP; the first to dogmatic isolation from workers in struggle. (Of course our militants sometimes find that defending our basic politics leaves us them isolated anyway, but to argue that isolation proves we're right is sectarian stupidity.) Neither is an acceptable position for an interventionist revolutionary party. I want to argue that we need to see alternative or workers' plans in some cases as possible ways of organising against sackings, factory closures, and so on.

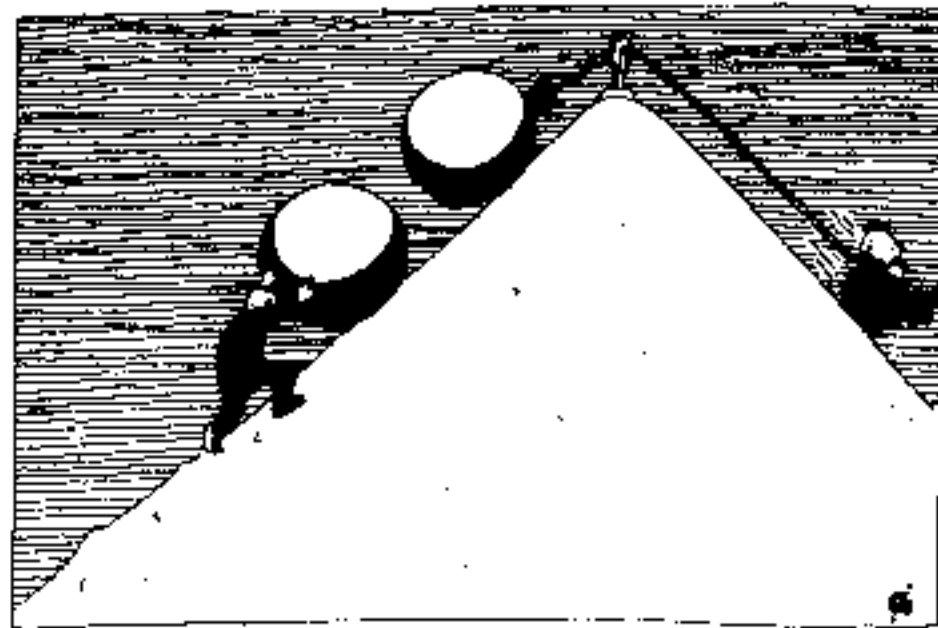
The problem needs discussing, I believe, because it seems likely that more working-class organisations will look to such answers as the present wave of job-losses continues, and workers become less ready to accept the carrot of redundancy money, when faced with over two million unemployed. Also, alternative plans could fit very neatly into the CP/Labour Left Alternative Economic Strategy, for which we can also expect to see support growing.

This last point is usually taken as one of the major arguments against alternative plans. We cannot, it is said, give any support to what is merely an extension of reformism's traditional arguments. There is some truth in this. We can expect to see some plans drawn up by such people centred around more state intervention, import controls, productivity deals, etc., which it would obviously be our job to oppose strongly.

But not all alternative plans fit into this category. Some (for example the Lucas Aerospace plan) have a very different logic: opposition to all sackings, demands to produce socially useful goods (kidney machines instead of weapons, for instance) and an implicit rejection of the profit motive. Alternative plans straddle the divide between class struggle and class-collaboration, and revolutionaries need to look carefully at

such for the left is plans individually to work out what degree of political support, if any, we can give them. Yes, they are reformist, but we do traditionally organise around reformist demands (no overtime, 35 hour week, wage claims) if they can be used to draw workers into an organised struggle that goes beyond the logic of reformism.

Organisation is the crucial question here. We have always argued that we distinguish ourselves from the reformists not solely by differing demands, but also through *activity*. In any struggle, we argue the need for the involvement of the mass of workers, through regular mass meetings and pickets, flying pickets, or whatever form is most appropriate. Traditionally alternative plans have mostly been fought for in a reformist (and thus token) manner, but that does not prove that such methods are inherent in such plans. Many demands that we support have been fought for in such a manner; what can change that is not the questioning of the demands in the abstract, but the intervention of revolutionaries around a distinctive and clear position.



In such cases our argument should be: OK, we accept the plan as a basis for fighting the sackings, closure or whatever, but we need mass involvement to win the struggle, through factory occupations, demonstrations, touring the country to build solidarity, and so forth. In other words, we would be using a *defensive* demand to build an *offensive* struggle, which is surely what most of our industrial work should be aiming at in the present downturn.

Most of the other objections concern the effect of such plans on workers' struggles. 'They damp down the wages struggle.' 'They become arguments between sets of experts divorced from the shop-floor.' 'They lead to disguised productivity deals and a disregard for health and safety matters.' Once again, while many of these are certainly true at present, I do not see that they are automatically so. To say that is to fall into a dogmatic fatalism, the attitude that since the struggle will almost certainly be sold out or co-opted by capitalism, we must keep or purity of principle by not getting involved, which is an attitude that runs directly counter to all our traditions.

To labour the point, there is nothing in the notion of alternative plans *as such* which should prevent us using them. The struggle may or may not win, may or may not end up being led in a reformist direction—we cannot predict the outcome in advance. One

thing, however, is certain. If we maintain literally our present attitude, the CP/Labour Left/Trade union bureaucracy will, in such struggles, be able to isolate us as 'ultra-lefts carping from the sidelines', and any struggle that does emerge will be led along reformist lines and thus to defeat. We will only win workers away from reformism through struggle.

One last argument raised in the ISJ article referred to above needs to be briefly dealt with. It said that 'The questions (about alternative production—C.H.) must be raised "this side of the revolution", but, in fact, can only be democratically answered in a socialist society.'³ While this is obviously true, it is elementary to Marxism that it is also true of the oppression of women, racism, and all other evils of capitalism. Yet we do not restrict ourselves to abstract propaganda on these other issues; on the contrary we crucially argue that it is only through involvement in struggles around such issues here and now that we can win people to a revolutionary perspective. Why, in principle, should the question of alternative plans be any different?

To sum up, part of the problem is that the term 'alternative plans' has such a wide meaning that a simple 'we are for them/we are against them' attitude is useless. A hospital work-in, for instance, when workers refuse to let a hospital close because it is needed by the local community, is in some sense an alternative plan, and we of course support any such actions.

Some alternative plans are downright reactionary, some are extremely muddled, but some could be used to make workers' struggles forward. The principal question remains winning workers to active struggle against all sackings and closures, and we cannot rule out the possibility in some cases of alternative plans with clear, simple, demands being a means to that end.

We would need to ask: Are these demands ones we can give principled support to?, and if so: How do we organise around them? A sensitive and interventionist position (which would of course include pointing out the limits to such plans) would enable us to give a distinctive lead in such struggles. Hopefully this article can start a discussion on exactly what that position should be, because our present position, if taken literally, is not tenable in an actual struggle. It would of necessity collapse into either abstentionism, or uncritical tailing of reformists. To avoid that we need to abandon dogmatism and take a fresh, critical, look at alternative and workers' plans.

Charlie Hore

¹I am only concerned here with our attitude to workers' plans when they have actually been adopted by working class organisations. I have no quarrel at all with our attitude to those socialists who argue that proposing such plans is a central task for revolutionaries.

²For a further account of this position, see Dave Albury's article in *International Socialism Journal* (new series) no. 6, pp. 85-96; and *ISJ* 8, pp. 105-111, for two replies.

³p. 93 of Dave Albury's article mentioned above.

Worse than useless

Amazingly, the editorial board seem to think that the readership will find the correspondence between the Central Committees of the International Marxist Group and the Socialist Workers' Party of great interest—as they not only published the former's letter but Chris Harman's perfectly correct but very long-winded reply.

It has never been the custom of our Party's publications to engage in sectarian 'critiques', 'polemics', or even correspondence. We have always understood that this sort of thing has no interest for our readership. The place for such correspondence is the internal communications of each organisation.

If the International Marxist Group is part of 'The Movement' (would the editor care to define the term?), could *Socialist Review* please report on their positive initiatives in the real world.

If, in the opinion of the editorial board, there are no such initiatives, the publication of the letters is worse than useless.

Annie Nehmad

Combatting the Ripper

I was pleased to see a discussion of the Ripper in SR 1980:6, however I think that Trish Calvert's and Geoff Robinson's suggestions of how we combat the Ripper are very inadequate. They argue for women carrying weapons as the only answer; yet a knife would be of little use judging by the style of his last attacks. However women do have a right to self defence, but as socialists we should be looking at how we solve the problem collectively, in our unions.

I came to this conclusion while on night duty in a large teaching hospital in Leeds, so called "Ripper country". When I went on



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London E2.

the wards I don't think I gave a thought to the security. While I was working Barbara Leach was murdered, the next 2 months were spent in fear. It was rumoured that the Ripper was to strike a nurse, and that he had rung up the hospital. By police activity and their refusal to deny the rumours, most of us concluded there must be some truth in them. The nurses were genuinely frightened. All management did was tell us not to go to dinner on our own, but what about when we relieved on other wards? Then we all ran holding onto our scissors. I can tell Trish Calvert and Geoff Robinson that it wasn't much comfort.

This is where the union comes in. We raised it at our NUPE branch meeting and our full-time official spent many hours after that trying to find the truth behind the rumours. We were able to tell nurses what he had found out while management consistently refused to make a statement.

The union then started to campaign for better security as we have 1 pathetic night securityman for the largest general hospital in the country. Large numbers of nurses on night duty joined NUPE as the pleas for more staff had become urgent—it was a case of not going to dinner or leaving one person on their own. We also tried to make management provide transport to a hospital in the district, on the border of the "red light area". The internal ambulance men were prepared to do it but management did not want to spend the money as always it was a case of "I'm alright, Jack". They insisted nurses would have to move home everytime they got sent to another hospital (every 3 months)—an idea totally unacceptable and impracticable. Our full-timer and branch secretary spoke on radio and to the papers about the situation.

I'm sorry to say that we did not achieve much, hundreds of nurses rely on 1 security man still. However we did fight for a better deal for those on nights. Nurses realised how critical staffing was and how unprotected they were from any prowlers. The union was aware of the problem. Our cuts campaign always held meetings in the centre of town so women would be able to get buses.

I believe this is the way that we, as socialists should fight against the Ripper. Women, especially us shift workers, should demand a safe environment to work in, good transport to and from work, and the truth as it is less scaring than rumours. One woman clutching a weapon is not going to solve the problem, we can only do it by fighting through our unions. I'm sorry we did not achieve more but at least we proved that unions care more than management and the police.

Jane South
Leeds

Collaring confusion

There seems to have been some confusion in one or two recent letters to *Socialist Review* about the class position of 'white collar workers'. And I couldn't help noticing a similar confusion in Colin Sparks' new book on fascism, *Never Again*. The common error is to lump together in the same category every-

one from clerks doing routine clerical work right up to 'professionals' such as administrators, lecturers, scientists and technicians.

Colin Sparks, for example, even though in places he rightly differentiates between professionals and low-level office workers, persistently lumps these groups together under the heading of 'the new middle class'. On the other hand, some writers want to call professionals and even managers 'working class' because they 'sell their labour' and are paid wages or salaries.

Both of these views are mistaken. Fifty years ago clerks were 'middle class'. They were better paid than manual workers, there were not many of them, and they generally carried out the role of 'the boss's assistant.' They were also mainly men. Today, however, clerical work is a mass working class occupation. Clerks are lower paid than many manual workers, there are many of them, and they are subject to the same division of labour and alienation as manual workers. They are mainly, but not entirely, women, and in fact they constitute a large section of the female section of the working class.

The same applies to shop assistants. These are classified as non-manual or white collar workers. Would Colin Sparks argue that shop assistants are middle class? The extent to which clerks and shop assistants act in a class conscious manner, of course is variable. But the same applies to the manual working class.

On the other hand, professional workers such as lecturers and technicians cannot automatically be classified as working class. Not only are their wages etc better than most workers', but also their jobs are usually less alienating. If there is a 'new middle class' (as opposed to the old petty bourgeoisie, which consists of small businessmen, shop keepers, self-employed etc, and which is shrinking), then it is these professional workers. However it's also true that many professional jobs are being increasingly 'proletarianised', in the nature of the work, the rewards, and, in consequence, in the level of union organisation and membership. Many of these professional workers can be won over to the side of the working class.

In his excellent book *Labour and Monopoly Capital*, Harry Braverman estimates that the working class in an advanced capitalist country today (including manual workers, clerical workers, shop assistants and workers in service industries such as hotels and catering) constitutes about 70 percent of the population, with the remaining 30 percent consisting of the old petty bourgeoisie, the 'new' professional middle class, and a tiny minority of capitalists, along with the managers whose job is to control the alienated labour of the working class.

Braverman's book shows how the development of capitalism affects the labour process and the composition of the working class. Perhaps if it was more widely read some of the confusion we have seen recently about white collar workers would be dispelled.

Phil Webster
Blackburn

Coogan's Bluff

On the Blanket: the H Block Story

Tim Pat Coogan

Ward River Press/Quartet £2.50

Tim Pat Coogan, author of the only book yet written on the campaign for political status by republican prisoners in the H Blocks of Long Kesh, is the editor of Ireland's leading daily, the *Irish Press*. Founded by Eamon deValera in the 1930s, the *Press* has always been the mouthpiece of the Fianna Fail party, a party that manages to combine a verbal (commitment to a united independent Ireland with a policy of fiercely repressing all who) struggle to bring it about.

Coogan's book on the H Blocks is based on the same hypocritical double-think. Behind his apparent sympathy for the prisoners and their demand for special status lies a much greater concern about the 'destabilising impact on Irish Society as a whole (and the) very great worsening of Anglo-Irish relations' that may result if the H Block crisis is not resolved. It's a case of scratch the humanitarian, find the Irish bourgeois ever conscious of his class's security.

The problem, as Coogan sees it, is 'how to get everyone off the horns of the dilemma'; and he thinks he has the answer. The British should allow the prisoners to wear their own clothes and should accept the cleaning of cells as adequate penal labour.

Ingenuously, Coogan appeals to the Tory monetarists: 'Why should the state of necessity have to supply expensive prison clothing? The issue could be disposed of on grounds of economy.' In return, the Provos should agree not to claim such a settlement

as a victory, for it is the fear of being seen as the losers that prevents the British from seeking a compromise deal.

Coogan writes as one whose own class has confronted similar demands from republican prisoners and survived to tell the tale. A campaign in the South's jails was resolved a few years ago though a pragmatic compromise arrived at quietly and without fuss. And just in case anyone imagines the Southern bourgeoisie are a bunch of 'wets', Coogan reminds his readers boastfully that they have presided over the execution of a great many more republican prisoners than any British government in history.

But there is another side to this book which goes a long way towards rescuing it from the scrap heap. Coogan's journalistic foot-slogging, whatever cynical political use he put it to, has been considerable.

He is one of a very small number who have actually visited protesting prisoners in their cells, both in the H Blocks and at Armagh women's jail. Although he was not allowed to talk to the male prisoners, he did interview some who had been released. He also talked to prisoners' families, prison warders, loyalists, and British administrators. His accounts of these, together with chapters giving historical background and analysing the repressive policies of successive British governments, are worth reading.

Nor is Coogan so naive as to have accepted the British lie that the horror of the H Blocks is the responsibility of the prisoners themselves. He shows how the situation is one inevitable consequence of Britain's three-pronged strategy, 'Criminalisation,

Normalisation, Ulsterisation'.

Through an interview with one former prisoner, Joseph Maguire, Coogan manages to convey some sense of the marvelous resilience and ingenuity of the 'blanket men'.

'Everything goes up your bum', Maguire told him, and went on to list some of the items smuggled in this way: tobacco (in biro casings); pencils; pens, combs, lighters. (In fact, even a camera has been brought in, and the resulting photos printed in the republican press.) 'But you do bleed all the time and sometimes pieces of flesh come off'.

Despite permanent lock-up, the prisoners do communicate: usually in Irish Gaelic and by shouting at full volume from cell to cell. In this way regular history lessons are conducted; quizzes, singing sessions, competitions, Irish classes and recitals are held. (One prisoner had memorised the whole of Leon Uris' book, *Trinity*; it took him eight days to retell it.)

Maguire offers another interesting insight. 'There is a lot of religion in the Blocks. No Marxism. No way. They never miss the Rosary every night in Gaelic. Gaelic prayers are a great way of learning Irish.'

That is a picturesque reminder of the nature of the Provisionals. Left wing militants initiated the broad based National Smash H Blocks Campaign, which has mobilised many thousands of workers on the streets in support of the prisoners. *Support* is the operative word. There is a place in the republican tradition for mass mobilisation, but only as an auxiliary to the 'real' struggle, conducted by the brave, armed few. Whether or not the Provo Left have a clear idea of how to overcome this tradition remains to be seen.

In the meantime, some of those involved in the H Block campaign (including our own comrades in the Socialist Workers' Movement, are critical of the way that, provos are pushing it: away from distinct political argument both with the British and with Irish



Belfast anti-internment demonstration, August 1980

workers, and towards appeals to 'liberal' opinion on strictly humanitarian grounds; while relying on the 'instinctive', if 'latent' republicanism of the worker. The possibility cannot be ruled out that the Provos will ultimately settle for some compromise along lines similar to those suggested by Coogan.

What then of the mass movement that has been rebuilt over many arduous years? Sent home with a 'thank you'? Asked to divert its attentions to some other issue? (If Coogan had his way, it would simply vanish, leaving the Provos wholly isolated and easy to mop

up. Will the Provos be their own worst enemy?)

Those socialists fighting for working class involvement in the anti-imperialist struggle, as part of the struggle for socialism, are not yet strong enough to offer a massively popular alternative. One thing that will help strengthen them is our commitment to mobilise working class support in this country for the struggle in Ireland.

But such matters would be anathema to Mr Coogan.

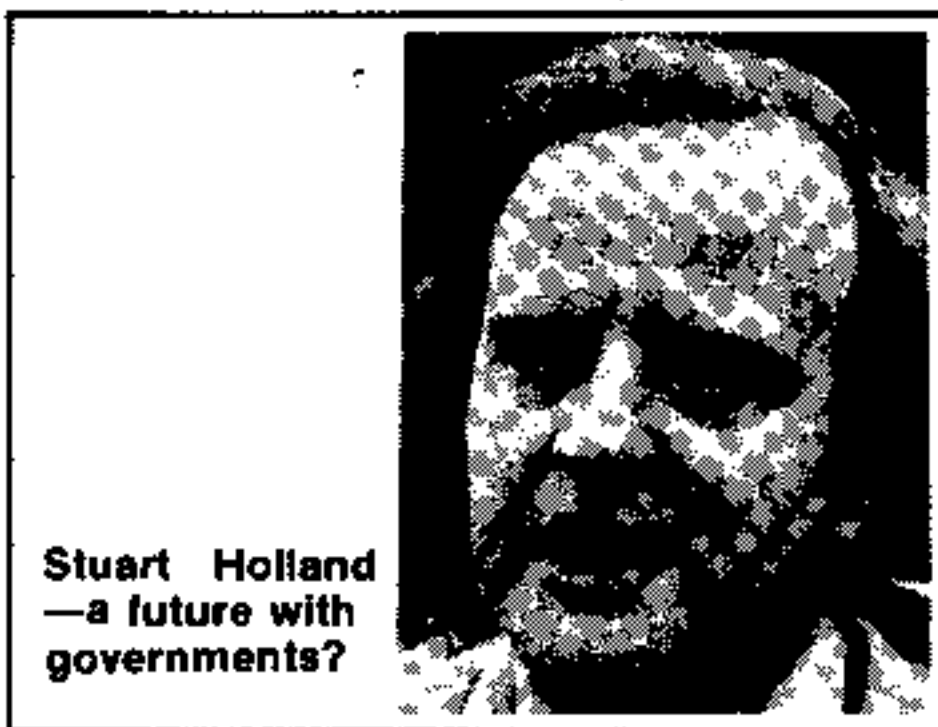
Mike Milotte

Hedging his bets

UnCommon Market,
Stuart Holland,
Macmillan, £2.95

Stuart Holland played a creditable role in the Brixton dole picket, and is currently being attacked by Len Murray for taking action which should be the minimal duty of any MP elected under the label of 'Labour'. It would be a pleasure, therefore, to report that he had written a useful and interesting book. Unfortunately honesty requires me to state that it is a boring irrelevance.

In 1975 the SWP called for a 'No' vote in the Common Market referendum, because we saw the 'yes' campaign as consolidating Wilson's links with British capitalism and



Stuart Holland
—a future with
governments?

clearing the path for wage controls. However, we have nothing in common with those elements in the Labour left and CP who try to blame the current crisis on EEC membership and want to launch a campaign for withdrawal. Such a campaign can only be a diversion from the real targets. Doubtless it would be popular—witness the flood of sub-racist filth churned out by the media because French fishermen fighting for jobs have screwed up Brits' holidays. But it would be profoundly anti-working class.

Holland, as one of the subtler lefts, is hedging his bets. In his Preface he tells us the book is 'analytical rather than prescriptive' (in plain English, it is irrelevant to action), and denies that it is the 'rationale for an anti-EEC case'.

The valid point in Holland's argument is

that the Common Market doesn't work, even in its own terms. Capitalism, historically embodied in the nation state, cannot create effective international institutions (though it may create temporary blocs and working agreements). Holland shows how the free market ideology of the EEC ensures that the Rome Treaty's provisions are 'concerned with preventing abuses to competition and the market mechanism rather than with providing a framework for joint intervention to achieve what the market itself cannot do.' Thus the EEC has failed over twenty-odd years to establish a meaningful transport policy; all it has done is to forbid individual governments from protecting people and the environment against hordes of giant lorries. The Common Agricultural Policy benefits rich landowners, not poor peasants, while raising food prices for workers. Monetary integration, he argues, 'is irrelevant to the real needs of Western Europe now.'

So far, so good. If anyone in the whole wide world (except for Williams, Owen and Rodgers) still believes the EEC has anything to do with real internationalism, Holland will help disabuse them. For the rest of us, he has little to offer. He does offer reforms of the EEC institutions which, he claims, 'could increase support for closer co-operation between governments at the European level'. Maybe. But do we really want closer co-operation between Thatcher, Schmidt and Giscard d'Estaing. Far better for us if they are at each other's throats.

A few pages later Holland tells us that 'joint action by labour at an international level in response to multinational capital tends to be rare, temporary, and relatively ineffective.' Once again, true enough. But to note the fact is hardly helpful; what we need is a discussion of how this state of affairs can be changed. But Holland passes on. Advice to governments on how to link up, but none for workers. For doubtless Holland, despite his guest appearance at Brixton dole, sees his future with governments rather than with workers. And that is why his book cannot help us much.

Ian Birchall

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What to blame?

The British Economic Disaster;
Andrew Glyn and John Harrison,
Pluto Press.

The last twenty years have been something of a disaster for British capitalism. Severe decay of the industrial base has followed a steady decline in competitive performance. Deindustrialisation is more advanced in Britain than any comparable industrial country. The deep structural problems which have been with us for some time are now compounded by the trend to global contraction. Everyday brings further news of factory closures, bankruptcies, shortage of orders and decreased market shares.

Explaining this crisis its nature and causes, has become quite an industry among a

section of academically-based left-wing economists. They first started in a big way in the early seventies, a period when capitalism seemed ruptured by strong and often successful wage claims. This left a lasting impression upon their work. The evidence they collected, by empirical methods, appeared to suggest that the crisis in Britain was the result of an increased proportion of the national income going to wages in contrast to Marx's position that it is the growth of the means of production per worker that damns the system. Consequently, they concluded that Marx's theory was at best inadequate and faulty.

Broadly-speaking, this section of left-wing economists has become known as 'neo-Ricardians'—an allusion to similar methods

applied by the classical economist David Ricardo. Perhaps the first significant neo-Ricardian statement during this period was that of two Oxford economists, Andrew Glyn and Bob Sutcliffe, *British Capitalism, Workers and the Profit Squeeze* (1972). Others followed with diversification and specialisation: Steedman, Harrison, Himmelweit, Hodgson and Gordon, to mention a few.

Now Glyn joins co-thinker John Harrison to produce a major re-statement of the neo-Ricardian position. The result is *The British Economic Disaster*, a book which attempts to pull together the arguments which have arisen and summarise a view on the crisis which is both crudely unmarxist in its approach and flimsy in its conclusions, more a reply to critics than a serious attempt to come to grips with the real problems.

The central argument is repeated. A rapid accumulation of capital leads to a situation of 'overaccumulation'. This uses up 'the reserve army of labour' and, as wages rise, profits fall. The motor of the system is weakened. The conclusion that Glyn and Harrison leave dangling before us is that wages cause the crisis.

Some readers might find this trivial. Does it matter if wages cause the crisis? But it is an important point. Glyn and Harrison are not only empirically and theoretically wrong, but their position, despite protests from them, leads to disastrous consequences in practice.

Theoretically, Glyn and Harrison are wrong because they attempt to locate the crisis within capitalist distribution—wages and profits, taxes and terms of trade. Whole sections are devoted to these specific aspects, all in distinct contrast to the approach of Marx, where capitalist crises are located within capitalist production.

The heart of the matter is their complete mishandling of Marx's theory of value. They see no qualitative difference between dead and living labour. Hence their calculation of the profit rate at prices of production rather than at values. The result is that they are drawn into an argument over the extent to which factors counteract the tendency to fall.

Essentially, Glyn and Harrison say that rises in productivity have more than counteracted the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, because it has cheapened machinery and raw materials. Of course there are counteracting tendencies. But in the case Glyn and Harrison offer us, there has also been a decline in surplus value through productivity. They incorrectly exclude this from their equation and so overstate the counter tendency to the falling rate of profit.

It is quite interesting to see where this leads them. Glyn and Harrison are supporters of the Militant Tendency. Both end up calling for nationalisation 'in the context of a coherent socialist programme.' There is Militant's familiar plea for the nationalisation of the top 200 companies. But nowhere is there any mention of the working class taking power, not a whisper of revolution. The implications are evidently reformist.

Glyn and Harrison claim that this book is an advance of the Glyn and Sutcliffe book in

1972, because it is more concerned with accumulation. But this does not represent an improvement so much as an attempt to re-adjust the argument under changing cir-

cumstances which reveal their position to be increasingly bankrupt. As the book indicates, they are now clearly on the defensive.
Jon Bearman

Brushing away the cobwebs

Theories of Underdevelopment

Ian Roxborough
Macmillan £3.95

A primary thesis of bourgeois studies of the third world economies has been that a closer integration into the world market would inevitably lead to economic development. Marx and Lenin had shared the expectation that foreign capital would result in the development of indigenous working classes whose growth would hasten the proletarian revolution.

But after the world depression of the '30s and the war of the '40s the advanced economies grew dramatically in contrast, the third world countries did not. Country after country, advised by leading economists, attempted to promote economic development by shifting from primary exports to 'import substituted industrialisation'. The failure of these policies stimulated the study of the relationship between the third world economies and the world markets—the science of development economics was born.

Marxists too had their problems, and many set about studying the connection between economic dependence and national economic development. These studies soon turned in on themselves and became entangled in debate about the transition from feudalism to capitalism, the nature of state power, the revolutionary role of the peasantry, and so on, until no-one was really sure what was really Marxist, and what was not. Revisionism was a potential career. The result is that much of the work of the fifties and early sixties in the 'Marxist' mould are confusing and politically suspect. The theories of Frank ignored class structure (using theories derived from that most eminent bourgeois Talcott Parsons), and Fanon and Debray glorified the role of the peasantry in

a profoundly voluntaristic manner.

Later attempts to come to terms with the obvious reality of the world economic system resulted in massive over-generalisation so that whilst theoretically feasible, these theories were politically useless.

At last we now have a book which clearly and perceptively disentangles the polemic from analysis and spells out the implications of this particular theoretical legacy. He examines the weaknesses of Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution, the fraudulent claims of Stalinist theory to have developed a road to 'socialism in one country', the bourgeois nationalist politics behind Cuba's development, and in a detailed analysis of Bolivia, Cuba and Chile, he demonstrates the value of Cliff's thesis of 'deflected permanent revolution'.

He attacks the classical conceptions of the peasantry, arguing that the economic relations of production on the land are considerably more diversified and complex than is usually understood. The interconnections between class struggle, international competition, strangled economic development, religious groups, and so on, result in individual patterns of development which cannot be identified by lifting chunks of Marx or Lenin.

As ever, Marxism must start with concrete analysis and the author indicates the manner in which this is to be achieved with some detailed analysis. In a sense, this is the proof of the pudding and it is unfortunate that the book was not long enough to encompass more of the Latin American countries. But the result is a very refreshing book which brushes away the cobwebs of bourgeois, Stalinist, and orthodox-Trotskyist theory and hopefully it will help to lay the ghosts of Guevarism and Castroism so prominent in the sixties.

Bob Lloyd.

socialist REVIEW

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Recently I found my spectator,
On a dusty street
He held a power-drill in his fist.
For a brief moment he looked up. And I
quickly
Pitched my theatre between the houses. He
Looked up expectantly.
In the bar
I found him again. He stood at the counter
Sweat-stained; he was drinking, in his hand
A sandwich. Quickly I pitched my theatre.
He
Looked up amazed.
Today
Luck was with me again.
In front of the railway depot
I saw him jostled by rifle-butts
Amid drum-beats—being hustled into war.
Right there, in the middle of the crowd,
I pitched my theatre. Over his shoulder
He looked back toward me:-
And nodded.
Bertold Brecht

Theatre Review

Brecht amongst the bourgeois

Brecht the German Communist playwright who died 24 years ago often complained about the passivity of middle-class audiences. The conventional theatre fed this passivity by putting on plays which, instead of forcing people to use their judgement and think about what they were seeing, offered only uncritical, emotional identification with 'heroes' and 'heroines'. Brecht wanted an audience that answered back, shocked out of its familiarity, and he wrote plays which attempted to do that.

He would have been disappointed by the audience at the National Theatre, which is currently staging his *Life of Galileo*. At the performance I attended, the spectators, a good bourgeois lot, were apparently quite unshocked by the Marxism of the play and its author, despite warnings in the programme notes.

No doubt, many of them had been quite prepared to cross the NATTKE picket line

at the National Theatre some months ago, at a time when the technicians on strike were visibly reminding us that theatre can actually be an area of class struggle.

Brecht wrote the first version of *The Life of Galileo* in 1938/39, revised it in 1944/45 while living in America, and was working on a third version up until the time of his death in 1956. In the first version the emphasis was on the revolutionary role of science. In setting out to prove, with the help of the newly invented telescope, that the earth revolves around the sun, Galileo is not only rejecting the ancient systems of thought but also the reactionary social order that requires them as an ideological support.

Brecht therefore also wanted to bring out the links between the emancipation of science and the first stirrings of revolt by the lower orders. The application of science can begin to end people's dependence on nature—as well as on their supposedly 'nat-

ural' superiors.

But, increasingly with each revision, as the threat of atomic war loomed larger, Brecht wanted to bring out an opposite tendency: that the 'freedom' of science to pursue knowledge could also become a 'freedom' from popular social control, producing more and not less oppression.

The play brings out this conflict with Galileo's recantation under pressure from the Inquisition. One interpretation could be that, however cowardly, it gave him the freedom to continue his work in secret. Without that modern science would have suffered.

Galileo himself rejects this view. He feels he has betrayed social progress. 'With time,' he says to his former assistant at the end of the play, 'You may discover all that is to be discovered, and your progress will only be a progression away from mankind. The gulf between you and them can one day become so great that your cry of jubilation over some new achievement may be answered by a universal cry of horror.'

Brecht didn't want his audience to 'sympathise' with Galileo. He wanted it to think critically about the issues raised and go on debating them. So Galileo is distanced from us deliberately by making him both attractive and repulsive. His earthiness, his love of food and drink, links him to common humanity. He appeals to the democracy of experience and insists on scientific discussion being in the vernacular, not in Latin. His passion for science goes hand in hand with his passion to explain to and work with anyone willing to understand—his housekeeper's son, the lens-grinder or a peasant monk.

On the other hand, he is an opportunist, quite willing to put comfort before principle. He palms off the telescope invented in Holland to the Venetian senate as his own invention. He is blind to his housekeeper's and his daughter's needs, and by wrecking his daughter's prospects of marriage in the interest of science Galileo imprisons her in the backward ideology of the church.

The Life of Galileo is less the depiction of a 'hero' and more the dramatisation of a series of crucial questions about the relationship of science to society. Brecht wanted the play not to be about Galileo but the people.

Does this production manage to do that? I don't think so. Galileo is too much of a star part, and the other characters are not given enough weight.

The arguments, and the conflicts between class interests, are played for laughs. Perhaps that is why the National Theatre audience were so complacent—they didn't feel that it was *their* social order under attack. But if you can put up with the audience the play is still worth a visit.

One final point. I noticed in my programme that the National Theatre receives a large grant from the Arts Council. I haven't heard of any Tory MPs complaining about the putting on of a Marxist play. There *have* however, been complaints about the modest sums being given to left-wing touring theatre groups. But then they have some hopes of reaching a working-class audience. It's an irony Brecht would have relished...

Gareth Jenkins

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Coast to Coast

The Wobblies

'The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of people, and the few who make up the employing class have all the good things in life. Between these two classes a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organise as a class, take possession of the earth and the machinery of production, and abolish the wage system.'

So declared the founding conference of the Industrial Workers of the World, held in Chicago in 1905. *The Wobblies*, a full length film, documents the struggles of the IWW from its founding to its virtual demise during World War One.

Old Wobblies vividly recount their memories of strikes, street meetings, and anti-war activity. The IWW organised the unskilled and semi-skilled workers, largely ignored by the craft-orientated American Federation of Labour, which also excluded non-white workers.

Unionising dockworkers, lumberjacks, textile workers and migratory workers, the Wobblies spread their message 'One Big Industrial Union' from the East to the West coast. It was often only possible to 'bun' a ride by train across the USA by showing an IWW card.

The film also illustrates the propaganda, often rather crude, of the employers and their press, against the IWW. Accused of 'using' women on the picket lines, Wobbly leader Elizabeth Gurley Flynn replied, 'Because the IWW does not push women to the back, they go to the front'. The Ford Motor Company produced cartoon films of Wobblies as 'Bolsheviki parasites'. During the war the press ran the traditional smears accusing the IWW of being German agents.

The Wobblies were in the forefront of the fight for free speech. Frightened by 'rabble rousers' of the IWW, the authorities tried to ban street meetings, often arresting a succession of speakers as each climbed onto the soap-box. Following America's entry into the First World War repression became savage, many Wobblies being beaten up inside or outside jail. The entire Wobbly leadership was arrested and their paper *Industrial Worker* was made illegal.

Unlike the chauvinistic attitude of the AFL, which pledged itself to fighting 'a people's war for democracy' on behalf of the ruling class, the IWW took a clear internationalist, anti-imperialist position. Many of its members continued to agitate inside the armed forces.

The Soviet Revolution of 1917 served to further weaken the Wobblies. The IWW had pledged itself to fight for workers emancipation 'without affiliation with any political party'. The experience of Russia heightened the arguments between the syndicalists and the 'political wing' of the IWW. By the early 1920s the IWW had virtually ceased to exist, though many Wobblies were involved in the formation of the American Communist Party.

'The Wobblies' is one of those classic socialist films - a must for every militant - but our history should not be allowed to be hidden in trendy film theatres. Left wing organisations should get this film from 'The Other Cinema' and show it themselves locally.

Dick Lord

Avoiding the nasties

Breaking Glass

Director Brian Gibson

After paying £2.30 for the neck-cracking cheapest seats to see this film I couldn't help feel, by the end of it, that I'd been had. Not that *Breaking Glass* is a particularly bad film, but it doesn't anything like live up to its lush pre-release publicity.

The basic story-line is an old one; struggling musicians get drawn away from their roots as they begin to make it. Manipulated by the record business they become the antithesis of every-

thing they previously stood for, and as the strain becomes too much, the band begins to break up followed by the inevitable crash.

What makes *Breaking Glass* different from this conventionally romantic rock myth is that it is set in contemporary London against a background of social decay. To context this, the film is punctuated by panoramic shots of West London, overlaid with news bulletins which tell of strikes, more police powers, etc. There are also innumerable scenes of Nazi violence, a spot of police harassment, rioting and a youth is stabbed to death at a 'Rock Against 1984' carnival - a thinly disguised reference *Rock Against Racism*.

This of course, is all intended to give the audience a point of identification, but the film sadly lacks any reference to a real struggle against all the nasty things it portrays. Just as NF violence goes unopposed so, 'Rock Against 1984' is nothing more than a wet liberal protest.

In some ways director Brian Gibson with his debut film has made a genuine attempt to articulate some of the problems faced by young musicians who want to be recognised but don't want to become mere puppets of the record companies, to be bought and sold like any other commodity.

The world of *Breaking Glass* is that of a spectacle inhabited by cardboard cut-outs. But ironically, the film is a part of that spectacle. It is a carefully packaged and staged piece of 'youth culture'.

A lot of people will probably go to see this film and, you never know, if the box-office returns are substantial enough, we may even see a sequel. Youth/Rock films have gone a long way since the days of Cliff Richard in films like *The Young Ones*, but *Breaking Glass* is still firmly on the same road with a long way yet to go.

Howard Porter

Do-it-yourself film shows

It is remarkably easy to hire and screen your own 16mm films. The average price is around £20. It is usually possible to beg, borrow or steal a projector from a local school, and the automatic-loading variety are reasonably idiot-proof. Provided you can find a place with a bar, you have the makings of a cheap and enjoyable night out.

The SWP in East London screened a series of films in the autumn of 1978 with relatively little effort. We printed tickets and invited people to sign up for a 'full' or 'half season'. Obviously you can sell tickets on the door, but if you get some people to pay in advance you can be virtually certain of not losing money, and you won't have problems of cash flow when the bills start rolling

in from the distributors.

Choosing the films is made easier by getting the British Film Institute to send you a copy of their *Films on Offer* for the current year (price £3). This lists the distributor, the running time and the price for all available 16mm films. The BFI also have an ever-expanding selection of extracts from feature films (av. length 20 minutes), which can be hired quite cheaply and screened as accompanying shorts.

Jane Ure Smith

The address of the British Film Institute is: 81 Dean St. et, London W1V 6AA (437 4355) Wobblies is available from The Other Cinema, 12-13 Little Newport Street, London W1 (734 8508). It costs £35 + VAT (and carriage if outside London).

P is for all private property, the greatest of all the sins

The idea of private property as sin, as a degeneration from the original state of nature or state of grace in which all things were common, is a very old one. Among the ancient Greeks, the Stoics and other philosophers believed in a past Golden Age without property, and many ancient and medieval Christian writers, from St Augustine to the canon lawyer Gratian, believed the same. Private property, they said, came about as a result of the Fall of Man, the original sin in the Garden of Eden.

This was not, however, a revolutionary idea so long as people accepted that the decline from Golden Age to Iron Age, or the Fall of Man, was irreversible. But as exploitation and poverty increased in medieval Europe, some of the dispossessed got hold of the explosive idea that if private property was sin, then it ought to be overthrown. Many of the poor peasants and urban unemployed who rioted and revolted all over late medieval Europe did so in the expectation of the Second Coming of Christ which would bring a new thousand-year period of history without private property or exploitation. This was the celebrated 'Pursuit of the Millennium', and what lies behind John Ball's famous sermon on the text

In seventeenth-century England, when the Civil War against feudalism and absolutism threw all social relations into question, Gerrard Winstanley, the Digger, carried the old view of private property as sin to new heights. For Winstanley, the introduction of private property actually was the Fall of Man, the origin of all the evil in the world and the cause of all the 'inward bondages of the mind' as well as the 'outward bondages that one sort of men lay upon another'. Moreover, he saw the abolition of private property as a practical goal, no longer as a mystical millennium in which the earth would spontaneously bear fruit without the necessity of labour. Winstanley, in *The Law of Freedom*, made detailed proposals for a society in which all production would be based on communal property, and in which buying, selling and exploitation would disappear.



Illustration by Sophie Grillet

Between Winstanley and Marx there were many proposals for the abolition of private property — generally benevolent schemes for the abolition of inequality and poverty in the now emerging industrial society. Though Marx and Engels attacked the 'utopian socialists' for the abstract and elitist nature of their conceptions of socialism, they recognised the value of their attack on private property, the most cherished institution of bourgeois society. It was Robert Owen's communism which caused the one-time bourgeois philanthropist to be excluded from polite society in England; while Proudhon's famous dictum, 'Property is Theft' (though philosophically inadequate, for sure) was said by Marx to have 'electrified its readers and produced a great sensation on its first appearance'.

The achievement of Marx and Engels was to shift the attack on private property from the moralistic criticism of a great evil on to a scientific, historical materialist basis. They discussed primitive communism and the emergence of private property as real historical facts to be discovered, rather than as mythical or symbolic events. However much anthropology may 'reinterpret' the facts, it is the case that the means of livelihood in primitive, hunting and gathering societies — forests and wild animals — are not divided up into private property because, in the nature of things, they cannot be.

Private property and the exploitation of those who produce by those who merely own came about, in primitive agricultural societies (which were a technical advance on hunting and gathering societies) as a result of increasing production and exchange:

Private property is not, however, 'an independent relation, a category apart, an abstract and eternal idea', as Marx pointed out in his attack on Proudhon. There have been as many forms of private property as there have been different relations of production, and no form of property can be understood without understanding the relations of production which lie behind it.

Bourgeois private property, for example, appears to be based on the principle that a person is entitled to the fruit of his or her labour, like the late medieval peasant or artisan. But the growth of capital made nonsense of this principle, and bourgeois property became a means of depriving the workers of the fruit of their labour. Similarly, state property may appear to be the property of the community, but it may still in reality be controlled, and collectively owned, by one class at the expense of others.

Thus Marx and Engels moved from opposition to private property as an abstract principle to understanding it as a real historical development based on changes in the mode of production. With this new understanding came the realisation, too, of how private property could be overthrown — not by a moralistic crusade or an enlightened legislator, but by the conscious action of the working class whose interests are opposed to its continued existence.

So the dreams of millenarians and early communists can be realised — a new age of history without private property and its attendant evils of greed, violence, exploitation and oppression, is possible. We can, without divine intervention, one day get rid of the 'greatest of all the sins'.

Norah Carlin